

Conference Paper

Scientific Program “Discovery Kazakhstan”: Overcoming Break-up in Intercultural Communication

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Abstract

The article is aimed at analyzing a short-term experiment held on the basis of Suleyman Demirel University (Almaty, Kazakhstan) in the frame of the program “Discovery Kazakhstan”. The program included language courses (Turkish, Russian, Kazakh and English) in combination with tourist and scientific components and popular science information, mainly related to cultural studies. The program also included the course “Modern Kazakhstan: its social, economic and cultural potential”, which details the features of the Kazakhstani economy, Kazakh and Russian cultures, milestones of Kazakh history and peculiarities of education system in Kazakhstan. Participants of the program “Discovery Kazakhstan” were students from Turkey, USA and Malaysia. The experiment showed that a combination of language courses with tourist and scientific programs, as well as with some elements of entertainment, provides opportunities for improving and optimizing the educational process as a whole and for growing rapport between nations through the implementation of a soft power policy and intercultural contacts, in particular.

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1. Introduction

The initiative for starting such program as “Discovery Kazakhstan” was presupposed by the lack of information about Kazakhstan as an independent country with its own economic and cultural peculiarities. The other factor that prompted the program was one of the critical issues for Kazakhstan, which is becoming isolated on narrowly regional problems, as Kazakhstan “is a geographically European nation with multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition of the population due to its geopolitical location and economic potential” [1, 724]. In our opinion, the main strategy for addressing both issues will be the implementation of the soft power policy; according to Nye's definition, “soft power is a specific resource of a state based on three factors: culture of the country; political principles and attitudes of the country; its foreign policy” [2, 11]. So, the main objectives of this work were the following: (1) to study the priorities of prospective participants; (2)

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to identify the ways of overcoming break-up in intercultural communication by means of combining tourism, lingua-cultural studies and language program, since all those components are related to the soft power policy implementation.

Thus, lingua-cultural studies, as well as scientific tourism, are closely related to all the principles of the soft power policy, as it contributes to introducing tourists with national and local culture, as well as shows the sustainability of the state's foreign policy, which allows to attract tourists. Moreover, multifaceted tourist programs including scientific tourism are aimed at the implementation of the most important component of the soft power policy, which is propaganda of the cultural specificity of the country and ability to attract others by the legitimacy of (the country's) policies and the values that underlie them [2]. The following statement of C. M. Hall seems to perfectly clarify the peculiar features and purposes of scientific tourism, which the program "Discovery Kazakhstan" belongs to, as a part of the soft power policy: "It will incorporate both traditional and new perspectives on leisure and tourism from contemporary geography, e.g. notions of identity, representation and culture, while also providing for perspectives from cognate areas such as anthropology, cultural studies, gastronomy and food studies, marketing, policy studies and political economy, regional and urban planning, and sociology, within the development of an integrated field of leisure and tourism studies" [3, 4].

The foreign policy strategy of Kazakhstan is based on two principles: multi-vector and Eurasianism. In accordance with a statement of the President of Kazakhstan N.A. Nazarbayev, a multi-vector means "developing friendly and foreseeable mutual relations with all countries, which plays a significant role in representing our country's practical interest in the world affairs" [4]. Such multifaceted language and scientific tourist programs as "Discovery Kazakhstan" are the way to disseminate the information about achievements of Kazakhstan all over the world and share the experience in the field of establishing a multi-cultural community.

The program "Discovery Kazakhstan" has been carried out in the frame of aforementioned principles; however, it seems necessary to clarify the peculiarities and preferences of the target audience in order to obtain the most efficient experience from the future programs. A specific educational path (with the accent on teaching various languages), as well as scientific and touristic components should be proposed on the basis of participants' preferences and needs, which presupposes the relevance of a survey concerning the program "Discovery Kazakhstan", its main focus and trends.

