

Tourism development in post-Soviet nations: A comparative systematic review of English and Russian language research

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Abstract: This study comprehensively examined tourism research in post-Soviet nations, focusing on how it has been addressed in leading tourism journals. Employing the PRISMA framework, a systematic literature review was conducted to provide a novel, dual perspective by comparing English and Russian language publications. The analysis encompasses 110 articles (63 in Russian and 47 in English) spanning from 1991 to 2024. Findings reveal distinct differences between English and Russian research approaches, reflecting the varied stages of tourism development in these countries. Notably, Russian literature predominantly focuses on practical destination issues and showcases an early stage of academic development, while English literature offers a broader range of theoretical insights and explicit policy recommendations. The study highlights significant research gaps, particularly in regions like Belarus, Moldova, and the Caucasus nations, and emphasizes the need for innovative research methodologies in Russian literature. Overall, the research in post-Soviet tourism development appears to be in an emerging phase, with geopolitical alignments, EU membership, and historical legacies significantly influencing its trajectory.

Keywords: Destination management, systematic review: PRISMA framework; post-Soviet tourism research; English and Russian tourism publications; transition economies; research trends

1. Introduction

Following the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union, 15 member states embarked on independent paths of tourism development, creating a unique natural experiment in destination management. These nations represent diverse geographic, cultural, and economic contexts - from EU-integrated Baltic states to Central Asian republics - providing valuable comparative insights into how different political alignments and economic transitions influenced tourism development pathways. While their development trajectories vary, post-Soviet countries collectively hosted over 23 million visitors in 2021 (UN Tourism, 2024), representing a significant but understudied global tourism segment.

Focusing on post-Soviet nations offers several compelling contributions to tourism research and development theory. First, after 70 years of joint history, a synchronized starting point in 1991 allows researchers to examine how different development paths emerged despite similar historical foundations in terms of political, economic, and social systems. Second, studying these nations enriches the understanding of how tourism evolved in transitional economies, particularly shifting from state-controlled to market-driven tourism systems. This transition offers valuable lessons for other regions undergoing similar transformations and contributes to broader theoretical discussions about tourism development trajectories, institutional change, and the relationship between political systems and tourism management. Given these unique characteristics, two critical questions emerge: How does tourism literature document this process? Do Western and post-Soviet state scholars address this shift differently?

To better understand the state of post-Soviet tourism, this study includes a comprehensive review of the leading tourism journals. This systematic review of Russian and English language literature on post-Soviet states' tourism development follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Moher et al., 2010). Combining English and Russian language scholarship is a novel approach that provides a comparative "inside" versus "outside" perspective on tourism management for this region.

Citation: Odosashvili, L. & Martin, D. (2025). Tourism development in post-Soviet nations: A comparative systematic review of English and Russian language research. *International Journal of Tourism Sciences*, 24(1), 39-61.

Article History

Received: 29 January 2024

Accepted: 1 December 2024



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The results illustrate post-Soviet tourism's unique and evolving landscape. This review broadens the understanding of tourism within these transitioning economies and challenges the conventional definitions and perceptions of tourism. Following the background and literature review, sections on methods, results, and conclusion are presented.

On December 26, 1991, the formal dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (hereon Soviet Union or USSR) occurred as member states declared their independence over a two-year period. This significant event triggered a series of transformations in border regions, encompassing the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), Eastern Europe (Belarus, Moldova, Russian Federation, and Ukraine), the Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia), and Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) (see Figure 1). These regions embarked on a profound journey to reassert their unique national identities, distinct from Soviet influence, while simultaneously grappling with the complex challenges stemming from civil conflicts and persistent poverty resulting from prolonged economic stagnation. Tourism development emerged as a pivotal strategy to establish and promote these emerging national identities in addition to being a source of foreign currency (Fayzullaev et al., 2021). In the wake of independence, countries across the post-Soviet region have actively sought to rehabilitate their cultural and natural heritages and promote themselves as tourism destinations. These efforts underscore tourism's dual role as both an economic driver and as a tool for cultural preservation and national identity promotion.



Figure 1. Four distinct groups of post-Soviet countries

Currently, 12 of the 15 former member states are part of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2024) and adhere to the organization's definition of tourism. However, these definitions are shaped by cultural, historical, and economic factors (Laws & Scott, 2015), which tend to change more gradually. The post-Soviet states are undergoing a profound and multifaceted transformation, characterized by sudden and ubiquitous changes in societies and economies (Hall, 1991). This

holistic transformation represents a dramatic shift from one socio-political and economic paradigm to another. Despite regional conflicts and instability, tourism has grown consistently, averaging 7% annually (UN Tourism, 2024). The diverse interpretations of tourism significantly influence a country's practices, including policy decisions, infrastructure development, and community engagement strategies.

Exploring these dynamics is crucial for fostering sustainable and culturally sensitive tourism practices. Surprisingly, the tourism literature offers little systematic analysis of post-Soviet states' tourism development. Jaakson (1996) identified this gap in the literature, noting that a special issue of the *Annals of Tourism Research* (1990) on tourism in centrally planned economies does not study tourism in the Soviet Union. This gap underscores the need for a comprehensive examination of Soviet-era tourism and its subsequent transformation. This systematic literature review aims to fill the gap by examining tourism's evolution in post-Soviet states and analyzing the extent to which Soviet tourism policies and infrastructure persist or transform. Using a comparative approach between post-Soviet space and the Western world, the study explores differences in tourism understanding and practices. Beyond its historical significance, the review recognizes the contemporary relevance of this exploration, offering insights for policymakers, industry stakeholders, and researchers. This investigation also acknowledges tourism's dual role as both an economic driver and a tool for cultural preservation and national identity promotion in these states. To address these multifaceted aspects, this review poses four critical research questions:

RQ1: What role has Russian language literature played in documenting and shaping the evolution of tourism in post-Soviet states, and how does it compare to the literature in English in terms of focus and content?

RQ2: To what extent has tourism research in post-Soviet states evolved in terms of its focus, scale, and objectives when compared to the 'Western World'?

