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## CROSS-BORDER TOURISM COOPERATION AS A BASIS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY

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**Abstract.** The article presents critical review of approaches to understanding cross-border tourism cooperation. The authors substantiate peculiarities of tourism development in the mountain region, revealing the possible influence of tourism on the border regions, which can be both positive and negative. The paper examines five types of cross-border tourist structures using the example of the Altai-Sayan mountain region. Those types determine the direction and potential of cross-border tourism cooperation. The authors consider the possibilities of organizing the development of various types of tourism in the border area. Tourism can contribute to the sustainable development of a mountainous transboundary region.

**Keywords:** cross-border region, mountain region, tourism, fields of cooperation, the Altai-Sayan Mountains

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**Additional disciplines** ecology and environment; geography

### 1. Introduction

Cross-border tourist interaction is of particular interest in the regional issues of mountainous areas. Cross-border cooperation started developing in Europe back in the 1950<sup>th</sup>. Its main objectives were associated with the abolition of barriers, dividing the communities of the border areas of various European countries. Cross-border cooperation contributes to mitigation of the negative effects of state borders and the periphery of border areas, improving the

socio-economic situation of the local population. To identify the prerequisites promoting tourist cooperation it is important to study the cross-border region.

Cross-border systems are characterized by the integrity and mutual influence of two or several autonomous links located on opposite sides of the borders, the intersection of the geopolitical interests of the neighboring states, the asynchrony and asymmetry of changes on opposite sides of the border (Artemenko 2010). Mountain regions very often become the place of contact for not only state borders. They are characterized by high fragmentation of ethnic groups, peculiar socio-economic development and the variety of tourist resources. Problems of cross-border cooperation imply the solution of various issues: socio-economic, ethnic and ethnocultural interaction, regionalization and interconnection, reduction of threats to economic and national security, etc. Several economic, political, historical, and social prerequisites provide incentives for the development of cross-border cooperation.

There are different approaches to the study of cross-border regionalism, which are also related to the study of models of rational economic activity, ethnocultural interaction, tourism, etc. Most studies focus on comparative analysis of the border areas. Study of the cross-border region is one of the approaches, in which a cross-border region is considered as a space of exceptional civilizational, political, economic and cultural interaction. A cross-border region can be examined through the socio-economic potential of the border areas, their geopolitical significance and individual features of the border. The border areas, where socio-ethnic and economic similarity predetermines the development of cooperation, are of particular interest (Baggio 2008). Identification of cross-border systems and regions provides a guiding framework for the study of cross-border tourist areas.

In accordance with J. House model, various relations influence the situation in the border regions: between the states; between the border region and its capital; interstate relations between adjacent border areas; relations between border areas within each country (Druzhinin 2010).

The development of cross-border regions is of great importance for improving efficiency and regional proportions of the economy. Cross-border cooperation is the most natural function of border areas and one of the main factors contributing to their development (Zigern-Korn, Sevast'yanov 2009; Tvaronavičienė, 2017; Mikhaylov et al. 2018). Border areas define the formation of cross-border ties, which form the basis of cross-border regionalism. It is a spatially integrated form of political cooperation in addressing problems that can be jointly solved by the border regions. Development of cross-border regionalism is a consequence of inter-connectedness and the limited ability of individual states and international organizations to address certain global issues.

Globalization is the most important factor in the development of cross-border territories, which is the dominant factor and method of the territorial organization of society. The spatial integration-disintegration process of specific border areas is increasing (Gerasimenko 2005; Kiselitsa et al. 2018).

## **2. Case study of Altai-Sayan mountain region**

The natural historical background of cross-border cooperation in the mountain region is associated with peculiarities of the natural conditions of the territory, which influence the formation of culture and traditions of economic activities in the region.