2. Literature Review

Scientific tourism as a multifaceted phenomenon traces its origins to the XX century. As L. Molokáčová and Š. Molokáče [5, 41] point out, the term "scientific tourism" appeared in literature for the first time in 1980. Since then, various definitions of scientific tourism were given by scholars investigating its different dimensions. Laarman, J. G. and Perdue, R. R., [6, 205], for instance, looking at the phenomenon from the point of view of relation to science, in their research paper "Tropical science and tourism" describe scientific tourism as "a work of the explorers in the country without proper technical equipment". However, J. H. Laing [7] in her work "Science tourism: exploring the potential for astrobiology funding and outreach" argues that successful scientific tourism contains all of the attributes of tourism and, moreover, it requires a human factor and technical equipment of the high level. The West considers the phenomenon from the point of view of its relation to tourism and defines scientific tourism as "a specific form of tourism related to scientific practice. The results of that are also benefits for tourism. The benefits are presented in various popular science magazines" [8, 41].

An observation of scientific tourism peculiarities in post-reform Russia was done by Ilyina, L. and Mieczkowski, Z. [9]. The authors discuss "the present conditions and organizational problems of scientific tourism in unstable Russia". They offer some forms and types of development according to different regions. Scientific tourism, as a form of sustainable tourism, has excellent prospects for development under Russian conditions. Political aspects of scientific tourism could also be important. Russia is going through a difficult and painful period of political and economic adjustment to the free market system with an uncertain outcome. Western scientists and 'knowledge-orientated' tourists visiting Russia as, well as Russian scholars travelling to the West, may contribute to the successful transition of the country to the new socio-economic system, more efficient economically, and more democratic politically" [9, 325].

Being a representative of The Centre of the Scientific Tourism, ÚEL SAV Zvolen, M. Pichlerová [10] thinks that the basis of scientific tourism is satisfying educational, cultural and leisure needs of the group of people who are interested in the same thing. The main parts of scientific tourism are excursions led by the expert in the specific field.

On the other hand, S. L. Slocum, C. Kline and A. Holden [11, 205] focused on motivational aspects of scientific tourism: "Whereas the growth of interest in science and environmental conservation is an important pointer towards explaining the increased popularity of scientific tourism, the inherent volunteerism that characterizes much of this market suggests a complexity of motivations. While the financial motivation of a

salaried scientist who travels for research would appear to be the dominant factor to account for such behavior, presumably allied to an anticipated belief in the social good of the research being invested, individuals who enter into scientific tourism voluntarily may have a range of motivations for participation. Yet, by definition, instrumental to scientific tourism is the desire to travel to a new environment. Although this may be a necessary prerequisite to be able to participate in certain types of scientific enquiry, it may also be paramount even when other motivations and goals could be fulfilled closer to home". Also, they underlined clearly the main advantages and disadvantages of such complicated phenomenon as scientific tourism: "inherent to scientific tourism is a transfer of knowledge centered upon a relationship between scientific tourists (voluntary or salaried) and local people, which even when utilizing participatory mechanisms still places the onus of expertise upon the outsider. There is a subsequent danger of creating a legacy of dependency on the Western aid unless special attention is focused on the capacity building of local people by lead stakeholders that facilitates the continuance of locally organized and determined scientific tourism" [10, 219].

3. Program Description

The "Discovery Kazakhstan" program carried out at Suleyman Demirel University (Kazakhstan) offers a special comprehensive program including a summer school with elective language courses (Russian, Kazakh, Turkish, and English), the course "Modern Kazakhstan: its social, economic and cultural potential" and special tours and excursions providing the participants of the program with practical experience.

The language courses are conducted on the basis of the special techniques considering achievements of modern methodology and at the same time focusing on cultural and communicative peculiarities of the studied language. The language courses have three credits for each of them. A training term covers two months. All language courses are supplemented with oral training practice with student and teacher volunteers and in real situations during tours and excursions, such as shopping at the bazaar and souvenir shops, asking for the information in the underground and on the bus.