RQ3: How has the balance between the roles of the state and the private sector in tourism development evolved in post-Soviet states, and what are the implications of this balance on the growth and sustainability of the tourism industry?

RQ4: What challenges and opportunities have emerged during the post-Soviet states' transition from centrally planned to market-oriented economies in the context of tourism development?

2. Literature Review

Compelling evidence shows that tourism research shapes policies and practices, which reflects a significant interest in this dynamic (Hoarau & Kline, 2014; Melissen & Koens, 2016; Pyo, 2012; Ritchie & Ritchie, 2002; Roh et al., 2014; Xiao & Smith, 2007, 2008). Despite concerns about the magnitude of its impact, the tourism literature acknowledges the industry's positive effect on economic growth (Wu et al., 2022; Zhou & Huang, 2019). The outcomes and implications of scholarly work foster innovation within tourism policy and practice by facilitating tacit knowledge sharing and social capital building between scientists and businesses (Hoarau & Kline, 2014). To begin exploring differences in practice, understanding the contextual development of knowledge is essential.

What is tourism? The definition, coupled with the tacit knowledge of what tourism entails, shapes researchers' agendas, ultimately influencing knowledge creation. Moreover, tourism knowledge subtly but significantly impacts policy and practice (Thomas & Ormerod, 2017). A critical first step is examining how definitions of tourism vary across cultures, histories, and economies. Identifying distinctions between English and Russian definitions reveal potential influences on shaping academic discourse and, consequently, impacting policy decisions and practical implementations.

Tourism's conventional view is derived from an image defined by research in Western cultures (Towner, 1995). Scholars' diverse perspectives emphasize aspects including movement away from home, engagement in experiential activities, and business' pivotal role in supporting the tourism industry (Laws & Scott, 2015). However, challenges defining tourism persist. Advocates for a synthesis of academic and industry perspectives cite difficulties stemming from industry and policy-driven viewpoints, researchers' limited industry knowledge, an overly economic-centric lens, and a common tendency to view tourism as the amalgamation of local events with substantial external influences (Franklin & Crang, 2001).

Alternative diverse definitions of tourism encompass elements such as time, temporary residence away from home, and the commercial aspects of the industry (Leiper, 1979). The multitude of perspectives underscores the abundance of definitions, reflecting the diversity of users engaged in this discourse (Smith, 1988). From a critical perspective, these definitions primarily stem from Western authors, organizations, and businesses, thereby shaping the discourse with Western ideologies. Notably, during the formulation and debate of these definitions, a significant portion of the world (viz., the Soviet Union) perceived tourism as a non-beneficial or even undesirable economic component. In stark contrast to the contemporary emphasis on leisure, cultural exchange, and informal learning in the modern conception of tourism, the former Soviet Union characterized tourism as a non-productive industry, focusing primarily on workforce recovery (Burns, 1998) and the dissemination of propaganda messages (Jarvis & Kallas, 2008). This perspective suggests post-Soviet state policy makers plausibly have a different mindset about tourism.

2.1 Tourism in the Western World

Tourism in the Western world has a long history in academia, with early writings and contributions being descriptive rather than analytical (Wassler & Fan, 2021). In the 1990s, this research stream lacked clear theories and unified ideas (Hardy et al., 2002). Jafari (1990) outlined different stages in English literature from the '50s to the '90s. The post-WWII advocacy platform focused on tourism's role in rebuilding European economies. The shift to the cautionary platform surfaced concerns about environmental and social impacts, pushing for responsible tourism. The subsequent adaptancy platform examined sustainability, aligning with Western views on responsible tourism. Lastly, the knowledge-based platform emphasized academic rigor, making a significant contribution to global tourism research. This evolution highlights the changing focus and perspectives in tourism studies. Tourism research and scholarship have significantly advanced over the last few decades, reflecting a dynamic evolution in understanding the complexities of the industry (Hsu, 2015).

2.2 Tourism in the Soviet Union

In the Soviet Union, tourism was profoundly shaped by Cold War (1947-1989) dynamics, creating a complex interplay between ideological control and economic incentives. While the Iron Curtain imposed strict travel restrictions (Gradska, 2020), Soviet authorities used tourism to reinforce Soviet identity and showcase socialism's advantages (Gorsuch, 2003; Orlov & Popov, 2020). International tourism played a pivotal role in showcasing specific aspects of the Soviet Union to foreign visitors, serving as a political tool to promote the Soviet image abroad, and allowing the state to monitor and control their movements (Burns, 1998). Unlike the Western perspective, tourism for Soviet citizens was primarily functional, focusing on specific purposes such as sports, culture, or political propaganda (Kreck, 1998).

The Soviet Union developed an extensive social tourism system for its citizens (Assipova & Minnaert, 2014) but struggled to attract Western tourists due to inadequate infrastructure (Arefyev & Mieczkowski, 1991). Tourism became a politically loaded practice. While promising benefits like proletariat rejuvenation and ideal socialist citizenship, the disparity between state-sponsored

tourism and popular expectations contributed to the failure of 'real existing socialism' (Rosenbaum, 2015). Despite these constraints, tourism across the Iron Curtain gradually increased, driven by Western curiosity and socialist states' need for hard currency (Gradszkova, 2020; Romano, 2019). When referring to tourism in the Soviet Union, researchers suggest that the Stalinist era should be regarded as a separate phenomenon (Rozite & Klepers, 2012). From 1947 to 1953, the late Stalin regime encouraged internal travel among Soviet citizens, fostering ignorance about foreign (Western) countries deemed as the enemy, using tourism to reassure the war-weary population with the promise of a brighter future within the socialist homeland (Gorsuch, 2003). Tourism was perceived as a non-productive industry, leading to its redefinition as either a tool for propaganda or a means of workforce recuperation (Jarvis & Kallas, 2008). During the early 1950s, individuals were designated as 'USSR tourists' by participating in organized tours to Gori (Georgia), Baku (Azerbaijan), and Tbilisi (Georgia), engaging in a recreation of Stalin's early life and revolutionary experiences (Gorsuch, 2003). In 1949, tourism was formally acknowledged as a non-Olympic sport and is still recognized as such (Rassokhina, 2015). Stalin's death (1953) started a transition period in Soviet tourism. In the 1970s, recreational zoning and tourism development had gained attention, with Moscow, St. Petersburg, and the Black Sea coast emerging as prominent destinations (Kropinova et al., 2020). Foreign tourism, managed by Intourist, aimed at earning hard currency, though most earnings were centralized in Moscow, with only a small portion retained by individual Soviet Republics (Jaakson, 1996, 1998).