The authors have identified the opportunities for cross-border tourist cooperation in the Altai-Sayan mountain region, which is located in the central part of Eurasia, the center of Eurasia, within the borders of four states. In the Russian part, the region completely occupies the territories of the republics of Altai, Tyva, Khakassia and partly Altai and Krasnoyarsk Territories, Kemerovo, Novosibirsk and Irkutsk Regions and the south-western part of the Republic of Buryatia. The foreign part of the region includes the eastern districts of the East Kazakhstan

region; Altai administrative district of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region; twelve aimaks of Mongolia. Currently, cross-border tourist relations gradually develop in the region and it is possible to define the potential for their further development (Dunets et al. 2019).

However, the most famous example of cross-border interaction of the states, located in the mountain region, is the activities of the countries located in the Alpine region. The Alpine Convention, signed in 1991 by Austria, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Slovenia, France and the EU was the first international document, consolidating efforts for sustainable development of this mountain region. It is aimed at the integration of the economic interests of the local population and the creation of the principles of cross-border cooperation between the Alpine countries. To achieve these goals, appropriate measures are being developed in twelve sectors: demography and culture, spatial planning, nature protection and rural areas, mountain farming, tourism, etc. (Dunets 2011).

Development of cross-border regional cooperation in the Russian Federation became possible due to the implementation of the principles of federalism and power decentralization. This cooperation has its own distinctive features in each part of the country. Cross-border communication covers all major fields of vital activity of the regions. Trade and economic ties play a key role in regional cooperation since they are the easiest to adjust between the internal and adjacent parts of different countries. However, in addition to the benefits of cross-border interaction, there may be dangerous trends. Those are associated with a violation of trade, the predominance of imports, and sale of raw materials at low prices.

The impact of tourism on the economy of a cross-border region is manifested in the development of trade and economic relations (receiving income from the provision of services, shopping tourism, purchase of goods and souvenirs by tourists). The interaction of tourism with the socio-economic complex of a cross-border region is a complex system. Such interaction cannot be measured using only statistical data (Aleksandrova 2009). The implementation of the border areas institutions functions goes in several directions:

- economic interaction, determined by the action of rules and regulations for border crossing by tourists, baggage transportation (including purchased goods, hunting and fishing equipment, guidebooks and maps, etc.);
- social and cultural interaction involves various options for tourist contacts with the local population of the border areas, the establishment of cultural relations, participation in national and cultural holidays, awareness of cultural objects and organizations;
- ecological interaction is aimed at the promotion of biodiversity conservation, development of ecotourism, contributing to the maintenance of activities of specially protected natural areas.

Tourism in the cross-border region has a direct and indirect economic influence on the cooperation of the border areas, which may be both positive and negative (table 1).

**Table 1.** Possible impact of cross-border tourism cooperation

| Objects of influence of the border area | Positive influence  | Negative influence   |
|---|---|--|
| Economy                                 | Infrastructural development, income generation in regional budgets, small and medium business development, etc.           | Currency leakage and construction of infrastructure facilities in the territory of a neighboring state, increased competition  |
| Culture                                 | Development of traditional culture, etc.  | Commercialization of culture, disrespect for cultural values, etc.   |
| Social sphere                           | Improvement of the living conditions, employment, provision of goods and services, development of the social sphere, etc. | The increase in crime, the migration of the working population to a neighboring country, the growth of imports and the reduction in consumption of domestic goods and services, etc. |
| Ecology                                 | Joint protection of natural areas, biodiversity   | Excessive loads on certain natural complexes,  |

|            |  |  |
|------------|--|--|
|            | conservation, transboundary protected areas, etc.                      | transboundary pollution, etc.  |
| Management | Agreements on international cooperation and their implementation, etc. | The increasing complexity of planning and regulation of the development of industries, fiscal, border and customs problems, etc. |

*Source:* author

The "geographical transboundary structures" are of particular importance for international cooperation (Gerasimenko 2005; Artemenko 2010). The authors have identified various types of cross-border tourist structures, which determine the potential of cross-border tourist cooperation in the Altai-Sayan mountain region:

1. Natural-resource structures of a linear or areal type. These are geographic systems intersecting the state borders, aqua and territorial combinations of natural resources for the development of which cross-border cooperation is advisable. In the tourist development of several mountain peaks and ridges, international cooperation is advisable. Most state borders between the countries in the mountain region run along with the axial parts of the mountain ranges. Some lakes are located in two states (Ubsu-Nur, Tore-Khol, etc.). The Irtysh River, the river basin of which is located on the territory of all four states, is of significant tourist importance. The Selenga River begins in Mongolia and crosses the Russian border). The border between China and Kazakhstan goes along the Ak-Kaba River.

