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The History, Culture and Architecture as a Potential of Urban Tourism Development: Evidence from Armenia

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Abstract

The article presents a brief history of the founding of the capital Yerevan, some examples of the history and architecture of Armenia, which has a tourist attraction. Yerevan is rich in historical, cultural and scientific monuments, which together with hotels, restaurants, clubs, and various places of entertainment are tourist resources.

The paper is dedicated to urban tourism development issues. The main purpose of the research is to explore urban tourism development opportunities and main challenges in Yerevan, the capital of Republic of Armenia. Investigation of the topic is carried out in the following logical sequence: presentation of historical-cultural monuments, museums of scientific, and cultural interest visited by tourists, the main touristic assets, the main social-economic indicators and tourism infrastructures of Yerevan are discussed, then the main obstacles are analyzed.

Yerevan is 2803 years old; it is rich with cultural-historical monuments. Yerevan has all the opportunities for historical, cultural, religious, gastronomic, entertainment, adventure, educational, medical, festival, and MICE tourism development.

The methodological tools of the research methods are historical description, historical analysis, statistical methods, also SWOT analysis. The object of the research is Yerevan city and the subject of the research is tourism development issues in Yerevan. The results of the analysis shows that correlation coefficient is high in Yerevan between volume of tourism services and GDP, volume of tourism services and GDP per capita, volume of tourism services and employment. Also, SWOT analysis reveals the main strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of tourism development in Yerevan. The research theoretically proves and empirically confirms that tourism has a significance role for sustainable development of the city. Based on the main analysis, some recommendations are carried out towards creating sustainable tourism development plans, improving marketing, statistical recording, increasing touristic information in the city, developing infrastructures, investing in more sustainable and smart solutions in city development. The main sustainable solutions should be connected with the transport system, water and waste recycling mechanisms, energy efficiency, construction, increasing green areas, and-so-on. The results of the research can be useful for municipalities for elaborating urban tourism development plans which will lead to sustainable development.

Keywords: history and culture, architecture, museums, urban tourism, sustainable development, smart solution, correlation, SWOT, Yerevan, Republic of Armenia.

JEL Classification: L83, Z32, Q01, Z1, N9.

Introduction

Yerevan is the capital and the largest city of the Republic of Armenia. Yerevan is 2803 years old (29 years elder than Rome), it has many cultural monuments, museums, theaters, universities, hospitable people, tasty cuisine, touristic infrastructures. So, it has high opportunities for tourism development. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the opportunities of urban tourism development in Yerevan which potentially will lead to sustainable development.

Tourism has an essential role for the development of cities, as it contributes to the improvement of infrastructures, increases the level of well-being of the population, increases employment, income, and-so-on. According to the UN World Tourism Organization (WTO), urban tourism involves travel to cities that are usually short in period: 1-3 days (Tourism 2020 Vision, 2001). According to the UN, in 1950 30% of the world's population lived in cities (751 million people), today - 55% (4.2 billion people), and in 2050 68% will live in cities (6.7 billion people), about 90% of which will be in cities in Africa and Asia (World Urbanization Prospects, 2008). Of course, the growth of the urban population can cause problems in terms of sustainable development, so when planning urban development, it is necessary to pay attention to sustainable issues. Urban tourists can bring significant social-economic benefits to cities, so cities need innovative development strategies using smart solutions that will offer a competitive tourism product, while at the same time contribute to the sustainable economic, social and environmental development of the city.

The article has the following logical sequence: at first some literature review is presented on the main touristic historical-cultural resources of Yerevan, and then the social-economic indicators of Yerevan are discussed. Later tourism infrastructures are presented, SWOT analysis is done for revealing the main obstacles of city tourism development. Based on the analysis, some recommendations are made for urban tourism development using smart and sustainable solutions.

