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HERITAGE AND CULTURE-BASED EXPERIENTIAL TOURISM
IN THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA: NEEDS, PROBLEMS
AND DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVES

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Heritage and Culture-based Experiential Tourism (HCBET) development in the RA is discussed in this article, as well as its background, current situation, sectoral and territorial structure, and factors contributing to its development. This article identifies the major needs of this tourism and possible directions for development based on expert surveys and case studies of similar tourism companies. The article answers the following questions: what are the drivers of heritage and culture-based experiential tourism in the RA, and are there any specific needs that make this approach viable for sustainable tourism development in the RA?

Culture tourism in Armenia can be traced back to the 1960s when Armenians living abroad visited their homeland to re-experience, enjoy, and interpret it. The visits consisted mainly of cognitive excursions to tangible historical and cultural monuments. Upon independence, the same image was preserved in the RA, but in recent decades, the country has started using its intangible cultural heritage for touristic purposes, laying the foundation for the development of HCBET. Based on the research, the following conclusions can be drawn: a) as a result of the investment programs of international organizations, HCBET is already developing in the RA; b) HCBET has developed mainly in the regions, especially in rural communities in the RA; c) a major component of HCBET is based on Armenian cuisine, arts, and crafts; d) HCBET does not yet have a widespread perception or interpretation in the RA; e) The RA has almost no public-private-educational/scientific cooperation in HCBET; f) Several problems hinder the development of HCBET, including service quality problems in enterprises, low qualification of human resources, imperfect legal regulations (within the framework of standardization-licensing), low or no cooperation between enterprises, and the lack of inclusion of these tourism offers in tour packages offered by tour operators; g) There is a lack of educational programs on HCBET in the universities of the RA; h) people involved in HCBET need specialized training; i) Marketing strategies for HCBET companies need to be improved.

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Introduction. The last 20 years have been marked by the progressive development of tourism around the world, including Armenia. Through these processes, intercultural communication has increased and tourists are more interested in learning about or participating in the cultural heritage of other countries. As a result of the latter, the concept of experiential tourism has emerged as a new approach to tourism organization, implementation, and development [1–3]. It has also begun to develop in Armenia in recent years, contributing to the country's tourism development and increasing tourism flows. The rich history of Armenia and its tangible and intangible cultural heritage enabled it to develop at a steady rate in the country. As a result of the programs implemented by international organizations combined with the wealth of scientific and educational resources available locally and the hospitable nature of the Armenian people, heritage and culture-based experiential tourism (HCBET) has developed. Accordingly, Armenia needs to be more systematic about implementing and developing experiential tourism based on its needs. Hence, in this regard, the following research questions arise: what are the drivers of heritage and culture-based experiential tourism in the RA, and are there any specific needs that make this approach viable for sustainable tourism development in the RA?

Research Methodology. The main methodological approaches used in the article are inductive (with a type of non-full induction), the use of primary and secondary data, and the participation approach. Based on these approaches, research methods of analysis and synthesis, case studies, and sociological surveys were used. Specifically, targeted (expert) surveys were conducted to identify HCBET needs in the RA. Questionnaires were developed for accommodations, catering, tour operators (agencies), educational and scientific institutions, government bodies, public organizations (local and international), tour guides, and destination management organizations (DMOs). Fig. 1 shows the number of tourism beneficiaries who participated in the survey.