Tourism in the Soviet Union was defined by centralized management by the Central Council for Tourism and Excursions and adhered to Communist Party guidelines (Rattus & Järs, 2020). Heavily state subsidized, domestic tourism was more accessible but constrained by the deficit economy, and the tourism infrastructure primarily catered to voucher holders (Jaakson, 1998). Organized trips often included visits to monuments highlighting key aspects of the Soviet heritage narrative (Rattus & Järs, 2020). As funders of the vouchers, trade unions played a significant role in defining tourism by prioritizing health spas and medical treatments for their members (Palmer, 2006).

As a result of the above described historical, cultural, and economic background, and following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, post-Soviet countries recognized the potential of tourism for economic growth, especially amid civil wars and extreme poverty. By utilizing Jafari's (1990) tourism platforms framework, this research aims to compare Russian and English literature to understand the developmental differences in the tourism industry between the post-Soviet and Western worlds.

3. Methods

This systematic review of Russian and English language literature on post-Soviet states' tourism development follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. Moher et al.'s (2010) guidelines were revised (see Page et al., 2021) to reflect advances in systematic review methodology and address changes in terminology over the past decade. The review process encompasses four key phases: (1) identification; (2) screening; (3) eligibility assessment; and (4) inclusion.

To ensure methodological rigor and transparency, this systematic review involved two researchers following established protocols for bias mitigation and quality assurance (Belur et al., 2021). The research process began with a collaborative discussion to establish search parameters and ensure comparability between English (Google Scholar) and Russian (Cyberleninka) database searches. Search terms were carefully developed through a translate-back-translate method to maintain consistency across both languages.

The review process incorporated several quality control measures. First, research questions were systematically broken down into specific sub-questions through researcher discussion and

consensus. Following this, both researchers independently reviewed identified papers, conducting regular interrater reliability checks to ensure consistency in coding and screening decisions (Petersen & Ali, 2011). When disagreements arose in English literature analysis, they were resolved through detailed discussion until consensus was reached (Pahlevan Sharif et al., 2019). For Russian language literature, analysis relied on one fluent researcher, with particular attention paid to maintaining consistent evaluation criteria across both languages. Translations in the next step helped to assure consistency in coding and screening.

3.1. Identification

An extensive literature search was performed across two comparable platforms. The search was limited to leading tourism journals published in either English or Russian languages between 1991 and 2024. For English-language journals, selection was based on the journal’s impact factor and citation metrics, longevity and continuous publication history, explicit focus on tourism research, and recognition within the academic tourism community. Based on these criteria, three English-language journals were selected: Annals of Tourism Research (established 1973, 2023 Impact Factor: 10.4), Tourism Management (established 1980, 2023 Impact Factor: 10.9), and Journal of Travel Research (established 1961, 2023 Impact Factor: 9.7). These journals consistently ranked among the top tourism journals globally and have maintained continuous publication throughout the study period (1991-2024).

Table 1. The search string by database

Databases	Searching string and searching terms				No of articles	Date of acquisition
Cyberleninka.ru	Anywhere in the article		“Менеджмент туристских дестинаций” (Eng: Tourism Destination Management)		14	1.13.2024
	To be included in the title		"туристская дестинация" (Eng: Tourism Destination)		27	1.13.2024
	Anywhere in the article with 2nd term in the title		постсоветский туризм (Eng: post-soviet tourism)	@name TI:	50	1.13.2024
	Total				91	
Google Scholar	Anywhere in the article		Tourism Destination AND Estonia OR Latvia OR Lithuania OR Belarus OR Moldova OR Ukraine OR Armenia OR Azerbaijan OR Georgia OR Kazakhstan OR Kyrgyzstan OR Tajikistan OR Turkmenistan OR Uzbekistan		301	1.13.2024
			Tourism Destination		68	1.13.2024
			Destination management		78	1.13.2024
	Total				447	

For Russian-language journals, selection criteria included inclusion in the Russian Science Citation Index (RSCI), dedicated focus on tourism and service research, and regular publication schedule. Two Russian journals met these criteria: *Современные проблемы сервиса и туризма* (Service & Tourism: Current Challenges, established 2007, 2023 Impact Factor: 0.965, total publications: 1,130) and *Сервис в России и за рубежом* (Service in Russia and Abroad, established 2007, 2023 Impact Factor: 1.182, total publications: 2,183). The selection of fewer Russian journals reflects the relatively recent emergence of dedicated tourism research journals in Russia, with most being established after 2007. While other Russian journals were considered, they were excluded due to significantly lower impact factors (below 0.530) and smaller publication volumes (fewer than 279 articles), compared to the selected journals' substantial publication records.

Table 1 displays the search string and narrowed-down terms based on database capabilities. To ensure accuracy, validity and adaptation of English keywords into Russian, a method known as translation and back-translation (Chen & Boore, 2010) was used. English keywords were translated into Russian by the author who is fluent in both languages. Second and third translators, also fluent in both languages, translated keywords back to English, without seeing the original file. The original and back-translated versions were then compared for consistency, accuracy, and potential discrepancies. The differences were reviewed and discussed, and no significant differences were found between the two versions, ensuring that the translated materials accurately reflected the original content. During the identification stage, 538 articles were identified for review, comprising 91 articles in Russian and 447 in English.

3.2 Screening

Following source identification and search term refinement, the subsequent screening phase took place. At this stage, abstracts were examined to precisely identify and exclude literature that did not align with the research objectives. Exclusions comprised duplicate articles, conference proceedings, periodicals, book chapters, or editorial letters (N=513).

