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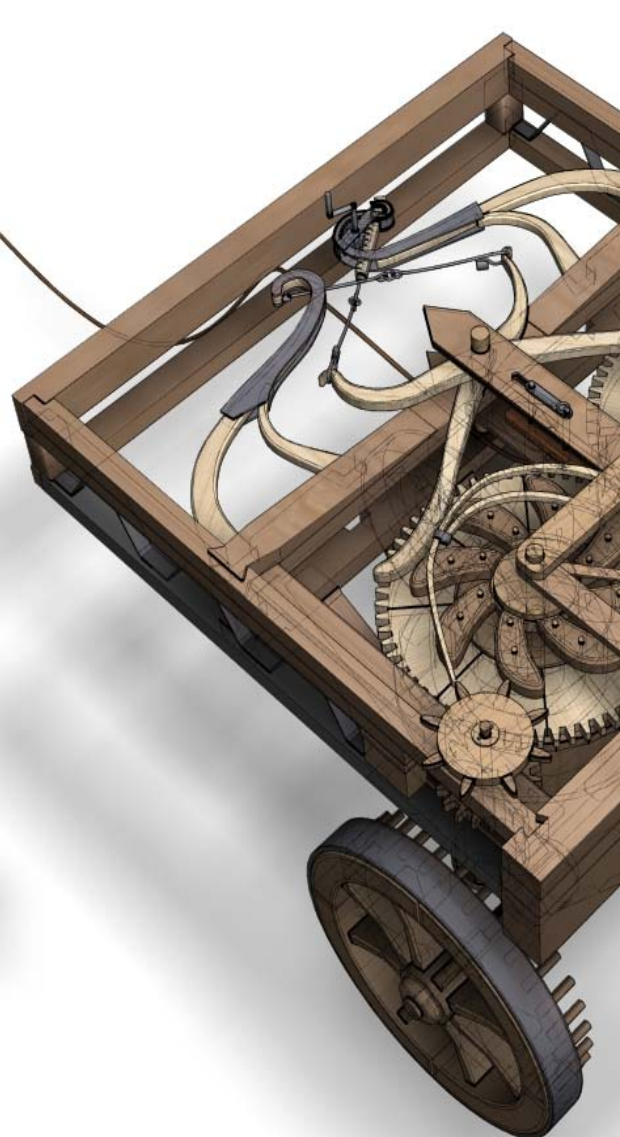
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Journal will publish original research and seeks to cover a wide range of topics regarding environmental management and engineering, environmental management and health, environmental chemistry, environmental protection technologies (water, air, soil), pollution reduction at source and waste minimization, energy and environment, modeling, simulation and optimization for environmental protection; environmental biotechnology, environmental education and sustainable development, environmental strategies and policies, etc. This topic may include the fields indicated above, but are not limited to these.

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## Management of Overtourism Problems in Small Historical Towns. Case of Suzdal, Russia

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### Abstract:

Active tourism development in Suzdal – world-famous town-museum and UNESCO Heritage site in Vladimir region, Russia – forms the growing pressure on its heritage and the local community. The tourist flows, extremely uneven both in time and space, cause overcrowding and substantial discontent of the local residents. The research discusses the ways of managing overtourism problems through the long-term engagement with the local community using diversified event calendar, specially tailored tourist products, new tourist zones, transport and information infrastructure development as well as additional measures to support the local budget.

**Keywords:** overtourism; Suzdal; events; community involvement; tourism and sustainability.

**JEL Classification:** L83; Z32.

### Introduction

Suzdal, a small town in Vladimir region, is one of the major tourist destinations in Russia attracting domestic and foreign visitors. Founded in 1024, Suzdal is known as 'town-museum' for its well-preserved architectural monuments of 12th to early 18th centuries and medieval environment. Over the past fifty years, the number of visitors to Suzdal has increased manifold. In 2018 more than 1.7 million visitors were registered (TourStat 2019). If compared with the decreasing population of the town, which now has only 9,618 inhabitants (Vladimir Regional Office of Statistics), the problem of overcrowding and high tourist pressure on the local community becomes obvious. Tourists come mainly from Moscow and other regions of Central Russia; there are also many international visitors every year. The tourist flows are dramatically uneven as Suzdal is visited shortly on weekends and holidays and is almost empty during the week. In recent years tourism development has been diversified by cultural, historical, and food events that gave further aggravation of the problem and led to



overcrowding in peak dates and local infrastructure destructive overloads. This situation causes substantial discontent of local residents and their confrontation with visitors.