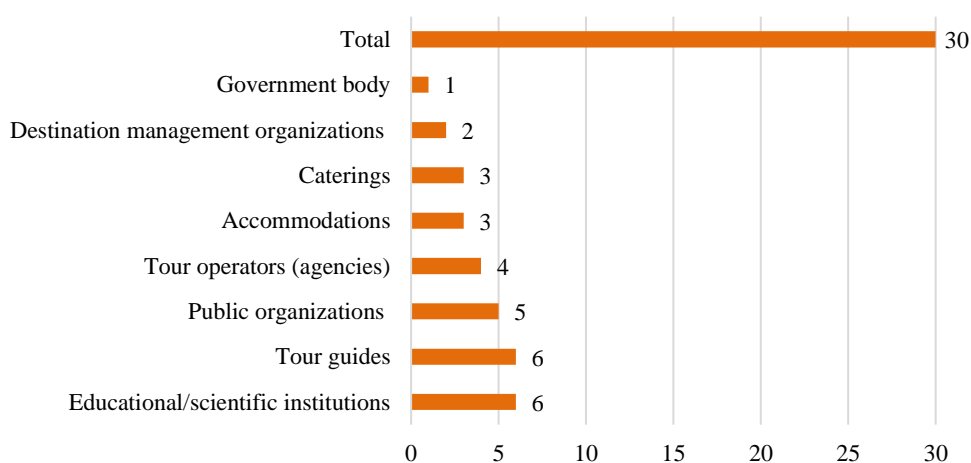


Fig. 1. Number of completed questionnaires (items) by groups of tourism beneficiaries.

Historical Overview. Culture tourism in Armenia can be traced back to the 1960s when Armenians living abroad visited their homeland to re-experience, enjoy, and interpret it. The visits consisted mainly of cognitive excursions to tangible historical and cultural monuments. Upon independence, the same image was preserved in the RA, but in recent decades, the country has started using its intangible cultural heritage for touristic purposes, laying the foundation for the development of HCBET. Currently, this type of tourism is being promoted in the RA through organized means, supported by several international organizations, and based on the unique elements of the Armenian intangible culture being carried by locals. As a result, micro, small, or medium-sized businesses become tourism products, or simply cultural tours become tourist products. The development of this tourism in the RA has been fueled by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) “My Armenia” program, which is implemented by the Smithsonian Institution. In partnership with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development of the Russian Federation, UNDP has implemented and funded the “Integrated Rural Tourism Development” (IRTD) Project (development of Gastro Yards). The mentioned organizations have established enterprises in the country based on intangible cultural heritage. They have developed the existing potential of HCBET in the RA.

Current Situation. As of now, more than 60 companies are offering HCBET products. Most of them are located in rural areas (Fig. 2). The availability of such services in Yerevan is limited to a few large national restaurants (lavash baking, national dances) and hotels (carpet weaving).

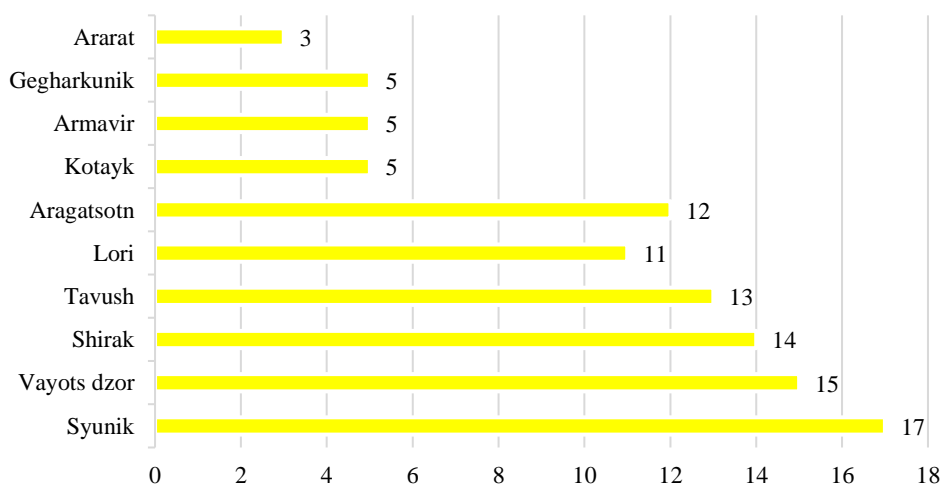


Fig. 2. Heritage and culture-based experiential tourism enterprises by Regions of RA (%), 2020 [4, 5].