3.3 Eligibility assessment

To maintain focus and relevance, stringent eligibility criteria were established, ensuring that only articles meeting these criteria proceeded to the next stage. Eligibility was assessed in two steps. First, abstracts were reviewed to exclude articles using metadata, review articles, general tourism model studies (typically encompassing 100 or more countries) or articles with access fees. Next, articles were subjected to a thorough skim-read to exclude those focused on geographic areas outside the post-Soviet space, or articles centered on education or linguistic research within the context of tourism, thereby establishing eligibility (N=110).

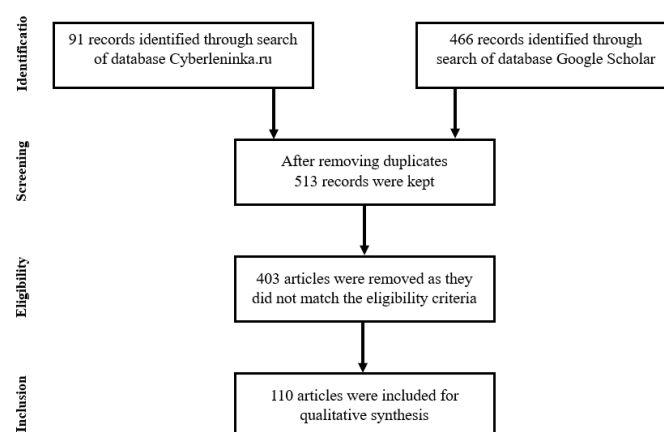


Figure 2. Flow of information through each phase of the systematic review

3.4 Inclusion

Once deemed eligible, the selected articles underwent comprehensive analysis, facilitating an exploration of answers to the research questions underlying this systematic literature review. Figure 2 shows the flow of information through each phase of the systematic review.

4. Results and Analysis

The final analysis encompassed 110 articles, with a distribution of 63 Russian and 47 English language journal publications (see Figure 3). Spanning from 1991 to 2024, these articles chronicled the evolution of tourism destination development research. Russian academic discourse on tourism development started in 2010 (Morozov & Lvova, 2010), significantly later than English contributions from 1991 on USSR tourism (Arefyev & Mieczkowski, 1991) and changes in student perceptions post-visit of USSR (Pizam et al., 1991). This significant lag in Russian-language academic publications (1991-2010) could be due to the broader challenges faced by the tourism industry during the post-Soviet transition. Following the Soviet Union’s dissolution, the industry experienced substantial economic instability and institutional upheaval, leading to a decline in domestic tourism and a corresponding shift toward outbound travel (Shkarubo, 2022). The limited research output in Russian peer-reviewed tourism journals from the 1990s and to the early 2000s may be attributed to these systemic challenges (Sheresheva & Kopiski, 2016). However, the mid-2000s marked a turning point, with a renewed focus on developing domestic tourism driven by government initiatives, business interests, and academic research (Shulgina & Shul’gina, 2023). This revival coincided with efforts to leverage cultural heritage and natural resources to boost both domestic and inbound tourism; however, challenges including geopolitical tensions and economic factors persisted (Gudkov et al., 2018; Sheresheva, 2018). The emergence of dedicated tourism journals in 2003 and subsequent mega-events like the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics and 2018 FIFA World Cup further catalyzed research interest. Crimea’s annexation also stimulated academic research by examining its impact on regional tourism development (Ivanov et al., 2016). This confluence of factors contributed to the marked increase in publications post-2010. This difference highlights a significant lag in Russian language literature’s engagement with tourism destination development in the post-Soviet space.

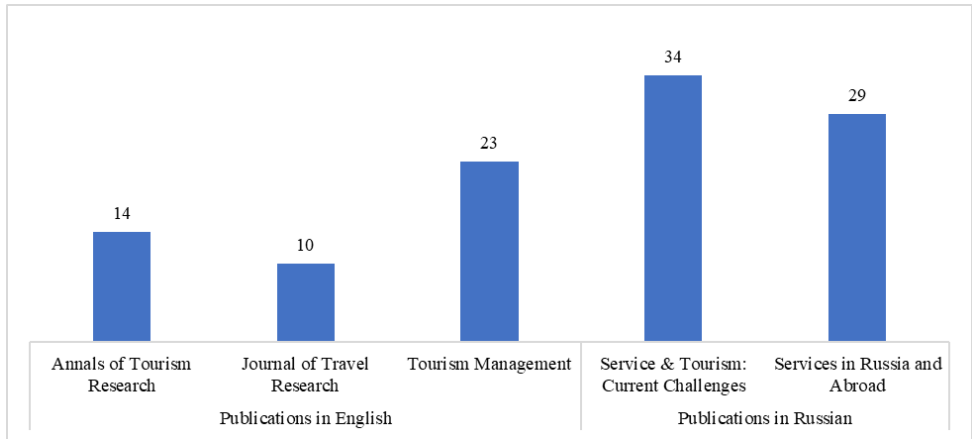


Figure 3. Publications by source 1991-2024

From 1991 to 2008, English journal publications on post-Soviet destination development were modest but steady, peaking at six articles from 2006 to 2008, with no corresponding Russian studies (Figure 4). Russian contributions began in 2010, echoing Jafari’s (1990) perspective on tourism’s economic role in Europe post-crisis (WWII) and mirroring the spike in European tourism research following the Great Recession (Duan et al., 2022). The publication landscape shifted between 2012-

14 when Russian exceeded English language publications sevenfold. This surge, peaking with 22 Russian articles in 2015-17, may be attributed to the growing number of travelers (UNWTO, 2024), sparking Russian authors' interest in destination development, resulting in an increase in available Russian-language journals. Up to 2024, the output between the languages balanced out, mainly because of a decrease in publications in Russian language during the COVID-19 period.