## 1. Research Background

In recent years the rapid growth of tourism has led to substantial changes in the relationships between tourists and local communities. In some places, the results of mass tourism growth have brought serious problems to the life quality of local residents and destination development and demand special measures to be taken without delay (Goodwin 2019, Weber 2017; McKinsey and WTTC Report 2017). This problem became particularly challenging and harmful for small towns with rich cultural and historical heritage popular among short-term visitors (Seraphin, Sheeran and Pilato 2018). They were among the first to face the problem of overtourism.

Suzdal, a small medieval town located 30 km from the regional center and 200 km to the east of Moscow, was one of the first destinations in Russia to experience serious problems caused by overtourism. The destination appeared as a 'town-museum' in 1923, when the provincial commission on arts and antiquities concluded that «... the whole of Suzdal is a museum and the inviolate preservation of all its monuments is dictated by the interests of science and art» (Suzdal History Reference). There are 305 historical and cultural monuments, including five monasteries, 30 churches, 16 bell towers and other magnificent samples of ancient architecture within the old part of the town included in the first historical and architectural museum-reserve in Russia founded in 1958 (Suzdal Local Authorities).

In 1967 the Decree of the Russian Federation Government «On the Development of Tourism Centre In Suzdal» gave the start for tourist activities in the area. Suzdal has become one of the most attractive and visited destinations of the Golden Ring of Russia – probably, the most famous tourist route in the country. The route was organized for foreign tourists mainly and was highly appreciated by them. In 1982 Suzdal was awarded the World Federation of Travel Journalists and Writers (FIJET) Golden Apple and became the first tourist destination in Russia (Soviet Union) recognized by the international professional community (Belov 1986).

In 1992 Suzdal Kremlin, the Cathedral of the Nativity and the Monastery of Our Savior and St Euthymius were included in the UNESCO World Heritage list along with five other white-stone monuments in Vladimir region (UNESCO 2019).

Now the traditional Golden Ring of Russia circle route does not exist anymore. It is replaced by radial (with 2-3 sites to visit) and single-point (one site) routes. There was also a substantial reduction in the length of tours as multi-day tours almost disappeared and converted to short or even single-day trips, mainly on weekends. Thus, the total number of tourists in this area increased, but the revenues from their staying and services they used decreased (Aigina and Tulskeya 2015).

In 2024 Suzdal is going to celebrate its 1000th anniversary. Various effective measures need to be developed to help the town minimize overtourism conflicts and get more economical and social benefits – both for residents and visitors. They should be aimed at responding to diverse challenges and forming new evolutionary trajectory and performance for the renowned destination. It is essential to understand whether particular limitations or bans are necessary, or there are opportunities to solve the problems of overtourism by more reasonable methods. Consequently, the issues addressed in this study need to have a practical outcome for destination management.

## 2. Methodology

The empirical research gives the analysis of the specific history of tourism development and destination dynamics in Suzdal aimed at finding ways and methods for escaping the overcrowding and inefficient tourism development and keeping its status as one of the most famous short-term cultural destinations for both domestic and inbound tourists. Tourism development in Suzdal starting from the Soviet period up to the present situation by focusing on historical, social, and economic processes that shaped the evolutionary trajectory and the present state of the destination is discussed. Special attention is paid to the enabling and constraining issues of regional tourism development.

Although tourism development in Russia has a great deal of specificity, its modern transformation can be viewed from the perspective of different concepts in tourism academic studies. The concept of developing tourism sustainably for the community which has become a primary concern for tourism development (Richards and Hall 2000) is one of the most essential. Generally, models of sustainable development include the community as a cornerstone of the tourism development process. Community-based tourism and community development in tourism are widely discussed in recent years emphasizing the necessity for each community to

relate tourism development to local possibilities and needs through cooperation between tourists (customers), industry, local residents and governing authorities (Murphy and Murphy 2003). The community-based tradition is searching for a balance between the tourism industry and its stakeholders, especially local communities, by emphasizing local involvement, control, and empowerment in tourism development (Saarinen 2013). The use of tourism-related resources of different level, as well as principles of community empowerment and capacity building, form the integrated approach to sustainable community-based tourism (Dangi and Jamal 2016).

It is also essential to look back at carrying capacity concept to evaluate the destination and community capacity for tourism development. As Getz (1983) points out, there are different capacity criteria (physical, economic, ecological, social/cultural, political/administrative and perception of visitors) but they are all aimed at understanding the impact tourism development has on local communities and the possibilities they give for the sustainable and effective tourism growth. It becomes vitally important now when some of the destinations suffer from overcrowding and extremely uneven distribution of tourist flows, which causes life quality deterioration and conflicts between tourists and local residents.

To avoid problems like this, we need to achieve coordination among the government bodies, public agencies, and private enterprises involved in tourism. It requires developing new mechanisms and processes for incorporating the diverse elements of the tourism system in its sustainable growth. The local authorities have to manage private sector interests with local resident needs and requests to maintain the economic health of the community and ensure that development is sustainable (Jamal and Getz 1995). It is particularly important for small tourist towns where the principles of social justice should be manifested through the fair distribution of budget revenues to provide responsible tourism development.