The Armenian intangible cultural heritage is mainly expressed through master classes, storytelling, and cognitive visits (tours). A study of more than 60 companies providing experiential tourism services [4, 5] reveals that HCBET incorporates elements of Armenian intangible cultural heritage such as national cuisine, and arts

and crafts (Fig. 3). The national cuisine includes not only tasting it but also participating in its preparation, such as making lavash, chanakh cheese, poghindz (khashil and khavits), tanapur, ghapama, baked bread, barbecue, wild plants (asparagus, sindrik or polygonátum), tolma, pilaf with beech, ishli kufta, gata, sweet sujugh, wine and homemade vodka, zhengyalov bread, paklava, and honey decanting. As for the elements of national arts and crafts, the following are packaged and offered: making tuff souvenirs and engraving, traditional pottery, khachkar (cross-stone) making, painting on ceramics, carving of Armenian dolls, blacksmithing (hand processing of metals), making soaps, carpet making, woodworking, batik making, wood carving, willow weaving, kamancha (musical instrument) lessons.

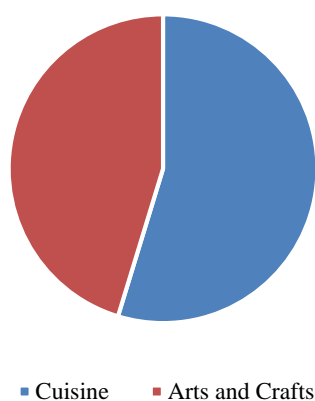


Fig. 3. Key types of intangible cultural elements of the RA in experiential tourism (%).

As festivals have become more widespread and developed in recent years, they also provide unique tourist experiences in the RA, where tourists can observe intangible cultural heritage values in one place and experience them in the local environment. There are many famous festivals in Armenia, both on the local and international markets: Areni Wine Festival (v. Areni), Yerevan Wine Days, Arts and Crafts (v. Dilijan), Gata (v. Khachik), Gutan (national dance and music) (v. Yerevan), Honey and berries (v. Berd), Khorovats (p. Lori), Tolma (p. Armavir), sheep shearing (v. Khot), etc. Aside from the traditional tourism offers that are based on tangible cultural values, the listed intangible cultural values also increase the tourist attractiveness of the country, making it a leader in implementing and creating new tourism trends. As a result of the development of this tourism, the locals are more involved in the tourism value chain, contributing to a balanced spatial development of the tourism sector in the RA.

Preservation of Cultural Heritage in the RA. Culture is a key component of tourism development in any country, and for that reason, its preservation and protection are crucial. There are four laws governing legal relations in the RA about cultural heritage: the Civil Code, the Administrative Offenses Code, and the Criminal Code. Government decisions, normative-technical documents, departmental and other legal acts, international treaties, conventions, and international agreements are implemented by governing bodies for cultural heritage protection (Tab. 1). Cultural heritage is primarily preserved and developed through collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the

International Council on Monuments and Sites/ICOMOS, the International Council of Museums (ICOM), and the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM). To preserve cultural heritage, historical and cultural reserves, and reserve museums have been established in the RA (Tab. 2).

Table 1

The key organizational components of the RA cultural heritage preservation system [6, 7]

Conventions signed and ratified by the RA for the protection of cultural heritage	Key laws of the RA for the protection of cultural heritage	Management bodies in the field of protection and use of cultural heritage in the RA
Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (The Hague)	On the use of history, immovable cultural monuments, and preservation of the historical environment	RA Government
European Cultural Convention (Paris)	On the basics of cultural legislation	Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports
Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (Paris)	On historical and cultural monuments not subject to alienation, which are considered state property of the RA	Department of Cultural Heritage and Folk Crafts
Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (Paris)	On the export and import of cultural values	Agency for the Protection of Historical and Cultural Monuments
Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (Granada)	About intangible cultural heritage	Cultural Heritage Preservation Agency
Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro)	About libraries and library work	“Expert Centre for Cultural Values” State non-profit organization
European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (La Valletta)	About copyright and related rights	“Historical-Cultural Reserve-Museum and Historical Environment Protection Service” State non-profit organization
Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (Paris)	About the archive case	“Historical and Cultural Heritage Research Centre” State non-profit organization
Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions	Mandatory copy of documents (ratifications)	–