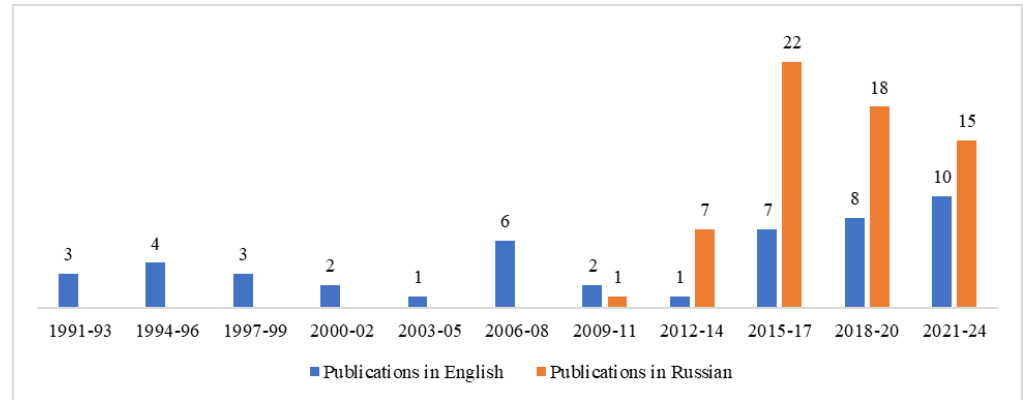


Figure 4. Number of publications by year

Russian literature on tourism destination development predominantly centers on the Russian Federation, with 53 articles, whereas English-language research is more varied, covering the Russian Federation (13), the Baltic States (12), and global post-Soviet connections (11) (Table 2). Tourism research focusing on Ukraine (9) increased after Crimea's annexation. Notably absent were studies on Belarus, Moldova, and all Caucasus nations, suggesting potential research gaps. These gaps could stem from several factors. For example, limited resource allocation might prioritize regions with perceived greater tourism potential, but prevailing academic trends and collaboration networks may focus on areas with established scholarly interest. Data scarcity and language barriers also posed significant hurdles, further compounded by regional political or economic instability that can dissuade academic inquiry. Additionally, historical biases and the specific stage of a region's tourism development may lead to their inadvertent exclusion from the broader research narrative.

Table 2. Publications by Geographic Focus

Geographic region	English Literature	Russian Literature	Total Publications
Russian Federation	13	53	66
Multiple Regions	11	3	14
Baltic States	12		12
Ukraine	5	4	9
Central Asia	3	3	6
Soviet Union	2		2

In the selected 110 articles, qualitative research dominated with 89 publications, predominantly from Russian literature, which contributed 62 qualitative studies. While qualitative research is also prevalent in English articles (27), the gap with quantitative studies (17) is narrower. Theoretical frameworks are less commonly employed in Russian articles, with most publications (55) not adhering to any particular theory. Notably, both English and Russian publications referenced Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle (Aleksandrova, 2020; Upchurch & Teivane, 2000), suggesting that the theoretical knowledge accumulated in West has crossed the borders, although a

time lag of 20 years is apparent. On the other hand, experience economy (Dotcenko, 2023; M. Y. Sheresheva & Kolkov, 2018; Timofeeva et al., 2019) is the most prevalent theory used in Russian language literature, suggesting a particular interest in the experiential aspects of tourism within Russian studies and the influence of economic theories. Dependence on theories from other disciplines supports the early stages of the tourism field (Tribe, 1997).

Table 3 illustrates the thematic research trends in tourism studies, highlighting a divergence between Russian and English literature. Russian articles predominantly investigated “destination development” (25 articles), “development factors” (14 articles), and diverse “types of tourism” (17 articles). These themes included ecotourism, advocating for environmental awareness and education (Afanasiev & Afanasieva, 2017; Mishechkin & Golubnichaya, 2017b); Religious tourism (Aleksushin & Solomina, 2019; Kotova et al., 2019), which assessed the touristic potential of sacred sites; Health tourism (Danilina et al., 2022), addressing the stagnation of sanatoriums; and underwater tourism (Fazlullin, 2021), which identified and outlined stakeholders and their role in planning. Moreover, niche sectors such as industrial tourism (Timakova & Radygina, 2023) explored the potential of the Ural macroregion; Jewelry tourism (Timofeeva et al., 2019); and Red (communist history) tourism (Timofeeva et al., 2018). Two additional and unique types of tourism emerged from the literature. Children’s tourism refers to an experience where visitors stay at locations where Soviet children went to summer camps (Golikova, 2014; Konyshev & Gerasimov, 2021; Rassokhina, 2015). These camps first emerged in 1949 when tourism was officially recognized as a type of non-Olympic sport (Gorsuch, 2003). This development is reminiscent of USSR-era practices, and lacks a direct Western counterpart. The other highlighted area is agro (Orishev et al., 2023; Pinaev, 2016) and rural tourism (Shabalina et al., 2016; Trukhachev, 2016a), referred to in Russian as сёльский (sél’skij) tourism, stemming from the word for village (село/seló). These articles investigated the potential for tourism development of villages focusing on communist agricultural history.

Fourteen publications in the dataset focused on identifying and analyzing the development factors impacting tourism's evolution. The issue of overtourism, a significant concern of modern tourism, is specifically addressed in four articles. These works collectively assert that the Russian Federation has not reached a state of overtourism (Preobrazhensky, 2019; Sheresheva et al., 2019; Vetitnev & Chigarev, 2019), and underscore the importance of proactive sustainable development planning (Aleksandrova, 2018).

Destination development and the factors associated with it are also widely discussed in English literature, in 10 and 11 articles respectively. Destination development studies focused on various issues including the role of positive perceptions towards Ukraine in influencing travel decisions, contrasting with negative sentiments towards Russia (Josiassen et al., 2023); the limited impact of tourist photographs on destination appeal (Kim & Stepchenkova, 2015); strategies for preserving Sochi's (Russian Federation) attractiveness as a tourist destination (Lukashina et al., 1996); and the advantages of network diversity in modern economies (Povilanskas & Armaitienė, 2011). Additional research points to the distinctiveness of smaller locales based on visit characteristics (Raun et al., 2016) and how advertising subtly shifts country image (Stepchenkova et al., 2019). Other topics included the effects of workforce losses from conscription or emigration (Tomej et al., 2023), Latvia's nascent stage of tourism development (Upchurch & Teivane, 2000), and the dynamics of post-communist transition (Worthington, 2003).