Literature review: brief history of Yerevan and its touristic sites

The capital of the Republic of Armenia, Yerevan, is one of the oldest cradles in the world. Fortunately, some details of the founding of the name of the city have been preserved in the Khorkhorian Chronicle of its founding king, from which it becomes clear that it was founded by Argishti I in 782 BC (Melikishvili, 1954). He founded the Erebuni fortress in the territory of present-day Yerevan, which later grew into a city. It turns out that Yerevan is 29 years older than Rome. Throughout history, Yerevan has had periods of prosperity and decline, has been repeatedly tested, destroyed and reborn. Not only legends about the foundation of Yerevan were created and preserved, but also a cuneiform record.

Yerevan has become one of the ancient cradles of mankind since ancient Stone Age. Here you can see traces of structures and fortresses from the stone, copper, bronze centuries and from the Urartian period. The territory of Yerevan was, in fact, one of the first in the world to enter the period of civilization and the early statehood (Minasyan, 2020).

Shengavit, one of the oldest examples of human construction activity (IV-II millenniums BC) is located in Yerevan. Early city life in the territory of Yerevan originated in the Shengavit, located on the shore of Lake Yerevan. Remarkable materials from the Middle Bronze Age and Early Iron Age sites in Yerevan show that these

areas were inhabited from the Bronze Age to the Middle Ages. The period of the Van or Ararat-Urartu kingdom (IX-VII centuries BC) is of great importance for the history of Yerevan.

Without delving into the deep chronological layers of history, let us mention that Yerevan became the capital of Armenia in 1918 (the first republic of Armenia declared its independence on May 28, 1918). Yerevan retained that status in Soviet Armenia (1920-1991). Yerevan was the first city in the Soviet Union to have a master plan. The general plan authored by architect Alexander Tamanyan was approved in 1924 (Ter-Minasyan, n.d.). It was designed for 150,000 inhabitants.

Since 1991 in the first years of Armenia's independence, the capital of the newly independent republic was tested. The ongoing blockade of Armenia by neighboring Turkey and Azerbaijan, the war unleashed by Azerbaijan against Artsakh, the heavy socio-economic situation put the population of the capital in a difficult situation. In other words, in the initial period of independence, the capital Yerevan, was not left out of the crisis events.

Already in the 21st century, Armenia, which has entered a stable and dynamic stage of development, breathed new life into its political, economic, industrial, cultural, educational and tourist center, the city of Yerevan. The city of Yerevan is a center of developed culture. In 2021 there were 28 theaters in Armenia, 18 of which were in Yerevan. In 2020 of the 63 museums in Yerevan, 21 are of historical nature, 1 is geological, 9 are memorial, 31 are literary, and 1 is other (Museum activities, 2020). Over the past 30 years, the capital has strengthened its foreign relations with the sister cities and international organizations, and in 2012 UNESCO declared Yerevan the World Book Capital. All this contributed to the rise of Yerevan's international prestige.

Yerevan is rich in historical and cultural monuments, museums, which together with hotels, restaurants, clubs, and various places of entertainment are tourist resources.

It is not possible to refer to all the tourism assets of Yerevan within the framework of one article, but let us try to briefly present the historical and cultural monuments and museums of Yerevan, which are of great tourist interest.

Matenadaran – The Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts is a center for the study of ancient manuscripts, one of the richest centers for the preservation of manuscripts in the world. It is located in the capital Yerevan. It was established in 1921 on the basis of the Matenadaran of Etchmiadzin, established in the 5th century, and was the first scientific-research institution in Armenia. Formerly it was called the Cultural-Historical Institute. The Matenadaran after Mesrop Mashtots was founded in Yerevan in 1959. It has one of the largest collections of manuscripts and medieval books. About 23,000 manuscripts, charms, fragments and 300,000 archival documents are preserved here. The monumental stairs of the building lead to the statue of Mesrop Mashtots and Koryun, and the front of the building is decorated with the statues of famous representatives of Armenian culture. The Matenadaran is one of the 100 largest museums in the world and is registered in the UNESCO World Heritage List (Sargsyan, 2018).