2. Ethnocultural cross-border structures arise when the state border divides a single ethnic group. This contributes to travelling and more comfortable stay in the places of residence of the same ethnic group. In the Altai-Sayan mountain region, Kazakhs also live in the border areas of Russia, China, and Mongolia. East Kazakhstan region has a large percentage of Russians in the population structure. Tuvans live on the territory of Russia, Mongolia and China. There are close ethnocultural ties between the border regions of Buryatia and Mongolia.

3. Economic territorial and economic structures crossed by the state border. For example, the following transport corridors: P-256 "Chuiskiy trakt", the main road in the Russian part of the mountain region, continues in Mongolia and then leads to China. Tourist enterprises in the regions have close production and economic ties to carry out cross-border tourist routes.

4. Transboundary specially protected natural territories can function successfully through the development of cooperation in biodiversity conservation and the development of eco-tourism. Such activities are performed, for example, on the territories of the Ubsunur Hollow (Russia) and Uvs-Nur (Mongolia) reserves, which include the ecosystems of the lake of the same name, which are UNESCO World Heritage sites and attract tourists from different countries. The national parks "Tunkinskaya hollow" and "Lake Hovsgol" are border parks and important tourist attractions. Several tourist routes include both parks. In 2011, the official intergovernmental agreement was signed on the creation of a transboundary reserve "Altai" on the basis of the Katunsky Biosphere Reserve (Russia) and the Katon-Karagay National Park (Kazakhstan). The length of the common border is 105 km, and the total area amounts to 795.2 thousand hectares. In the high mountain zone, at the junction of the borders of Russia, China, Kazakhstan and Mongolia, specially protected natural territories adjoin. In the future, they can get the status of an international transboundary UNESCO World Heritage Site.

5. Geopolitical cross-border structures arise between the bordering administrative entities in the interaction in various fields (economic, humanitarian, political). In 1998, the Altai-Sayan working group prepared, discussed and signed the Altai-Sayan Agreement. The Altai Convention was signed in the city of Urumqi (China). This document declares the possibilities of cross-border cooperation in nature protection and tourism development. A necessary condition for the successful development of cross-border regional cooperation is its institutionalization. For this purpose, it is important to create regional organizations that would direct this process, complementing the relevant world institutions (Shinkovsky 2004). In 2003, an international coordination council of the ISS, "Our Common Home Altai" was established, uniting the executive authorities of the Republic of Altai and the Altai Territory (Russia), East Kazakhstan Region (Kazakhstan), Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (China), Khovd, and Bayan -Uylgi aimaks of Mongolia. The council activities are designed to coordinate the cross-border activities of the regions in the field of nature conservation, nature management and tourism development. The

Great Altai tourism and sports festival is important for exploring the tourist potential. However, to date, rare meetings of representatives of the regional authorities have little effect on the development of cross-border cooperation. The development of cross-border tourism should be considered in conjunction with the preservation of nature and cultural and historical heritage, the development of transport infrastructure and the expansion of trade and economic relations (Dunets, Zhogova 2018; (Razminienė, Tvaronavičienė 2017; Razminienė, Tvaronavičienė 2018; Monni et al. 2017; Tvaronavičienė, Razminienė 2017; Zemlickiene et al. 2017; Ohotina et al. 2018; Petrenko et al. 2019). In 2018, it was decided to hold an economic council aimed at the development of trade and economic cooperation and tourism. However, the lack of specific agreements on tourist projects and a very small number of border crossings remain the main obstacle to cross-border tourist cooperation. This hinders cooperation between the representatives of the tourist business in the countries of the mountain region.