English language literature stood out for methodological innovation and testing (Ahas et al., 2007, 2008; Raun et al., 2016; Saluveer et al., 2020), exploration of solidarity within tourism (Josiassen et al., 2022; Nicolau et al., 2024), and insights into leisure travel's significance for post-Soviet citizens. Overall, these studies suggest that leisure travel interpretations and functions are progressing more gradually compared to rapid economic and political changes (Kirillova et al., 2018).

Table 3. The focus of the articles

Focus of the article	# of Publications	Citations
Russian language		
Destination development	25	(Aleksandrova, 2017, 2020; Amelkina, 2020; Dokuchaev, 2015; Dotcenko, 2023; Dukhovnaia, 2014; Gilfanova & Solovova, 2019; V. Khetagurova, 2017; V. Sh. Khetagurova & Umaraliev, 2016; Korolev & Zharkova, 2015; Krivosheeva, 2014; Mishechkin & Golubnichaya, 2017a; Morozov & Lvova, 2010; Oborin, 2023; Rassokhina & Lebedev, 2016; Shabalina & Kashirina, 2023; Shcherbakova & Zhdanova, 2019; M. Sheresheva et al., 2017; Troshkina, 2022; Trukhachev, 2015; Tsyshchuk, 2018; Tsyshchuk & Tsyshchuk, 2013; Varivoda, 2016; Vesloguzova & Shestanova, 2016; Zhulina et al., 2019)
Type of tourism	17	(Afanasiev & Afanasieva, 2017; Aleksushin & Solomina, 2019; Danilina et al., 2022; Fazlullin, 2021; Golikova, 2014; Konyshv & Gerasimov, 2021; Kotova et al., 2019; Mishechkin & Golubnichaya, 2017b; Morozova, 2021; Orishev et al., 2023; Pinaev, 2016; Rassokhina, 2015; Shabalina et al., 2016; Timakova & Radygina, 2023; Timofeeva et al., 2018, 2019; Trukhachev, 2016a)
Development factors	14	(Avilova et al., 2023; Butova et al., 2018; Cherenev, 2019; Fekhtel, 2012; Kedrova & Vyacheslav, 2020; Kotova & Shaigardanova, 2021; Krivosheeva & Vapnyarskaya, 2015; Orekhov & Chasovsky, 2023; Sadykova et al., 2022; M. Y. Sheresheva & Kolkov, 2018; Stasev, 2021; Suslova, 2017; Trukhachev, 2016b; Yakovenko, 2016)
Overtourism	4	(Aleksandrova, 2018; Preobrazhensky, 2019; M. Y. Sheresheva et al., 2019; Vetitnev & Chigarev, 2019)
Destination competitiveness	1	(Kharitonova et al., 2014)
Tourism benefits	1	(Isabaev, 2013)
Tourism development	1	(Andrianov, 2015)
English language		
Development factors	11	(Caber et al., 2013; Carnegie & Kociatkiewicz, 2019; Ivanov et al., 2016; Ivanova & Buda, 2020; Kantarci,

		2007; Kirilenko & Stepchenkova, 2017; Makkonen et al., 2018; Papagianni et al., 2023; Pfoser & Yusupova, 2022; Stepchenkova & Belyaeva, 2021; Upchurch et al., 2000)
Destination development	10	(Jaakson, 1996; Josiassen et al., 2023; Kim & Stepchenkova, 2015; Lukashina et al., 1996; Povilanskas & Armaitienė, 2011; Raun et al., 2016; Stepchenkova et al., 2019; Tomej et al., 2023; Upchurch & Teivane, 2000; Worthington, 2003)
Type of tourism	6	(Ahas et al., 2007; Ilyina & Mieczkowski, 1992; Wight, 2016; Wight & John Lennon, 2007; Williams et al., 2023; Zhao Xinluo, 1994)
Destination image	6	(Pizam et al., 1991; Sobral et al., 2022; Stepchenkova et al., 2015; Stepchenkova & Eales, 2011; Stepchenkova & Morrison, 2006, 2008)
Tourism development	5	(Airey & Shackley, 1997; Arefyev & Mieczkowski, 1991; Burns, 1998; Gorbuntsova et al., 2019; Unwin, 1996)
Method	2	(Ahas et al., 2008; Saluveer et al., 2020)
Solidarity	2	(Josiassen et al., 2022; Nicolau et al., 2024)
Destination competitiveness	1	(Andrades & Dimanche, 2017)
International tourism	1	(Kreck, 1998)
Meaning of leisure travel	1	(Kirillova et al., 2018)
Sustainable development	1	(Darvishmotevali & Altinay, 2022)
Tourism consumption	1	(Kirillova et al., 2020)

Figures 5 and 6 show word clouds that depict key themes in tourism literature, with larger fonts signifying more frequent mentions. Common disciplinary terms such as “tourism,” “tourist,” and “destination” were excluded from the visualization to better highlight distinctive research themes in each language's literature. In Russian literature, terms like "sustainable," "rural," and "cultural" reflect a focus on environmentally conscious tourism development and leveraging rural and cultural assets. The appearance of "resources", "potential", and "region" indicated a focus on identifying and utilizing regional strengths and opportunities for tourism growth. Words such as "overtourism" and "industrial" draw attention to challenges such as overcrowding and the integration of tourism into industrial and economic strategies. Additionally, terms like "recreational" and "environment" emphasized the balance between economic development and environmental stewardship.

5. Discussion

The comparative systematic literature review between Russian and English language articles published between 1991 and 2024 on tourism destination development revealed several noteworthy trends and patterns. A total of 110 articles were examined to answer the research questions. The analysis compared the publication trends over the years, geographic distribution, methodological approaches, theoretical frameworks, and the diverse focus areas within Russian and English literature.

RQ1: What role has the Russian language literature played in documenting and shaping the evolution of tourism in post-Soviet states, and how does it compare to the literature in English in terms of focus and content?