Table 2

Historical and cultural reserves and reserves museums of the RA [8, 9]

Reserves	Reserves museums
“Arpi” natural-historical	“Metsamor” historical-archaeological
“Goshavank” historical-architectural	“Garni” historical-cultural
“Smbataberd” historical-cultural	“Glagzor University” historical-cultural
“Berd” historical-cultural	“Zvartnots” historical-cultural
“Zorats Qarer” settlement historical-cultural	“Kumayri” historical-cultural
“Lori Berd” old city settlement historical-cultural	“Erebuni” historical-archaeological
“Bjni Fortress” historical-cultural	“Dilijan” folk architecture
“Agarak” historical-cultural	–
“Amberd” historical-cultural	–

Results and Discussion.

The Priority Needs of the Enterprises Involved in the HCBET Activities.

According to the study, most companies involved in this tourism need employees who speak different languages, and translators are currently solving this problem. There is a lack of cooperation between Yerevan-based tour operators/agencies and similar enterprises in other regions, which requires a clear communication strategy. To present existing cultural values to tourists correctly, in-depth professional research is sometimes necessary. Enterprises must have appropriate interior decoration such as furniture, equipment, quality human resources, and organized service. The level of financial literacy of employees in enterprises must also be increased. Even though companies organize specialized training courses to carry out their business activities, general theoretical and practical knowledge about experiential tourism is needed.

Marketing Communications of Enterprises Involved in HCBET Activities in the RA. The companies use social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Google, as well as digital marketing tools such as social media marketing, blogging, search engine optimization, e-commerce, and print media. Word-of-mouth marketing is quite effective in the RA, particularly when it comes to accommodations and catering when customers are told about the company orally by their friends, acquaintances, or colleagues. To penetrate both local and international markets, these enterprises need marketing communication strategies.

Business Models of HCBET in the RA. From a legal-organizational perspective, these tourism enterprises are mainly regarded as individual entrepreneurs in the RA, because the tax conditions are more favorable in this case. A majority of these businesses are family-based (mainly restaurants and guesthouses), regardless of their size. Often, these enterprises operate under a social entrepreneurship philosophy or are classified as social enterprises. According to their business relationships, these enterprises mostly work by the B2B model but also use the B2C model. The sharing economy model is also used by these enterprises.

Perceptions of HCBET in the RA. A majority of Armenian experts and practitioners regard this tourism in the same way, but it should be noted that experts' ideas regarding HCBET are more coordinated and provide the key points, whereas, for practitioners, it is somewhat associated with traditional culture tourism, including cognitive tourism based on tangible cultural and architectural resources (traditional approach). However, it should be noted in general that HCBET is well known in the RA, but there is no common perception.

The Impact of COVID-19 on the RA HCBET. The COVID-19 outbreak had a relatively large impact, especially on inbound tour operators/agents and non-local guides. Some of these companies began offering their services to domestic tourists after the pandemic began. On the other hand, domestically oriented enterprises and guides were more competitive. The pandemic also affected catering and accommodations. Although restaurants located in large settlements were able to mitigate some of the effects of the crisis by offering delivery services in the domestic market, restaurants in rural communities where tourists were the main consumers did not have that opportunity because of the territorial peculiarities, and locals did not use delivery services either. Accommodations that specialize in experiential tourism

have a relatively better situation because they are mostly small hotels and guest-houses that allow domestic tourists to stay with their families and take advantage of experiential tourism services and offers in a relatively safer environment. In addition, new standards must be developed for working in the conditions of the commodity, which will be mandatory for everyone and will allow the field to develop. Tourism companies, in general, were able to alleviate some of COVID-19 consequences due to domestic tourism. COVID-19 was a big blow to experiential tourism because it prohibited communication, which is essential for experiential tourism.