The course "Modern Kazakhstan: its social, economic and cultural potential" is aimed at providing the students with interesting, objective and multifaceted information on the following aspects: history of Kazakhstan, its economy, natural sights and landmarks, customs, traditions, spiritual values and material culture of the Kazakhs, like national crafts and music, and the national and language policy of Kazakhstan. The last aspect was studied in the frame of multilingual settings and multiculturalism.

The program is supplemented by a large number of excursions, tours, master classes and meetings with experts in different fields. The lecture concerning Kazakh traditional arts and crafts, for example, is accompanied with an excursion to the Central Museum of Kazakhstan and the master class in a jeweler's workshop where the students can see many various artifacts and even try the jewelry on.

The lecture about Kazakh national music is followed by the excursion to the Museum of Musical Instruments (meeting the expert). The lecture on such topic as "Historical Monuments of the Kazakh Steppe" is supported by a 3-day trip to the ancient city of Turkestan in order to get acquainted with Hodge Akhmet Yassavi Mausoleum and Arystan Bab. Trips to the Charyn Canyon and Turgen Waterfalls in Almaty region, where the participants of the program have the opportunity to see those national monuments, follow the lecture on "Geography of Kazakhstan". The lectures on "Semiotics of Internal Space of Housing" and "Ethnic Cuisine of Kazakhs" are supported with visits to Kazakh families. So, the program can also be considered as a discursive one because it gives an idea of traditional and modern culture of Kazakhs, the history of the Kazakh people, about the economy of modern Kazakhstan; it is suitable for participants whose professional interests are related to Kazakhstan, Central Asia and who would like to know the economic, linguistic and cultural features of modern Kazakhstan. Moreover, "Discovery Kazakhstan" can be treated as a creative experience combining tourism, language courses and cultural information.

4. Data Analysis

4.1. Research Questions

On the basis of the aforementioned factors as well as definitions and key characteristics of scientific tourism, our research aims to answer the following research questions:

- Which target audience and requirements should our program suit?
- How to find a balance between different components of the program aimed at combining language courses, lingua - cultural and economic studies, on the one hand, and tourism and leisure activities - on the other hand?

4.2. Results and Discussion

In order to make clear all the aforementioned factors such as (1) peculiarities of the program target audience; (2) preferences of the program target audience; (3) the most

important advantages and disadvantages of the program etc., the following questionnaire was used:

Questionnaire

1. I am

- Male
- Female

2. My age is between

- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59

3. I am from (country)

4. Learning area I tend to focus on is

- Kazakh traditional cuisine;
- Lingua-cultural studies (Kazakh and Russian);
- Customs and traditions;
- Kazakh music;
- Kazakh and Russian folk pedagogy;
- Intra-familial relations in traditional Kazakh families;
- Cinematographic art of Kazakhstan;
- Kazakh folk crafts.

Attention! You can choose no more than 4 variants.

5. Which aspects of the Kazakh/Kazakhstani culture are the most interesting for you?

6. In your opinion, which of the following should be considered as the perspective aspects of the program?

- visiting museums (historical, ethnographical etc.);
- attending concerts related to national music;
- visiting specific places representing peculiarities of national culture and economics (e.g. camel farms)?

7. Personal opinion from your own experience (this part of the questionnaire was done by those who had already participated in the program).

While participating in Discovery Kazakhstan program, you have probably experienced some benefits and difficulties. We would like you to answer the following questions according to YOUR POINT OF VIEW.

Positive aspects

Describe 5 aspects that you think are positive when planning and delivering such kind of programs as "Discovery Kazakhstan" where tourism, cultural and scientific aspects are involved.

Negative aspects

Describe 5 aspects that you think are still an obstacle in course of your participation in such kind of a program

Future perspectives

From your point of view, how do you see the use of such program as "Discovery Kazakhstan" in the future? For example, could it be part of a curriculum or study program (if you are planning to become Academic Mobility Program participant)? Could it be part of the scientific cooperation between your home and host institutions in a particular field? What are the gaps in this area?