In recent years the concept of resilience has emerged as a more active approach to community planning and development than the sustainability paradigm. The most common resilience perspective in tourism has been on the recovery of tourism industries following fast variable changes. However, changes can occur over different rates of time, have different social and geographic scales, with some primarily impacting individuals and others – the entire community or social group (Lew 2014). Tourism development can play an active role and give new perspectives for community economic, social, and cultural resilience.

The modern paradigm shifts from mass, standardized tourism to more individual, flexible and segmented activities should also be taken into consideration. Changes in consumer behavior and tourist motivations cause changes in the relationship between resident and visitor communities. Many tourists now want to learn more about the local communities, to 'live like a local' with the emphasis made on the quality of their experience rather than the quantity of consumption. New ideas in tourism development and new types of tourism that are more creative, collaborative, and innovative, emerge (Richards 2009). They can contribute to finding the right balance between the tourism industry and local communities and make community tourism development responsible.

The research was carried out with the help of various methods of economic, statistical, and sociological analysis. Primary data collection, including documentary chronology (photographs of Suzdal tourism highlights taken before and under overcrowding), started a decade ago. Regular field observations including the number of visitor's estimations were held during the major tourist events in Suzdal in 2017-2018 to provide a comprehensive assessment of event tourism sites and their capacity.

The participant observations made during field studies were supported by content analysis of primary regulating documents, historical references (including chronicles and old Soviet guidebooks), media coverage, professional expert assessments. In order to get more detailed and proficient information about 50 semi-structured in-depth and narrative interviews with tourism experts and regional stakeholders were held, including the:

- representatives of regional and municipal tourism authorities and museums,
- national and local tour operators' management,
- representatives of the local hospitality industry,
- local community members involved in tourism activities.

The interviews were held during OTDYKH LEISURE 2017 and 2018 International Travel and Tourism Trade Fairs; Russian Event Awards and other tourism business meetings held by National Event Tourism Association; tourism academic conferences in Vladimir, Suzdal, and Moscow. The discussion on the future of Suzdal tourism development in focus groups was a major issue of the first All-Russian Hackathon in Travel Journalism dedicated to the 50th anniversary of «Golden Ring of Russia» tourist route in November 2017. The Hackathon participants suggested their estimations on the potential number of tourists and new options for their spatial and temporal distribution to match the destination carrying capacity.

The analysis of impressions and feedback of tourists who have visited Suzdal in the last two years through their reviews and comments published in the social media (Facebook, TripAdvisor, Tourister.ru) and other websites.

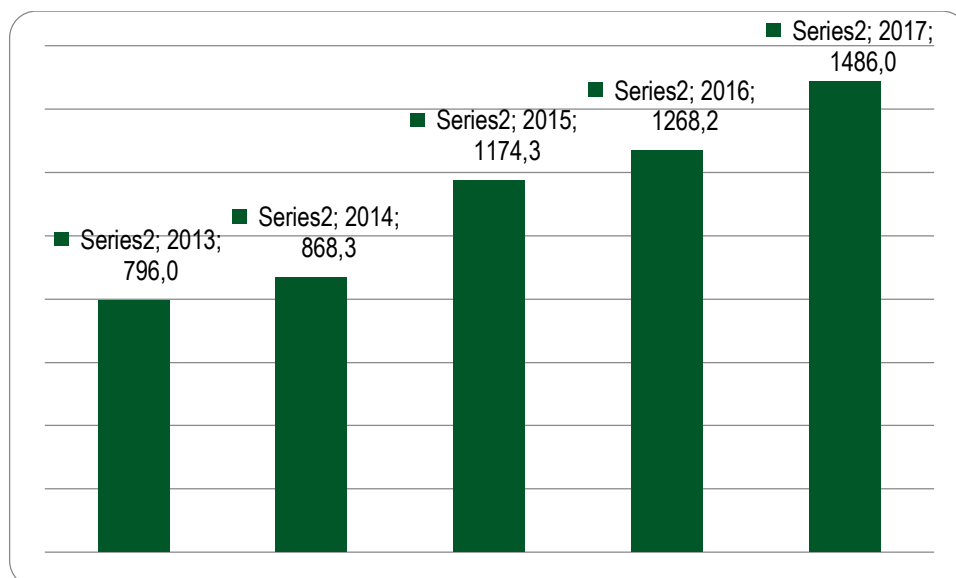
### 3. Case Study

Statistical data on tourism development in Suzdal, acquired from different sources, vary. Even official records of regional and municipal level often give conflicting information on the number of tourist arrivals, the number of accommodation facilities of different types, events audience, and museum visitors. Some information can be obtained only through field observations or expert assessments.