The History Museum of Yerevan was founded in 1931. The museum was established in the newly built building of Yerevan Municipality in 2005, forming a joint architectural complex with the municipality (architect: Jim Torosyan). The museum preserves about 96,000 exhibits, which present the history of Yerevan from ancient times to the present day (Sargsyan, 2018).

Erebuni Historical-Archaeological Reserve-Museum was established in 1968 according to the decision of the Government of the Republic of Armenia of May 24, 1945. The scientific basis for this was the findings from three famous ancient sites in the city of Yerevan: Arin Berd, Karmir Blur and Shengavit. The museum opened its doors to the public on October 19, 1968 within the framework of events dedicated to the 2750th anniversary of the founding of Yerevan. The museum has "Karmir Blur" and "Shengavit" branches. The museum building repeats the composition of the Urartian palace structures (Erebuni Historical-Archaeological Reserve Museum, n.d.).

Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute was opened in 1995 to the 80th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. The Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute was the fourth component of the memorial to the victims of the Armenian Genocide. On the 12 sittings of the basalt wall of the building are engraved the words of Henry Morgenthau, Anatole France, Jacques de Morgan, Valerie Brusov and others about the genocide of the Armenian

people. The museum exhibition is presented to visitors through excursions in Armenian, Russian, English, French and German (The Armenian Genocide Museum-institute, n.d.).

History Museum of Armenia - The first state museum is the History Museum of Armenia, which was founded during the First Republic of Armenia in 1919, and was opened to visitors in 1921. It was called the Ethnographic-Anthropological Museum-Library, only since 2003 it has been called the History Museum of Armenia (Asatryan, 2018). The museum maintains a national collection of about 400,000 items with the following sections:

• Archeology (35% of the main collection)

• ethnography (8%),

• Numismatics (45%),

• Ratifications (12%).

The National Gallery of Armenia was established in 1921 by the decision of the Government of Soviet Armenia as one of the five sections of the State Museum - the Department of Art. At that time Martiros Saryan was appointed director of the museum. The National Gallery is the largest art museum in the country. The works of famous painters I. Aivazovsky, M. Saryan, Kandinsky, Donatello and others are shown in that Gallery (Sargsyan, 2018). The National Gallery of Armenia is in the list of the 10 best museums of Commonwealth of Independent States member countries. The rating is based on the analysis of the popularity of museums, the analysis of virtual tours and number of museum exhibitions.

Apart from these museums included in the field of tourism, there are also festivals of interest from the tourist point of view. The city Yerevan has many well-established festivals. Most of them are international, they have their own reputation in professional fields, as well as in the wider international circles. This is also a serious stimulus for tourism. Yerevan's climatic conditions allow to have outdoor events for almost 6 months. The most popular and long-awaited festivals by the residents and guests of the capital are the "Yerevan with Taste and Smell" festive dishes festival, "Yerevan TARAZFest", "Yerevan Beer Festival" and others (The festivals of Yerevan, n.d.). The "Golden Apricot" international festival, which already has a reputation in the world, is held in Yerevan, bringing a large number of art-loving tourists here. The increase in the number and activity of multilingual info-structures and centers has significantly contributed to the constructive progress of the sector.

Methodology

The main goal of this research is to represent historical-cultural resources of Yerevan, analyze the opportunities of city tourism development in Yerevan and find solutions which will lead to sustainable development. The object of the research is Yerevan city. The subject of the research is tourism development issues in Yerevan. The methods used in the article are the following: historical description, historical analysis, micro and macro analysis, statistical and correlation analysis, SWOT analysis.