Risks and Problems Hindering HCBET Development in the RA. The risks associated with this tourism have been considered from two perspectives: global and practical. The biggest global risk is alienation, commodification, and colonization of local cultures. This can lead to loss of identity and devaluation of the culture. Cultural values may be misrepresented and interpreted (due to a lack of relevant knowledge and skills), societal preferences of tourists change over time, and geopolitical deterioration and cultural differences may lead to conflicts. Among the practical risks are food poisoning, physical injuries while participating in specific experiences, and the willingness of locals to participate in such tourism. As of now, the following problems are also considered obstacles to the development of this tourism: lack of skills and abilities to organize and provide relevant local tourism services, lack of trained staff, lack of business standards and licensing related to this tourism (who can be HCBET enterprises), lack of financial and accounting knowledge, lack of language skills, lack of a unified marketing policy at the state level for this tourism, lack of statistics on experiential tourism, the price of the offered services, which often does not correspond to its quality being expensive but of poor quality (in terms of service). Locals often pollute cultural heritage sites with household waste during experiential tourism. Among the problems is that tour operators/agents primarily offer tangible cultural heritage as a primary tourism offer rather than experiential tourism products in their tour packages. The next problem is the fact that universities in the RA that prepare tourism specialists do not have educational programs for experiential tourism. In the best cases, there are courses related to culture or tourism-related cultural values in the current programs. The COVID-19 pandemic and the war unleashed by Turkey and Azerbaijan are also considered a general problem for the RA HCBET.

The Future of Development and Opportunities for HCBET in the RA. According to the study, HCBET is considered to be one of the key pillars of tourism development of the RA, as it focuses on utilizing the hidden potential of centuries-old Armenian culture. HCBET future can be built by a clear state policy expressed in strategic programs and investments. This tourism will also be a key opportunity if the government announces it as a priority or important direction for the RA (it has not yet been announced). Additionally, the sustainable future of this tourism depends on its management system, both at the state and regional levels. To ensure its development, it is also necessary to introduce appropriate funding models. It is important for the future development of HCBET to increase active cooperation between business representatives of the sector and to organize tourism-oriented events of intangible cultural value at an international level.

Opportunities can be created by developing gastronomic tourism, which is characterized not only by rich cuisine but also by ecologically clean food, which is highly valued especially by incoming tourists. A unique opportunity for the development of HCBET is the Armenian scientific-educational institutions in the field of cultural heritage and tourism, which have the necessary scientific base, and justifications for effective, scientifically based inclusion of culture in tourism. The hospitality of Armenians, together with the cooperation of locals with their own tourism products and human, material, and technical resources (cooking, organizing master classes, presenting unique stories related to the place, etc.), offers a unique opportunity for the development of this tourism. The enterprises that provide relevant services to HCBET can work with these enterprises to assure relevant quality.

The RA Government's Role in HCBET Development According to Stakeholders. State participation in the development of experiential tourism based on cultural heritage is highly regarded by stakeholders in this field. In particular, they believe that the state should develop an appropriate development strategy to promote investment programs. In addition, they should coordinate international marketing campaigns for businesses in this sector. This will raise awareness of RA in the target markets for RA inbound tourism. According to stakeholders, the state must provide loans on special terms and define tax benefits.

Sustainability and Innovation in the RA HCBET. One of the key principles of sustainability in sustainable tourism the “Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, preserve their constructions and living cultural and traditional heritage values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance” and the following goals of sustainable tourism “Economic viability (providing long-term benefits)”, “Local prosperity (contribution of tourism to the economic prosperity of the host destination)”, “Employment Quality (creating new jobs and improving quality in the communities)”, “Cultural richness (respect for local culture, historical heritage)” are maintained in the RA experiential tourism offers. By utilizing local cultural and human resources, creating jobs for locals, and increasing their participation in tourism value chains, they rely mainly on local communities. In addition, due to this tourism, Armenian intangible cultural heritage elements were not only preserved, but they were also revived, and through glocalization (a crucial component of sustainability), they have reached a new level of cultural value and have become world tourist attractions as a result. Some established enterprises are at risk of closure due to a lack of professionalism and professional skills, which can lead to a lack of sustainability in their long-term operation. As these enterprises are small, their environmental impact is also small (mainly in terms of water and energy consumption). However, due to the poorly developed sewage treatment system in the RA, wastewater generated by them is discharged into various water basins without being treated, causing environmental problems over time. This tourism is considered to be a transforming innovation in the RA, as it breathed new life into cultural values and produced new tourist offers, based on Armenian cuisine and crafts. In Armenia, in terms of economic innovations, HCBET belongs to the types of experience and shared economy innovations (the offered products can leave unforgettable impressions, and enterprises follow the philosophy of sharing economy), but it can also be viewed as a social innovation (because there are social