Tourism growth in Suzdal began in the late 1960s, and the tourist flow started to increase quickly. Approaching a million, it sharply collapsed by more than half in the first years of perestroika in the late 1980s. Only after 1998, the situation changed. In 2001, 473.9 thousand tourists visited Suzdal; in 2010 their number reached 806.9 thousand. During the first decade of the 21st century, the tourist patterns have changed radically. The number of independent tourists has sharply increased (2000 - 55%, 2010 - 80% of the total amount); now a third of all booked groups are small-size (up to 5 persons). There are no organized trade-union groups anymore. At the same time, in 2000-2010 the number of school groups decreased by 56% (Aksenova 2013).

In the last years, Suzdal municipal administration reported about the increasing number of visitors to the town (Figure 1). Some sources indicate that the number of visitors in 2016-2018 reached 1.7 million (TourStat 2019). Tourists come mainly from Moscow and Moscow region, but there are also foreign tourists from Europe and East Asia. There are about 100 thousand international visitors every year (6% in 2016) (Vladimir Tourist Passport 2017). Traditionally they were from the European countries (UK, France, Germany, and Italy) but now the biggest tourist flow comes from China.

Figure 1. The number of tourist visitors to Suzdal (thousand)



Source: (Sakharov 2018)

According to the estimates given by hoteliers, tourism experts, and municipal administration, the appropriate number of visitors to Suzdal should be not more than 4-6 thousand per day. Suzdal Tourism Development Strategy for the period up to 2024 declares that the overall carrying capacity of the historic part of the town and its neighborhood suitable for its comfortable emotional, visual and psychological perception, is 2.1-2.5 million visitors per year (Strategy for Suzdal Tourism Development up to 2024).

Not only the number of tourist arrivals but also their extremely uneven distribution forms the critical tourism development problem. It causes overcrowding on weekends during the summer season, winter and spring school holidays and leaves the town vacant in other periods of the year. In peak days the number of visitors goes above 15 thousand per day. At the same time on weekdays, when there are no events, the number of visitors falls to 500-1000, and the town looks almost empty (Kaverzin 2016).

In order to smooth out the peaks and to expand the season, local tourism authorities started to introduce events. In general, Suzdal tourism diversification idea goes along with the mainstream trend both in Russia and



abroad, introducing events integrated with gastronomic tourism products. In recent years, the growth of tourist flow in Suzdal is primarily due to the diversified event calendar. Tourist events actively promoted in the town are connected with its history, culture, re-enactment activities, food, including rather original ideas such as International Cucumber Festival, Geese Battles, 'Lapot' (bast shoe) Festival, Medovukha (traditional low-alcohol drink made of honey) gastronomic festival and other celebrations. Maslenitsa, Christmas and New Year, Easter and other traditional festivities are also very popular. There were 56 events organized in Suzdal in 2017 compared to 48 events in 2016 (Sakharov 2018).

It was rather difficult to get the exact figures on the number of participants in Suzdal tourist events. First of all, not only tourists but also locals attend the event activities. Secondly, some events lasted for several days and took place at different sites within the town area, so it was not possible to avoid double counting.

With these considerations taken into account, the most visited tourist events in Suzdal in 2017 were as follows:

- 1) International Cucumber Festival (July 15) – 18 thousand visitors;
- 2) Suzdal Town Day (August 12) – 12 thousand visitors;
- 3) Maslenitsa celebration and Geese Battles (February 25) and traditional Euphrosynean Fair (October 7) - 6 thousand visitors each.

There were almost no events held in March and April as well as in September. Only a few events were organized in October and November. The results of field observations confirm that events are held mainly in high summer (May-August) and winter (December-February) periods and on weekends or other holidays. It is clear that event organization gives further aggravation of the seasonality problem and leads to serious overcrowding in peak dates and destructive overloads of transport and engineering infrastructure that cause strong negative attitude of the local community.

The major events took part on the central Market Square of the town, municipal Culture and Leisure Centre and Vladimir-Suzdal Museum-Reserve sites. Some events were hosted by the biggest hotels, such as GTK Suzdal, Heliopark, and Pushkarskaya Sloboda.

According to official statistics of Vladimir region, the number of accommodation facilities in Suzdal in 2017 reached 130 with the 3,180 bed places totally (Vladimir Regional Office of Statistics). According to Suzdal municipal administration, there were 101 hotels and guesthouses with 3,230 bed places in the town and 12 accommodation facilities in the neighboring area in 2017 (Suzdal Municipal Administration). In any case, all accommodation facilities in Suzdal are divided into two parts - 'large' (hotels with more than 15 rooms) and 'small' (private guesthouses or small hotels).