The first research question explored the contribution of Russian literature in shaping tourism in post-Soviet states and examined the distinctions in focus and content compared to English literature. To address this question, the history of scholarship was evaluated based on the first article and journals. The initial Russian-language publication addressing tourism dates back to 1996, focusing on the history of international tourism (Aleksandrova, 1996). This temporal reference highlights a notable time lag compared to the Western world, where dedicated tourism journals such as the *Journal of Travel Research* (since 1972), *Annals of Tourism Research* (since 1973), and *Tourism Management* (since 1980) had already established a robust presence. The difference in when scholarly discussions began highlights how academic exploration in tourism took different paths between Russian and English-speaking academic communities.

Moreover, as post-Soviet countries embarked on the tourism development process, the Western world had already traversed the stages of the four tourism platforms of advocacy, cautionary, adaptancy, and knowledge-based (Jafari, 1990). This historical context further accentuates the differing trajectories of academic exploration in the tourism sector. A salient point is that the Western research stream not only reflected but also significantly influenced the reality of the industry, demonstrating the interconnectedness of academia and practice. This dynamic exchange of ideas informs policymaking and contributes to the continuous evolution of both academia and the tourism sector. In contrast, the evidence does not support that the post-Soviet countries have experienced the same level of reciprocal influence, indicating a potential disparity in how academic insights were shaped and responded to the practical realities of the region's tourism industries.

RQ2: To what extent has tourism research in post-Soviet states evolved in terms of its focus, scale, and objectives when compared to the "Western World"?

Tourism research in post-Soviet states has distinctively evolved with a focus on practical destination issues and economic imperatives, diverging from the Western world's broader and theory-driven objectives. While both regions began with an economic emphasis, the post-Soviet literature, particularly from the Baltic countries, reflected rapid development, possibly due to early market reforms and European Union (EU) integration. Conversely, Western tourism research benefits from rich data and diverse theoretical approaches, encompassing sustainability and long-term impacts. Data scarcity in post-Soviet states suggests a more pragmatic approach, focusing on immediate economic gains rather than comprehensive theoretical constructs. This contrast embodies the unique socio-economic transitions shaping the post-Soviet research landscape.

Differences between English and Russian language research approaches offer opportunities for mutual enhancement. With a focus on applied scholarship, Russian language tourism literature could be enriched by incorporating theoretical frameworks common in English research, providing a more structured analysis and generalizable insights. Conversely, English-language research could benefit from Russian literature's detailed practical insights, particularly regarding tourism development challenges in transitional economies. This integration advances both theoretical understanding and practical implementation of tourism development strategies.

RQ3: How has the balance between the roles of the state and the private sector in tourism development evolved in post-Soviet states, and what are the implications of this balance on the growth and sustainability of the tourism industry?

In post-Soviet states, the nuanced dynamics between state and private sector involvement significantly impact the tourism industry's growth and sustainability. English language studies stand out for offering explicit, actionable recommendations to both policymakers and the private sector. In contrast, Russian articles tend to provide broader, more general suggestions, often without outlining clear, actionable steps. For example, Amelkina (2020) suggested that urban tourism development "should be considered systematically and comprehensively" (p. 145) and possibilities "should be evaluated taking into account interests of population and regional economies," (p. 145) but did not provide specific implementation steps. In contrast, English language publications tend to offer more concrete, actionable insights supported by specific examples. Ahas et al. (2007) demonstrated this by identifying a precise case of Latvian fishermen's movement patterns, quantifying the scale ("thousands"), and providing specific recommendations for using mobile positioning data in marketing and services, while also addressing practical implementation challenges such as privacy concerns and potential negative tourist reactions. This difference reflects the varying stages of tourism research development. The English language literature's longer history likely contributes to its more practical, implementation-focused orientation. Moreover, these studies typically leave the interpretation of whether the implications are more relevant to the state or the private sector up to the reader, adding another layer of ambiguity. The vagueness in Russian literature might reflect a historically stronger state influence in post-Soviet countries. Broad suggestions without specific actionable steps could indicate a prevailing mindset where the state plays a leading role, and the private sector's role is less clearly defined or secondary.

RQ4: What are the challenges and opportunities associated with the transition from centrally planned to market-oriented economies in the context of tourism development in post-Soviet states?

Both English and Russian literatures describe a complex evolution in post-Soviet tourism development from centrally planned to market-oriented economies as influenced by geopolitical alignments, dependance on USSR for tourists, and EU membership. This fundamental shift represents a shift from state-controlled resource allocation and investment decisions through administrative mechanisms (Griffin, 1998) to market forces, price mechanisms, and profit expectations guiding economic decisions (Vogels, 2011). In tourism development, this transition moved away from state-controlled tourism operations focused on workforce recovery and propaganda to market-driven enterprises responding to consumer demands. This transformation required developing new financial markets, establishing property rights, and privatizing state-owned tourism assets (Blejer & Szápary, 1991), while facing challenges such as institutional rigidities and underdeveloped market-oriented management skills (Dinoto, 1994).

The extent of embracing market reforms varies across the region, with some countries rapidly implementing policies conducive to tourism growth, while others grappled with the transition's complexities. This disparity not only affects their current tourism industry but also shapes future growth and sustainability. The literature review highlights a stark contrast in tourism development between Baltic and Central Asian countries. EU members (i.e., Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia) demonstrated effective adaptation to market-oriented tourism. The Baltic states leveraged their EU benefits for broader market access and regulatory support. For example, Estonia had lesser dependency on USSR travelers due to its geographic position and cost advantages compared to Scandinavian countries. In contrast, Central Asian countries within the Commonwealth of Independent States still heavily relied on Russian tourists and adhered to Soviet-era tourism models like sanatoriums and Soviet era monuments, reflecting their slower transition to market-oriented tourism practices. Further, countries with Western orientations that were outside the EU (e.g., Ukraine and Georgia) faced unique challenges in this transition, with few studies to fully examine their

development trajectories. Overall, EU membership emerged as a significant factor that accelerated the transition towards market-oriented tourism practices. On the other hand, countries with stronger ties to Russia or lacking EU integration experienced a slower, more complex evolution in their tourism sectors. This diverse landscape underscores the importance of strategic planning, innovation, and adaptability in navigating the shift to market-oriented economies in the post-Soviet realm.