Discussion and results

1. Social-economic situation and tourism infrastructures in Yerevan

Yerevan's territory is 223 ha, 0.75% of the total territory of the country. However, it is the capital and the largest city of Yerevan by area and population. The number of permanent residents of Yerevan is 1092.2 thousand people as of January 1, 2022, which is about 36.9% of the population of the Republic of Armenia (2962.1 thousand people) and about 58% of the urban population of the Republic of Armenia (The social-economic situation in January-December 2021). Yerevan accounts for 33.1% of Armenia's industrial output, 71.0% of retail turnover, 86.8% of services, 82.8% of accommodation and catering services, 98.1% of culture, entertainment and leisure services (The social-economic situation in January-December 2021). So, this data show that service sphere is centralized in Yerevan. The unemployment rate is 23.6% in Yerevan. In 2022 31.3 million Armenian drams[17] will be spent on tourism from Yerevan's budget (total expenditures amounted to 94.6 billion Armenian drams).

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[17] 1 US dollar is 487.77 Armenian drams as of 30.03.2022, according to Central Bank of Armenia, https://www.cba.am/EN/SitePages/Default.aspx.

Table 1. Some social-economic indicators of the RA and Yerevan

Place	Territory, km^2	Total population, 1000 persons	Structure of GDP, %	Volume of services	Unemployment rate (calculated to the labor force), %
		2022	2019	2021	2020
REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA	29743	2962.1	100.0	1879261.1	18.2
YEREVAN CITY	**223**	**1092.2**	58.4	1631576.1	**23.6**
ARAGATSOTN	2756	124.5	2.5	13313.3	10.0
ARARAT	2090	256.6	6.9	27156.7	12.6
ARMAVIR	1231	264.1	5.9	27438.2	12.6
GEGHARKUNIK	5352	227.6	3.6	16600.8	9.7
LORI	3799	212.1	3.5	22917.1	20.5
KOTAYK	2092	251.1	6.3	54823.2	20.1
SHIRAK	2680	231.6	4.1	28996.7	17.3
SYUNIK	4506	135.2	5.7	28771.8	13.1
VAYOTS DZOR	2310	47.9	1.1	11428.1	20.4
TAVUSH	2704	120.2	2.0	16239.1	23.6

Source: The social-economic situation in January-December (2021); Marzes and Yerevan city of the Republic of Armenia in figures (2021).

The highest ratio of GDP is in Yerevan. Yerevan has 12 district communities. Agricultural land in Yerevan is 3330.0 ha, including arable land – 913.2 ha. In 2020 there were 19 state higher educational institutions and 26 non-state higher educational institutions, 26 state middle vocational educational institutions and 9 non-state middle vocational educational institutions (Marzes and Yerevan city of the Republic of Armenia in figures, 2021).

2. Tourism analysis in Yerevan

The number of incoming tourists in Armenia is 870308 in 2021, in 2020, during pandemic it was 360338, but in 2019 the number was much higher – 1894377 (The social-economic situation in January-December, 2021 and 2019). There were 522 hotel facilities in Yerevan in 2021, including internationally renowned hotel chains: Armenia Marriott Hotel, Best Western Congress Hotel, Hyatt Place Yerevan Hotel, Double Tree by Hilton Hotel, Ibis Yerevan Center Hotel, ALEXANDER Hotel, Radisson Blue, Holiday Inn, and others. Tourists usually stay in Yerevan for 2-3 days, as the number of tourists for Yerevan is not calculated separately; it is considered that tourists visiting Armenia also visit Yerevan, which, however, may not be very reliable. The highest number of catering facilities and travel agencies are in Yerevan as well.

Table 2. Tourism infrastructure objects in Yerevan, 2021

	Number of hotel facilities		Number of incoming tourists who stayed at hotel facilities in 2020	Number of public catering facilities		Travel agencies, tour operators, reservation and other services in the field of tourism	
	Quantity, unit	Volume, mln. AMD		Quantity, unit	Volume, mln. AMD	Quantity, unit	Volume, mln. AMD
Republic of Armenia	915	33409.4	97550	2661	148698.4	742	9504.3
Yerevan city	522	24187.1	87429	1759	127298.5	619	9275.9

Source: Information was provided by the Statistical Committee of the RA, in April, 2022.