There are about 12 large accommodation facilities in the town, and they are owned or controlled by external management mainly. The first large hotel complex GTK Suzdal was opened in 1977 and became the principal accommodation facility for inbound tourists coming to the town. Every year about 200 thousand tourists stay in this hotel (Vladimir Region Committee on Tourism). The complex can host events up to 2,000 participants. From the very beginning, GTK Suzdal was for organized tourist groups accommodation and business and MICE activities.

Local residents run small hotels and guesthouses. Their number increased with the arrival of Airbnb. It is necessary to mention that not all accommodation facilities are officially registered and pay taxes.

The average occupancy rate for the accommodation facilities in Suzdal is 35% rising to 70-80% during events and weekends in high season (Kaverzin 2016). So, they are ready to offer accommodation for extra tourists. However, the ratio between the visitors and guests in hotels is also one of the major problems for the town. In Suzdal, the number of overnight stays is 10-12 times less than the number of visitors coming to the city, so it is a one-day destination with the corresponding level of tourist receipts. The hotels try to attract tourists to stay longer by introducing special room rates and other complementary services and also by organizing various events and activities in off-peak periods.

About 80% of tourists used to come to Suzdal to admire its architectural monuments, to plunge into the fantastic atmosphere of peace and quietness (Aksenova 2013). Traditionally tourists visit three main sites which are parts of Vladimir-Suzdal Museum-Reserve – Suzdal Kremlin, Museum of Wooden Architecture and Peasant Life and the Monastery of Our Savior and St Euthymius. The museum administration regulates all tourism products and prices as well as the museums' schedule. The museums' representatives admit seasonal overloading and the need to redistribute tourist flows as they are very uneven during daytime with peaks before and after lunch-time. Overnight tourists, including foreigners, usually visit the museum sites in the morning while visitors from Moscow – the main tourist flow – come in the midday and even after lunch. According to expert

estimations, museum exhibitions can increase the number of visitors by 40%. The museums also host municipal events and evolve new types of activities and new places for visiting.

However, the preferences of modern tourists are changing. Besides traditional museums, they are now interested in 'local flavor': they want to see the traditional lifestyle, to try local food and are keen on taking part in traditional activities. Not all events held in the town are particularly attractive for foreign tourists or families with small children, but new experiences, remarkable impressions and co-creation activities are in high demand now. However, the choice of activities provided for tourists now is rather limited.

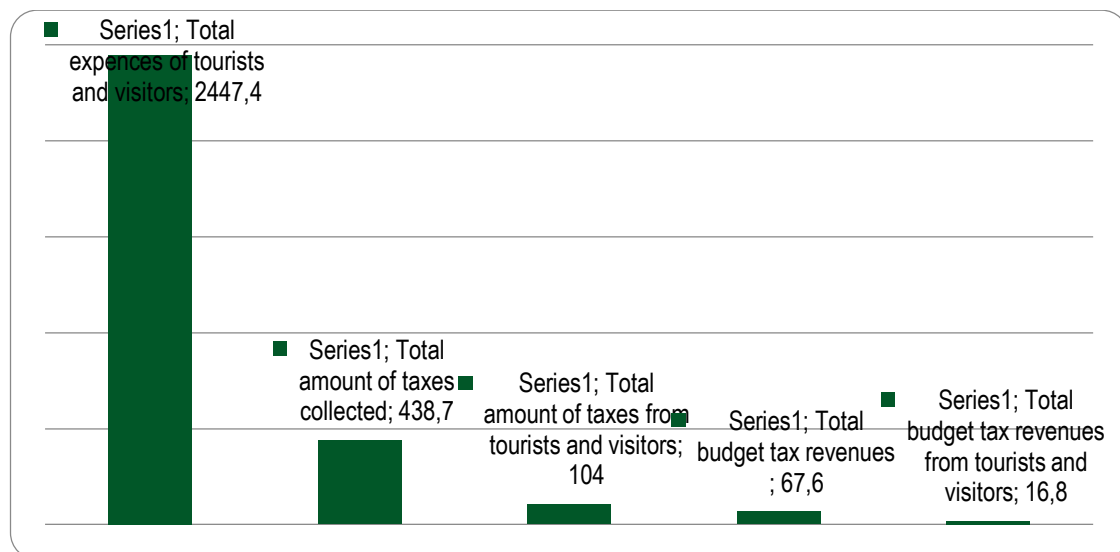
Modern tourists discuss not only architectural heritage and other tourist highlights but their experience and impressions about Suzdal in social media. Most of them complain about high prices in the town and lack of many services: parking, toilets in parking lots, places for dining and entertainment in the evening (apart from restaurants and hotels). Many visitors coming to Suzdal enjoy its beauty and excellent preservation of historical monuments and at the same time point out the overall neglected appearance of the areas around tourist highlights and unwelcoming atmosphere connected with the insufficient level of tourist infrastructure and the negative attitude of the local population.