entrepreneurship businesses). It is important to note that we must be especially cautious when introducing innovations in this field because we are dealing with a culture that places a high value on traditional values.

Conclusion. Based on the research, the following conclusions can be drawn.

- As a result of the investment programs of international organizations, HCBET is already developing in the RA.
- HCBET has developed mainly in the regions, especially in rural communities in the RA.
- A major component of HCBET is based on Armenian cuisine, arts, and crafts.
- HCBET does not yet have a widespread perception or interpretation in the RA.
- The RA has almost no public-private-educational/scientific cooperation in HCBET.
- Several problems hinder the development of HCBET, including service quality problems in enterprises, low qualification of human resources, imperfect legal regulations (within the framework of standardization-licensing), low or no cooperation between enterprises, and the lack of inclusion of these tourism offers in tour packages offered by tour operators.
- There is a lack of educational programs on HCBET in the universities of the RA.
- People involved in HCBET need specialized training.
- Marketing strategies for HCBET companies need to be improved.

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Ա մ փ ո փ ու մ

Հոդվածում ներկայացված է մշակութային ժառանգության վրա հիմնված փորձառական զբոսաշրջության (ՄԺՀՓՉ) զարգացումը ՀՀ-ում. դրա պատմությունը, ժամանակակից վիճակը, նյութային և տարածքային կառուցվածքը, զարգացման գործոնները: Փորձագիտական հարցազրույցների և փորձառական զբոսաշրջային արտադրանք արտադրող ձեռնարկությունների ուսումնասիրության հիման վրա հոդվածում բացահայտված են այս զբոսաշրջության հիմնական կարիքները և զարգացման հնարավոր ուղղությունները: Հոդվածում պատասխան է տրվում հետևյալ հարցերին. որո՞նք են ՀՀ-ում մշակութային ժառանգության վրա հիմնված զբոսաշրջության շարժիչ ուժերը, և կա՞ն արդյոք որոշակի կարիքներ, որոնք այս մոտեցման կիրառումը արդիական են դարձնում ՀՀ զբոսաշրջության կայուն զարգացման համար:

Հայաստանում մշակութային զբոսաշրջության արմատները կարելի է գտնել դեռևս 1960-ականներից սկսած, երբ, հատկապես Սփյուռքում ապրող հայերը, այցելում էին իրենց պատմական հայրենիք՝ այն նորովի ընկալելու, վայելելու և վերափմաստավորելու համար: Այդ այցելությունները հիմնականում կրում էին ճանաչողական բնույթ՝ դեպի նյութական պատմամշակութային կոթողներ էքսկուրսիաների կազմակերպման տեսքով: ՀՀ անկախացումից հետո, սկզբնական շրջաններում, պահպանվեց նույն պատկերը, բայց, հատկապես վերջին տասնամյակներում նաև ոչ նյութական մշակութային ժառանգությունը նույնպես սկսեց օգտագործվել զբոսաշրջային նպատակներով, որով էլ հիմք դրվեց երկրում փորձառական մշակութաին զբոսաշրջության զարգացմանը: Կատարված հետազոտության հիման վրա կարելի ներկայումս հստակ եզրակացնել հետևյալը, որ ա) ՄԺՀՓՉ արդեն իսկ զարգանում է ՀՀ-ում՝ գլխավորապես միջազգային կազակերպությունների ներդրումային ծրագրերի շնորհիվ, բ) ՄԺՀՓՉ գլխավորապես զարգացել է մարզերում՝ հատկապես գյուղական համայնքներում, գ) ՄԺՀՓՉ հիմնվում է հայկական խոհանոցի և արվեստի ու արհեստի ոչ նյութական մշակութային ժառանգության օգտագործման վրա, դ) ՄԺՀՓՉ դեռևս չունի համընդհանուր տարածում գտած ընկալում կամ մեկնաբանություն ՀՀ-ում, ե) ՄԺՀՓՉ