The state border may be the object of special touristic interest, and the border area may serve as a tourist destination. The identification of cross-border tourism structures contributes to the identification of cross-border cooperation forms. The use of border areas (located in the immediate vicinity of the border strip) as tourist destinations in the Altai-Sayan mountain region is based mainly on the following types of tourism:

- mountaineering, mountain and hiking tourism (development of mountain ranges and peaks of Tabyn-Bogd-Ola, Munku-Sardyk, Sailyugem, Belukha);
- water and health tourism (lakes Ubsu-Nur, Tore-Khol, rivers Selenga and Irtysh);
- cultural and historical tourism (routes to the places of historical battles, familiarity with the culture of the population living near the border);
- ecological tourism (routes in protected natural territories and their buffer zones, national parks TavanBogd, Kanas, Katon-Karagaysky, Tunkinsky, etc.);
- shopping tours, business tourism; short-term trips to the border area with the purpose of acquiring goods, business meetings, contracts signing;
- educational and scientific tourism (students and schoolchildren visit neighboring states, numerous expeditions work in the region).

Short-term tourist and excursion routes to the neighboring countries are of great importance for the development of cross-border tourism.

For the Altai-Sayan region, we have identified a number of strategic priorities for policy and planning of cross-border tourism cooperation, which can contribute to the sustainable development of this mountain region:

1. Recognition of tourist development of the leading type of organization of the territory in the mountain region.
2. The desire to achieve a balance of social, economic and environmental processes of development of tourist complexes.
3. Development of interregional and cross-border cooperation for the creation of cross-border tourism products, improving the competitiveness of the mountain region in the global tourism market and the implementation of long-term planning.
4. Determination of the structure of tourist complexes and analysis of inter-sectoral interaction, as well as the impact of tourism on the socio-cultural sphere and the environment.
5. The desire to match the tourist complexes with the functional and territorial structure of the natural and cultural-historical potential of the mountain region.
6. Providing professional manageability and responsible marketing of tourist complexes.
7. Understanding of tourism as a subsystem closely interconnected with the geosystem of the mountain region, and ensuring its harmony with the needs of the local population and natural landscapes.

Tourism activity directly forms the incomes of organizations and budgets of different levels, contributes to the development of infrastructure in the border areas, consumer market of goods and services, improving the living standards of the local population. In its turn, tourism in cross-border regions is also influenced by various factors, one of which is administrative-political. The state uses legislative measures to influence tourism (certification, customs, passport and monetary policy). In some cases, state influence inhibits the development of border tourist

regions. Various problems related to tourist formalities, transport infrastructure, socio-cultural rejection, low level of economic development and its imbalance, the lack of investment, natural features (high mountain ranges that create natural barriers), and weak regional authorities can negatively influence the tourism development. Those also include the existing threats to the economic and national security of the state, difficult sanitary and epidemiological situation, political and armed conflicts, large migration flows, etc.).

Cross-border tourism is of great national importance. Visiting the frontier territories of another state facilitates the study of traditions and peculiarities of economy, which develops under similar environmental conditions. It is important for economic integration, for optimizing relations between states and border areas. The absence of cross-border tourist exchange determines the more stringent barrier functions of the state border, creating myths that distort the real situation and relations in the cross-border region.

Business and educational tourism contributes to the development of communications and is an important motivation for the formation of cross-border cooperation. Holding meetings, seminars, conferences with the participation of heads of border authorities, exchange visits by scientists, teachers, schoolchildren, students, cultural and sports events are necessary forms of cross-border cooperation.

Tourist cross-border interaction is advisable to consider in conjunction with the problems of identity and self-identity of social groups living in the border areas. The development of tourism in the cross-border region contributes to the emergence of new problems (challenges) for the socio-cultural sphere (Indicators of Sustainable Development for Tourism Destinations, 2004; Zeibote et al. 2019). In tourist areas, which are mostly visited by tourists, there are changes in local personality and values; commercialization of local culture, standardization of tourist services and tourist facilities; adaptation to the needs of tourists. Tourist development of a cross-border area can lead to sociocultural conflicts. Those are associated with the economic disparity between the locals and the tourists. Due to carelessness and ignorance, some tourists do not respect local customs and local moral values. There may be irritations caused by the tourists' behavior, which harm the natural environment, cultural heritage, etc.