Nowadays, the residents of Suzdal are visibly divided into two categories. Some of them support further tourism development and tourist flow increase under any circumstances because they are tied up to the tourism industry: they work in guesthouses, cafes or restaurants, sell souvenirs and are involved in other activities. They act as a powerful driver for local tourism development. For example, Airbnb 2017-2018 survey showed that the most hospitable people in Russia live in Suzdal. Most of the Airbnb guests were highly satisfied with their staying in Suzdal – 91% gave the highest assessment to the town and the maximum score for their living conditions comfort (Airbnb Survey On The Most Hospitable Cities In Russia).

The other part of the local population, which is not connected with the tourism industry directly, discusses only the negative consequences of large numbers of tourists in the town. They do not feel the importance of tourism for the development of their town, but at the same time, they face crowds of visitors on weekends and holidays filling up the destination. When these crowds begin to exceed the comfort level, streets become blocked and partitioned that causes specific problems for the locals.

Tourism is almost the only industry in the town. There are various options for increasing its physical and economic capacity, but problems of social sustainability and local community involvement and empowerment in tourism development still exist. As tourism expands and the number of visitors increases, so do the problems. However, it is essential to mitigate stresses in the interaction between tourists and the local population. Overtourism should not aggravate social tension and disparity. The local community should be able to appreciate the results of tourism development and to cooperate with the tourism industry.

Figure 2. Tourism contribution to Suzdal economy in 2017, million RUR



Source: (Sakharov 2018)

The research shows that Suzdal local community still is not able to appreciate the results of tourism development because of low tourism contribution to the local economy. It is due to several circumstances. First,

as mentioned above, Suzdal remains short-term destination with small tourist expenses. Different types of mass and special interest tourism are discussed as practical tools for prolonging tourists' stay in the town and for increasing the average visitor's check that can significantly change the regional tourism economy.

Secondly, which is more important, the growth of tourist flow does not affect the income of the town. Although the amount of tourist services in Suzdal is growing, and the share of tourism in its gross product exceeds 46%, the town budget receives almost nothing from tourism.

In 2013-2017 the number of tourist visitors to Suzdal (Figure 1) almost doubled, but the town budget tax revenues remained at the same level. In 2017 Suzdal budget tax revenues were only 67.6 million RUR (Figure 2). Only 16% of the total amount of taxes collected from tourists and visitors remained in the municipal budget. Consequently, only 0.7% of the total amount of money spent by tourists and visitors in the town remained in the municipal budget.

The budget structure and specific features of inter-budgetary relations in the Russian Federation based on fiscal federalism principle are the main reason for the local residents and municipal authorities of Suzdal dissatisfaction with the growing tourist and visitors flow. Under this regulation, the state of the local revenue base does not depend on the scale and level of tourism development in the town.

Vladimir-Suzdal Museum-Reserve has federal status, and all its taxes, respectively, go to the federal budget. The owners of the hotels registered in Moscow or elsewhere, but not in Suzdal, pay taxes in their regions. The municipal budget revenues are formed mainly from land and property taxes, transport tax, and income tax from individuals. As a result, Suzdal has a subsidized budget though the town earns quite a lot.

The municipal budget scarcity does not allow the municipal authorities to carry out their responsibilities in full scale. For example, cleaning the city, especially in the winter period, with special equipment, workforce, and anti-icing reagents shortage put a dilemma: whether to clean up the town center where tourists are concentrated or to clean up the residential areas. The decision made in favor of the first place causes painful discontent of the local population. Community services expenses for tourist holidays and events maintenance, transport and engineering infrastructure overloads during weekends and holidays are paid by the municipal budget with no revenues and external support to the local community. The municipal administration tries to solve these problems through negotiations with tourism industry entrepreneurs but on a voluntary basis only.

It is necessary not only to improve the existing infrastructure according to the requirements for Suzdal traditional historical appearance preservation but also to increase the capacity of all municipal amenities to create favorable living conditions for the local residents and the comfortable environment for incoming tourists.

Different measures on how to make the local community interested in increasing the number of tourists and tourism revenues for its sustainable development are discussed. Generally, tourism development helps to increase employment and, as a result, the amount of personal income tax received by the municipal budget. Besides, the budget can get non-tax revenues from paid parking and street trading licensing. The question of individual tourist tax for accommodation, catering, and souvenir shops is also under discussion.