համար գրեթե բացակայում է պետություն-մասնավոր-կրթական/գիտական հաստատությունների համագործակցությունը, գ) ՄԺՀՓՁ զարգացմանը խոչընդոտում են ձեռնարկություններում սերվիսի կազմակերպման խնդիրները, մարդկային ռեսուրսների երբեմն ցածր որակավորումը, իրավական կարգավորումների անկատարությունը (ստանդարտացման և լիցենզավորման շրջանակներում), ձեռնարկությունների միջև համագործակցության ցածր մակարդակը կամ բացակայությունը, տուրօպերատորների կողմից մշակված տուրփաթեթներում այս զբոսաշրջության առաջարկների ներառվածության ցածր տոկոսը կամ բացակայությունը, է) ՄԺՀՓՁ կրթական ծրագրերի բացակայությունը ՀՀ բուհերում, ը) ՄԺՀՓՁ գրադվող մարդկանց համար կա մասնագիտացված վերապատրաստումների անհարժեշտություն, թ) ՄԺՀՓՁ գործող ձեռնարկությունների համար կա մարկետնիգային ռազմավարությունների բարելավման անհարժեշտություն:

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ОПЫТНЫЙ ТУРИЗМ НА ОСНОВЕ КУЛЬТУРНОГО НАСЛЕДИЯ В РЕСПУБЛИКЕ АРМЕНИЯ: ПОТРЕБНОСТИ, ПРОБЛЕМЫ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ РАЗВИТИЯ

Резюме

В статье представлено развитие опытного туризма на основе культурного наследия (ОТОКН) в Республике Армения: его предпосылки, современная ситуация, отраслевая и территориальная структура, факторы развития. На основе экспертных опросов и изучения предприятий, производящих опытный туристический продукт, в статье выявлены ключевые потребности этого туризма и возможные направления развития. Дается ответ на следующие вопросы: каковы движущие силы опытного туризма на основе культурного наследия в РА и существуют ли какие-либо конкретные потребности, которые делают реализацию этого подхода актуальной для устойчивого развития туризма в РА?

Культурный туризм в Армении берет свое начало с 1960-х годов, когда армяне, живущие за рубежом, посещали свою родину, чтобы по-новому воспринять ее, насладиться ею и переосмыслить ее. Визиты заключались в основном в познавательных экскурсиях к материальным памятникам истории и культуры. После обретения независимости в РА сохранился тот же имидж, но в последние десятилетия страна начала также использовать свое нематериальное культурное наследие в туристических целях, заложив основу для развития ОТОКН. На основании исследования можно сделать следующие выводы: а) в результате инвестиционных программ международных организаций ОТОКН уже развивается в РА; б) ОТОКН получил развитие преимущественно в регионах, особенно в сельских общинах РА; в) основной

компонент ОТОКН основан на армянской кухне, декоративно-прикладном искусстве и ремеслах; г) ОТОКН пока не имеет универсального восприятия и интерпретации определения термина в РА; д) в РА практически отсутствует государственно-частно-образовательное/научное сотрудничество в области ОТОКН; е) ряд проблем препятствует развитию ОТОКН, в том числе проблемы качества обслуживания на предприятиях, низкая квалификация человеческих ресурсов, несовершенство правового регулирования (в рамках стандартизации-лицензирования), низкое сотрудничество между предприятиями или его отсутствие, а также отсутствие включения этих туристических предложений в турпакеты, предлагаемые туроператорами; ж) в вузах РА отсутствуют образовательные программы по ОТОКН; з) лицам, привлеченным в ОТОКН, необходимо специализированное обучение; и) необходимо улучшить маркетинговые стратегии компаний ОТОКН.