Social prerequisites play a special role in transboundary cooperation. Similarities in language and traditional culture will contribute to increasing interest in the development of economy, culture, tourism, and preservation of biodiversity. Improving the social efficiency of cross-border cooperation is becoming one of the urgent problems of regional development. In connection with the possible multidirectional impact of tourism on cross-border cooperation, management and the formation of a single cross-border region, it is required to provide for planning and regulation at the municipal, regional and national levels.

Further development of tourism in the cross-border Altai-Sayan mountain region is associated with the introduction of a simplified border crossing for tourists, creation of conditions for visiting tourists in the border area, reconstruction and development of border crossings, formation of information and tourist centers and cultural and tourist areas; development of a network of tourist facilities; organization of cross-border routes and their coordination with foreign partners, etc.

The organization of the cross-border region structure is associated with the implementation of specific tourist projects that are implemented based on the principles of sustainable development of tourism and interstate cooperation. These projects include ecotourism development of protected areas, cross-border routes, tourist infrastructure, special Internet sites (for example, the Altai Transboundary website <http://www.altaiinter.info/>)

Development of international tourist routes is important. In recent years, tourist exchange between Russia and Kazakhstan has increased. Such cross-border routes as "Golden Ring of Altai", "Snow Leopard Path", "Baikal-Hubsugul", "Tea Path" and others are being developed. The cross-border route "On the Paths of Genghis Khan" has been developed by the employees of the Baikal Institute for Nature Management of the SB RAS. It provides

for traveling within two countries and one Selenga river basin, from its source to the mouth (Baklanov, Tulokhonov 2010). The coupled tourist development of border areas leads to "blurring" of the borders for the tourists and an increase in interaction effects in the cultural, social, economic and environmental areas.

## Conclusions

Cross-border tourism cooperation plays an important role in the process of state integration in the Altai-Sayan mountain region. However, this cooperation is hindered by problems associated with differences between states and border areas: political, economic, infrastructural, socio-demographic, urban planning, administrative law, socio-psychological, ethno-confessional, etc.

The authors revealed the possible influence of cross-border tourist cooperation on the border regions. Planning is required to increase the positive impact and reduce the negative effects.

Undoubtedly, the organization of cross-border tourist cooperation in the mountain region has several particular characteristics. The mechanism for the development of cross-border tourist cooperation and the development of tourist resources in the border areas of the Altai-Sayan mountain region has not yet been developed. Therefore, the most important scientific problem is related to the preparation of recommendations regarding the development of tourism in a mountain cross-border area. Such work has already brought the first results in connection with the activities of the Council "Our Common Home - Altai".

Border mountain regions of different countries compete in attracting tourists. However, their cooperation is possible to make the most of the tourist potential in the cross-border region. Therefore, the cooperation of the tourism organizations and government bodies of these territories will permit to get serious competitive advantages compared to other regions that are more distant from the border.

Five types of cross-border tourist structures formed in the Altai-Sayan mountain region. They determine the direction and potential of cross-border tourism cooperation.

The state border in the Altai-Sayan mountain region may be attractive to tourists. This is due to the possibility of organizing mountaineering, mountain-walking tourism, water and health tourism on rivers and lakes, cultural and historical tourism, ecological tourism in the border area. The greatest economic effect is associated with the development of shopping tourism and business tourism.

In the coming years, in order to develop cross-border tourism, it is necessary to settle the issues of organizational and legal nature, the organization of border crossings by various types of transport, visa regime, etc. This will contribute to the strengthening of the role of the Altai-Sayan mountain region in global tourism development. The intercontinental position of the region causes the intersection of interests, among which tourism has a great humanitarian significance.

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