It has been already decided that from 2019, local budgets start to receive a 100% excise tax on low-alcohol beverages (traditional medovukha and others). As the largest producer of medovukha is located in the Suzdal region and one of the most visited festivals is connected with this product, it can bring extra revenues to the budget. It is also necessary to find other measures (tax exemptions, state target programs, and others) for the historical settlements and small towns development and support through creating a comfortable living environment and rising their tourist potential.

#### 4. Discussion

Despite the evident concentration of tourists in time and space, most tourism stakeholders believe that Suzdal tourist industry potential is much higher. According to the experts, Suzdal can increase the number of tourists up to 2.5 million, but if they are evenly distributed over the year and do not cause problems for the locals.

A complex of measures is being developed to minimize the conflict of interests between local residents and tourists and, on the contrary, to find additional benefits – both for residents and tourists. The measures include:

1. *Construction and active promotion of the new Suzdal tourism products based on its rich historical, cultural and natural heritage and museum funds.*

For many years Suzdal is famous for its medieval architectural attractions, traditional culture, and museums. Now new types of tourism products, including family recreation, ecotourism, agritourism, educational and ethnic tourism, religious tourism, as well as creative folk crafts programs and other special interest products appear and are actively promoted. Gastronomy tourism and film tourism act as examples.

In 2016 a new year-round tourism product 'Gastronomic map of Vladimir region' was launched. The project started in Suzdal with the presentation during the first Medovukha Fest. It is aimed at developing regional gastronomic brands and national cuisine through gastronomic tourism and serves as an effective tool for regional development, in particular, for the food industry and agriculture improvement in small cities and rural areas (Gastronomic map of Vladimir region). It can also serve as a tourist flow management tool as food events are incredibly diversified in subject, time, place, and scope. It also contributes to the economic and social sustainability of the local community as local products, culture and traditions are supported and promoted.

There are 43 catering facilities in the town with a total capacity of more than 2,600 places (Vladimir Tourist Passport), which is impressive for such a small town. 'Ogurets' ('cucumber' in Russian) restaurant in the center of the town is very famous and trendy both for tourists and local residents. Since 2000 the town celebrates International Cucumber Festival which has become the most visited tourist event in Suzdal. Starting from 2007 traditional Euphrosynean Fair for local industrial goods and agricultural products was revived. There are many ideas on new events and products, educational programs and other activities connected with gastronomy to develop.

Thanks to the unique medieval atmosphere and high-quality heritage preservation, more than 60 movies used Suzdal and its neighborhood for scenery filming. Some of them have become world-famous, for example, Andrei Rublev – a film directed by Andrei Tarkovsky – or The Karamazov Brothers (1968 film and also TV-series) after the eponymous novel by Fedor Dostoevsky. Since 2002 the town hosts annual Open Russian Festival of Animated Films. In 2017 a monument to Andrei Tarkovsky and his famous picture was constructed. Some of the old pictures shot in Suzdal are incredibly popular among Russians; so, parts of the town renowned as film sceneries are now used for guided tours and other tourist activities.

2. *Organization of tourist information center to promote Suzdal as a tourism destination* is of vital importance. This decision addresses independent tourists mainly as they are becoming more numerous and active. The museum authorities have already started this process, but there is no final decision about the place and the form it should have. There were some attempts made by private tour companies; a number of their websites with tourist information about the town can still be found on the Internet.

The tourist information center should provide information about all the available opportunities and tourist products in the town but not only about the tours offered by the museum. It should have places for parking, public toilets, parking for horse-drawn transport, exhibition areas, souvenir shops and act as a starting point for tourist routes. Active promotion and proper management of Suzdal destination can help to ensure its active tourism development and to overcome the crowding.

3. *A project of the urban area functional zoning with different types of zones necessary for the municipal tourist complex* is suggested (Strategy for Suzdal Tourism Development up to 2024). The zoning is aimed at more even tourist flows distribution around the town. The main functional zones of the tourist complex include:

- transport and parking areas for individuals and tourist buses on the town outskirts, public transport and pedestrian zones in the center;
- tourist information infrastructure zone;
- accommodation, catering and other services infrastructure zones;
- recreational zones of different types, including natural objects.

Transport accessibility is always essential for tourism development. With the construction of a high-speed railway from Moscow to Nizhny Novgorod, many tourists started to use public transport as it helps to avoid congestion around Moscow. Still, many tourist groups and independent tourists come by cars and buses, so there is a strong need for car parks in different parts of the town. However, many areas within the museum-reserve and other places of tourist interest walking distance have special protected status; that is why the intercepting car parks can be built in the outer edge of the town. Also, a modern road from Vladimir to Suzdal to relieve traffic flows in Suzdal during major events is needed.

There are projects for new public service buildings construction and the historic center enhancement with the help of small architectural forms designed explicitly for Suzdal to preserve its historical appearance. The major cultural heritage sites and main tourist routes will be illuminated in the evening.