In order to evaluate the role of tourism in Yerevan, correlation analysis is carried out between the volume of tourism services, GDP, GDP per capita, as well as employment indicators. In this case, the volume of tourism services includes the sum of the volume of activities of accommodation, catering and travel agencies. The source of the above-mentioned indicators is the Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia for years, data range is for 2009-2020 years. The time series were processed by taking the first differences.

Table 3. Correlation analysis between tourism services, GDP and employment indicators

Indicator Location	Pearson correlation coefficient R		
	Volume of tourism services - GDP	Volume of tourism services - GDP per capita	Volume of tourism services - number of employed
Yerevan city	**0,88**	**0,86**	**0,61**
Republic of Armenia	**0,88**	**0,88**	0,42

Source: The analysis was performed by the authors with the help of SPSS software.

As seen from table 3, correlation coefficient is high in Yerevan between volume of tourism services and GDP, volume of tourism services and GDP per capita, volume of tourism services and employment. So, tourism plays an important role in Yerevan.

In recent years, a number of works have been carried out for the development of tourism in Yerevan: Yerevan City Tour, Yerevan Summer, printing of Yerevan tourist maps and guides, organization of festivals, and-so-on. But there are still some problems. Yerevan is not properly represented abroad as a 2803-year-old city with a culture, delicious cuisine, and hospitable people. Tourism infrastructure is underdeveloped, the level of services is not very high, there are few tourist information centers (Tovmasyan, 2020). For the development of tourism in Yerevan, taking into account the historical, cultural, religious, gastronomic, entertainment, business tourism opportunities of Yerevan, it is necessary to develop a tourism brand in Yerevan (Tovmasyan, 2020), attract international tourists through active marketing activities, develop tourism infrastructure, improve service level, price and quality of tourism services, add green areas, tourist attractions. Hotels should implement organizational, marketing, production innovations, introduce online booking system, e-marketing elements, organize excursions, cultural programs for tourists, and-so-on. Also, the service level should be increased, educational institutions should prepare high level specialists according to labor market needs (Tovmasyan, 2018, Tovmasyan, 2019).

Yerevan Municipality has developed the 2019-2023 a tourism development plan for the city of Yerevan in 2019, which presents the current situation of tourism in the city and some suggestions for development (Tourism development plan for the city of Yerevan, 2019).

For urban tourism development, it is very important to use smart technologies. Yerevan needs smart solutions for tourism development in the following areas: attractions, access to transport, hotel, food, entertainment, ancillary services (mobile applications, banking, medical, etc.), smart city lighting, WiFi. In general, the more developed the city is with technological solutions, the more it will have a positive impact on the level of services for both residents and guests, on their level of satisfaction with services. In Yerevan, the use of smart and sustainable technological solutions will also contribute to the development of tourism, so works must be done in a number of areas (Tovmasyan, 2019 a).

In order to develop tourism, the smart city should have a mobile application that shows the main entertainment places of the city, the available tours, the possible activities that tourists can do in the city. In 2021 VisitYerevan.am tourist platform was launched by Yerevan Municipality. With its help, tourists can find information in Armenian, English and Russian languages about the history of the city, places of interest and entertainment, cuisine and drinks, and other useful information and maps. It also has a mobile application that runs on Android and iOS systems (VisitYerevan.am, 2021).

Other cities in Armenia should have similar platforms and mobile applications, which will allow them to comprehensively present their main assets of urban tourism, infrastructures: hotels, food facilities, transport, entertainment places, existing tours, possible activities. The application should have a special section where tourists can evaluate various parameters of urban tourism, express their opinion, which will allow assessing the level of satisfaction of tourists with their vacation in the city. The complaints and comments voiced by tourists will be useful to the city authorities, to the Tourism Committee, and to private organizations operating in the field to develop policies and improve their activities.