6. Conclusion

This comprehensive review of tourism research in post-Soviet states included both English and Russian literature from 1991 to 2024. The results illuminate the multifaceted and evolving landscape of tourism development in these transitioning economies. Key findings highlighted that the state of research, particularly in Russian literature, is in a nascent stage, characterized by a reliance on qualitative narratives and absence of innovative methodologies. These findings indicate a crucial need for methodological evolution and diversification to enrich the scholarly discourse and align with global academic standards.

The review also underscores significant research gaps, especially in regions such as Belarus, Moldova, and the Caucasus nations. This scarcity of comprehensive tourism data likely stems from several structural challenges. First, limited financial resources often result in these countries prioritizing basic economic statistics over specialized tourism data collection. Second, when data is collected, methodological differences from international standards (e.g., different definitions of "tourist" or varying measurement periods) make comparative analysis difficult. Third, while some data exists, information is often only available in local languages and buried within complex government statistical portals, creating accessibility barriers for international researchers. To address these challenges, we recommended the following: (1) development of standardized data collection protocols aligned with UNWTO methodology that can be implemented within existing resource constraints, (2) creation of multilingual data access points, and (3) establishment of regional research partnerships to share costs and expertise in data collection and analysis. These data deficiencies not only hinder the growth of tourism in these regions but also constrain the broader understanding of tourism dynamics within the post-Soviet context.

Review evidence also revealed a limited understanding of tourist behaviors in post-Soviet states. A better understanding of tourist behavior would help to develop targeted and effective tourism strategies as understanding tourist preferences, motivations, and patterns is essential for tailoring tourism offerings and marketing them effectively. For instance, research on tourism motivations and specialized products revealed diverse factors driving travel decisions. These findings can inform the development of targeted tourism strategies in post-Soviet states. For example, cultural heritage, adventure experiences, and gastronomy are key motivators that attract visitors to Peru, where tailored offerings align with tourist expectations (Santos, 2024). Similarly, Soviet-era heritage tourism in Estonia capitalizes on the unique opportunity to experience curated versions of the past, which resonates with niche market segments (Mildeberg & Vider, 2022). Wellness tourism, another growing segment, is driven by motivations such as relaxation, personal development, and beautification, with preferences varying across nationalities (Bočkus, Tammi, et al., 2023; Bočkus, Vento, et al., 2023; Kelly, 2012; Rancic et al., 2014). Sacred site tourism in Central Asia highlights the integration of spiritual, cultural, and wellness factors as key drivers of visitation (Rybina & Lee, 2020). Further, improving the conservation, visualization, and interpretation of Gulag heritage sites in Kazakhstan could enhance tourism development by appealing to both historical interest and cultural curiosity (Tiberghien & Lennon, 2023). These insights demonstrate the potential for stakeholders to create specialized tourism products, improve services, and address barriers to meet evolving visitor expectations effectively.

Geopolitical influences, particularly EU membership and alignment, significantly shaped tourism competitiveness in post-Soviet states, as reflected in the Travel and Tourism Development

Index (TTDI) rankings for 2021 and 2024. The Baltic states—Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia—stood out due to their integration into the European Union. Estonia ranked 29th in 2021 and 36th in 2024, maintaining its position as a regional leader. Lithuania and Latvia ranked 42nd and 48th in 2021 and shifted to 44th and 65th in 2024, respectively. Despite slight declines, these states benefit from EU funding, regulatory alignment, robust infrastructure, facilitating sustainable tourism practices, diversified offerings, and greater global market integration. In contrast, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan reflected the challenges faced by non-EU post-Soviet states. Kazakhstan improved its ranking from 66th in 2021 to 52nd in 2024, driven by investments in infrastructure and efforts to position itself as a regional tourism hub. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan rank significantly lower, with Kyrgyzstan dropping from 90th in 2021 to 102nd in 2024 and Tajikistan ranking at 99th in 2024. These countries struggle with underdeveloped infrastructure, limited connectivity, and a reliance on niche tourism segments such as adventure and cultural tourism, which limit broader market appeal and growth potential. The contrast between EU-member Baltic states and Central Asian countries highlights the importance of institutional support and market integration in driving tourism competitiveness.

This study moves beyond the conventional Western-centric view of tourism, as traditionally defined by researchers like Towner (1995), to delve into the unique and evolving landscape of post-Soviet tourism. Results not only broaden the understanding of tourism within these transitioning economies but also challenge and expand the conventional definitions and perceptions of tourism. The findings underscore tourism's dynamic nature, especially in the context of societies transitioning from centrally planned to market-oriented economies. By juxtaposing the divergent paths of tourism development in post-Soviet states with those in the West, this research contributes to a more holistic and nuanced understanding of global tourism.

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of context-specific research in shaping the global discourse on tourism. This investigation serves as a catalyst to encourage a more inclusive and diversified understanding of tourism, acknowledging the varied perspectives and experiences of post-Soviet states as integral to the global narrative of tourism development. Findings emphasize that tourism's evolution cannot be fully comprehended through a singular, Western lens; instead, a diverse and inclusive approach is necessary. Critically, tourism studies must consider the unique historical, cultural, and economic contexts of different regions.

Based on these findings, several actionable recommendations emerge. Researchers should pursue collaborative projects between English and Russian-speaking scholars to bridge the theoretical-practical divide and develop standardized methodologies for studying tourism in transitional economies. Policymakers would benefit from combining English-language research's theoretical frameworks with Russian literature's practical insights when developing tourism policies. Practitioners should implement monitoring systems that incorporate both theoretical metrics and practical indicators, while fostering knowledge exchange between Western and post-Soviet tourism organizations.

Moving forward, this paper calls for continued and expanded research in post-Soviet tourism, advocating for innovative methodologies and comprehensive data collection to bridge existing knowledge gaps. Such endeavors will not only enrich the academic field of tourism studies but will also provide valuable insights for practitioners and policymakers in crafting strategies that embrace the multifaceted realities of tourism in a global context.

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