The survey was conducted with actual and prospective target audiences. 39 people were involved in the research procedure (because, as it was stated before, the program started in 2015, and now we have just the aforementioned amount of people as our target audience). The age of the most program participants (36) was between 20 and 29, but there were also some people (3 of the total number of participants) at the age between 34 and 37. Most participants (28 of 39) were female; 15 of them were Americans, 6 of them were Malayans and the rest were Turkish. Also, there were 33 students among them.

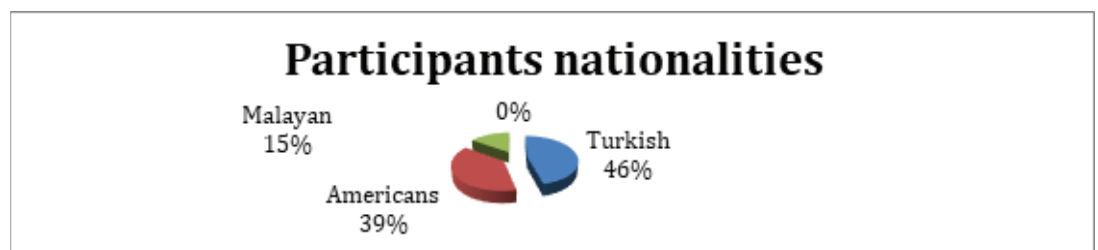


Figure 1: Nationality of "Discovery Kazakhstan" Program participants.

The Introductory part of the questionnaire contained the aforementioned information about age, gender and nationality of our target audience, whereas the results concerning question 4 showed the participants' preferences. Thus, most of the participants denoted lingua-cultural studies as the preferable aspect of the program (chosen by 32

participants i.e. 82%); it was followed by the study of Kazakh customs and traditions (29 participants, or 74.3% marked this aspect); Kazakh traditional cuisine (21 participants, or 53.8%); intra-familial relations in traditional Kazakh families (18 participants, or 46%) and Kazakh music (17 participants, or 43.5% respectively); the minority of people involved in our program, choose Kazakh folk pedagogy (9 participants, or 23%), and also cinematographic art of Kazakhstan as one of preferable topics was chosen by 5 participants, or 12.8%, respectively.

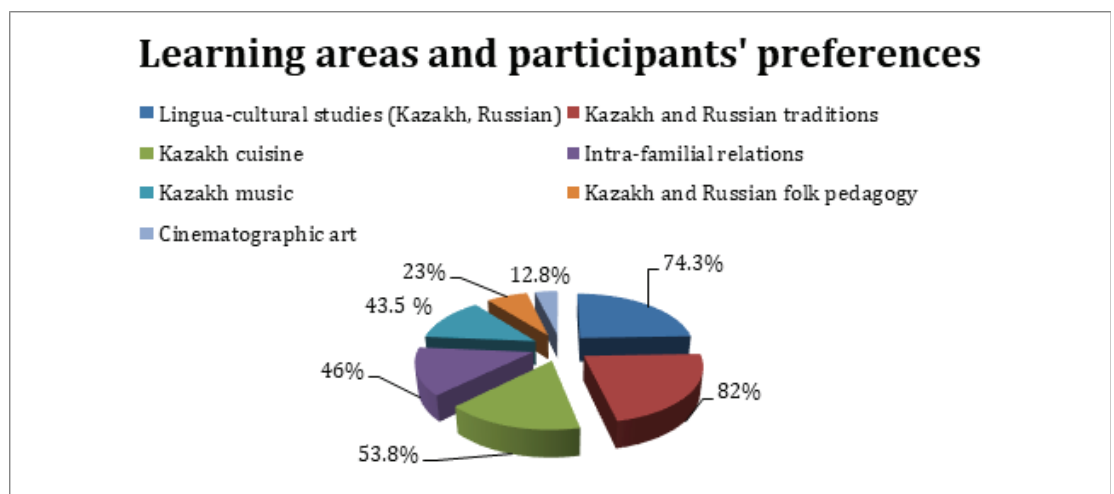


Figure 2: Learning areas and participants' preferences.