A SWOT analysis was carried out for tourism development in Yerevan.

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Table 4. SWOT analysis of tourism in Yerevan

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Yerevan is 2803 years old	Lack of info centers	Increasing the number of incoming tourists	Pandemic
Rich cultural heritage	Lack of tourist maps and touristic information	MICE tourism development	Environmental issues
Monuments	Lack of green areas, parks	Adventure tourism development	Air pollution
High number of hotel and catering facilities, tourism agencies	Lack of statistical data on tourism	Gastronomy and wine tourism development	Garbage everywhere
Zvartnots international airport	High prices of hotels	Improving public transport and taxi service	Economic situation
Tasty cuisine	Public transport is in Armenian	Increase of flights	Political conflicts
Armenian hospitality	Taxi fare is not fixed	Increase of green spaces	Migration
Supermarkets	Low number of direct flights	Improving statistics	Heavy traffic
Visit Yerevan Website	Touristic infrastructures are not highly developed	Elaboration of sustainable development programs	Not rational use of natural resources
Tourism development program	Lack of marketing activities for attracting foreign tourists	Increase of tourism info centers and touristic information	

Conclusions and recommendations

Yerevan is one of the oldest cities in the world, which in the 21st century presents itself to the tourist in a new way with its history, culture, architecture, as well as its cuisine and other tourist attractions.

Based on SWOT analysis, the main obstacles for tourism development in Yerevan are revealed, based on which some suggestions are made, which will contribute to sustainable urban tourism development:

✓ Increasing touristic information, tourism info centres in Yerevan,
✓ Creating more city tours in Yerevan including more places, monuments,
✓ Increasing the efficiency of marketing activities abroad for attracting international tourists,
✓ Infrastructure development,
✓ Increasing the number of direct flights,
✓ Improving statistical recording,
✓ Organizing different international events for advancing MICE tourism,
✓ Development of different types of tourism (cultural, medical, educational, gastronomic and wine, adventure, festival tourism, and others),
✓ Elaboration of sustainable tourism development programs for Yerevan,
✓ Use of eco-labels by hotels and other travel agencies,
✓ Rational use of natural resources,
✓ Ensuring sustainable urban transport and increasing the number of hybrid vehicles (creating a sustainable transport system will allow tourists to know the time of arrival of the transport, plan their route, indicating the desired destinations),
✓ Increasing green areas in Yerevan (this will help solve a number of environmental problems against air pollution and, of course, the city will become more beautiful, green for residents and guests, hospitable, clean),
✓ Use of solar panels (this can be applied by hotels, which will contribute to the application of the principles of sustainable energy development),
✓ Increasing the level of awareness of the population and tourists about sustainable consumption and sustainable development,
✓ Introduction of water and waste recycling mechanisms,
✓ Ensuring energy efficiency and sustainable construction.

In conclusion, Yerevan should use the strengths and opportunities and develop steps which will contribute to

sustainable urban tourism development of the city. Many of the above-mentioned steps require public-private partnership to accomplish them effectively.

Author Contributions: conceptualization, Gayane Tovmasyan, Marine Gevorgyan; data curation, Gayane Tovmasyan, Marine Gevorgyan; formal analysis, Gayane Tovmasyan, Marine Gevorgyan; investigation, Gayane Tovmasyan, Marine Gevorgyan; methodology, Gayane Tovmasyan, Marine Gevorgyan; project administration, Gayane Tovmasyan, Marine Gevorgyan; resources, Gayane Tovmasyan, Marine Gevorgyan; software, Gayane Tovmasyan, Marine Gevorgyan; supervision, Gayane Tovmasyan, Marine Gevorgyan; validation, Gayane Tovmasyan, Marine Gevorgyan; visualization, Gayane Tovmasyan, Marine Gevorgyan; writing – original draft, Gayane Tovmasyan, Marine Gevorgyan; writing – review & editing, Gayane Tovmasyan, Marine Gevorgyan.

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