So, the scientific component can be considered as the priority interest for our target audience (a focus on such areas as lingua-cultural studies and traditions should be treated as the predominance of scientific component in our program).

As the key components of Kazakh culture, most of the program participants distinguished such key concepts as 'adam' (a man), 'dombyra' (traditional musical instrument which is considered to be the core of Kazakh culture), 'arka' (steppe) etc.

Question 6 is aimed at the tourist aspects of a program, i.e. prioritizing of visiting museums (historical, ethnographical etc.); attending concerts of national music, and visiting specific places representing peculiarities of national culture and economy (e.g. camel farms). Most participants (57%) preferred the last proposal as the topical one; visiting museums were marked as crucial part of the program by 29.1% of the audience, and, finally, 13.9% chose national music as a field of their interest. In our opinion, such kind of preferences made clear the implicit ethnographic accent of the program, which was perceived by the audience.

Also, the need for intensive language courses was pointed out. Moreover, all the participants underline a language study as one of key points of "Discovery Kazakhstan" program; Russian and Kazakh were considered to be the preferred languages. In our

viewpoint, the fact proves the efficiency of the soft power strategy of promoting multi-lingual and multi-cultural values.

Whereas questions 1-5 are aimed at both prospective and former audience, the last two questions are related to participants of "Discovery Kazakhstan-2015". Mainly, the positive reactions were connected with the lectures on Russian and Kazakh linguistic studies; at the same time, positive emotional reactions were received on such stimuli as 'Kazakh folk crafts', 'folk music' (Kazakh and Russian), etc. Also, it is important to define the field of negative experience which is related to jet lag (which was followed by some drawbacks in the time-table of both classes and tours), and also some cultural peculiarities of the Kazakh and Russian nutritional systems [12].

5. Conclusion

Implementation of "Discovery Kazakhstan" program in the frame of the summer school, the reactions of the target audience represented in the conducted survey, the evaluation given by instructors and student-volunteers, as well as the results of the final control at the language courses (lingua culture and economics essays) showed that the methodological plan of scientific tourism suits the goals and objectives of Kazakh national culture promotion. Moreover, it seemed to be one of the ways of implementation of the soft power strategy that presupposed sharing the key values of the Kazakhstani multilingual and multicultural community with the target audience of the program.

The analysis of both the last-year experience and the survey done on the basis of the prospective target audience showed the need to make some adjustments. Thus, the features of the advertising company should be changed and, instead of broad and multifaceted study, the narrowly focused programs in the frame of the summer school "Discovery Kazakhstan" should be proposed for the following types of participants:

- people whose future or present activity is closely related to Kazakh and Russian languages, history, economy and culture of Kazakhstan as a heart of Central Asia;
- the youth of the Kazakh diaspora in foreign countries, as some of them would like to know Kazakh language (at least at elementary level of communication). Also, such audience can have some claims concerning Kazakh culture;
- prospective students from Turkey who need an intensive two-month training in Kazakh, Russian and English languages.

Probably the number of participants who are interested in scientific tourism and who are going to choose Kazakhstan as the field of both research and entertainment will increase as well as the program variability. Therefore, the program coordinators should

manage the required amount of time and pay attention to the results of the survey. Thus, in accordance with the aforementioned data, lingua-cultural studies can be treated as the most popular aspect of the program. That is why it requires most of its scientific part.

The pros of the summer school "Discovery Kazakhstan" are as follows:

-- Effective scientific and educational tourism makes a contribution to ranking the University and -- generally speaking -- the whole country. Also, this really strengthens the positions of the University, as well as the whole country on the international level.

-- We are getting a lot of opportunities for optimization and correction of the educational process, as well as for improvement of the leisure components of the program such as additional training in English, intercultural communication for language and ethnographic material obtained directly from native speakers and culture. To sum up, we should state that such programs as "Discovery Kazakhstan" seem to be the complicated phenomena combining scientific, cultural and properly touristic aspects, as well as an object for prospective quantitative research.

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