New scenic areas around the town started to form. Six of them are at the outskirts of the town and provide the panoramic view of Suzdal; ten scenic areas are in the central part, near the most visited cultural attractions.

There are State Landscape Reserve Il'insky Meadow and the Pine Grove Natural Monument located within the town boundaries. The natural landscapes are attractive for accelerating the development of tourism services, agritourism and ecotourism especially.

4. *Further event tourism development through increasing the events' quantity and diversity, their distribution by seasons of the year and around the town.* Until recently, many people believed that events generation and organization was the task of the municipal administration or individual event agencies, but by no means of hoteliers, restaurateurs or tour operators. Hotels as professional event venues can generate and host their own events and not only business events, but also sports, gastronomic, cultural events that can fill up the regional and national calendar of events. Diversification of events and other activities on the local basis can also increase the tourism contribution to the local economy.

Suzdal event tourism calendar is expanding every year. New sports events (cross-country skiing and dog sledging competitions), musical events (Blues-Bike Festival, Spiritual Music And Bell-ringing Festival) along with many other events and activities continue to attract visitors to Suzdal. Six events are included in Russia's National Event Calendar, and four events have international status.

Three parts of the town are used as event tourism venues mainly:

a) *Market Square* is in the very center of the town with the capacity of hosting mass tourism events. This place is the most 'touristic' in the town and 'selfie-friendly', as all popular sightseeing routes pass through it, it has good navigation and well-developed infrastructure. Many Suzdal hallmark tourist events take part in Market Square, and it is always ready for hosting other events.

b) the *Museum of Wooden Architecture and Peasant Life* belongs to Vladimir-Suzdal Museum-Reserve. As a result, it has some limitations and particular principles for hosting tourist activities corresponding to the museum cultural policy and marketing strategy. Functionally, the museum venue is fully tailored for organizing ethnographic festivals, cultural and historical events, and re-enactment activities as well as gastronomic events.

c) State Landscape Reserve of regional importance *Il'insky Meadow* is the largest of the eleven renowned Suzdal meadows. Though there are almost no infrastructure and many limitations, this area of outstanding natural beauty located near the town center is used for different events and activities, such as Dog Sledding Races or Balloon Festival.

Now events are also held within the territory of the major hotels, GTK Suzdal mainly. Hotels are interested in attracting new customers through events and take an active part in their organization and promotion. Other natural sites (parks and meadows) also host open-air events and sports activities. Since the town has a relatively big area and the density of residential buildings is low, there are many opportunities to distribute events over its area more evenly and avoid overcrowding.

5. *New ideas, resources, and technologies for tourism development* can give additional opportunities for tourism diversification in the region. The Museum-Reserve member of staff told about new attraction included recently in the museum tours. Kideksha, a small settlement located 5 km from Suzdal, was built in 12th century by Yuri Dolgoruky – the founder of Moscow. The Church of Boris and Gleb constructed in 1152 is included in the UNESCO World Heritage list. However, there were almost no visitors to the church as there was no public transport there. Now free shuttle buses for museum visitors who want to see this unique place are organized, and there are plans for its further involvement in the museum activities.

New technological solutions include the organization of new types of activities and events in the evening and in low season period, flexible pricing policy for travel agencies and online museum booking, new thematic tours and authentic life experience, virtual and augmented reality technologies for the most popular places and events and other ideas. At present, nobody wants to give up event tourism development, and nobody discusses the number of tourist's reduction.

## Conclusion

Overtourism seems to become a problem for many tourist destinations around the world. However, there are some ways to solve this problem and save destination resources and tourism revenues that are very important both for the tourism industry and the local community. Quite often, overcrowding happens due to the strong seasonality of tourist activities connected with the periods of the year or with limited places for visitation. Events that are highly limited in time and space also contribute to this phenomenon. Consequently, different technical measures can be applied to reduce the impact of seasonality, expand the time and places for carrying out certain types of tourist activities, to support or to replace them with less seasonal types. In case of Suzdal event tourism, special efforts are worked out to prevent further overcrowding in peak dates and destructive infrastructure overloads and to develop event tourism and other types of tourism that are diverse in time, venues and subject matter.

All tourism stakeholders are aimed at increasing its economic capacity, but, unfortunately, it does not always result in increasing tourism economic and social importance for the local community. In many small



destinations, there are conflicts of interests between local residents and tourists as not all the local community members benefit equally from tourism development. In some cases, and Suzdal is not an exception, the development of tourism may highlight existing problems and differences. Therefore, one of the most significant tasks for the municipal administration and representatives of the tourism industry is to build a local tourism development strategy to minimize these conflicts and to gain additional benefits - both for residents and tourists.

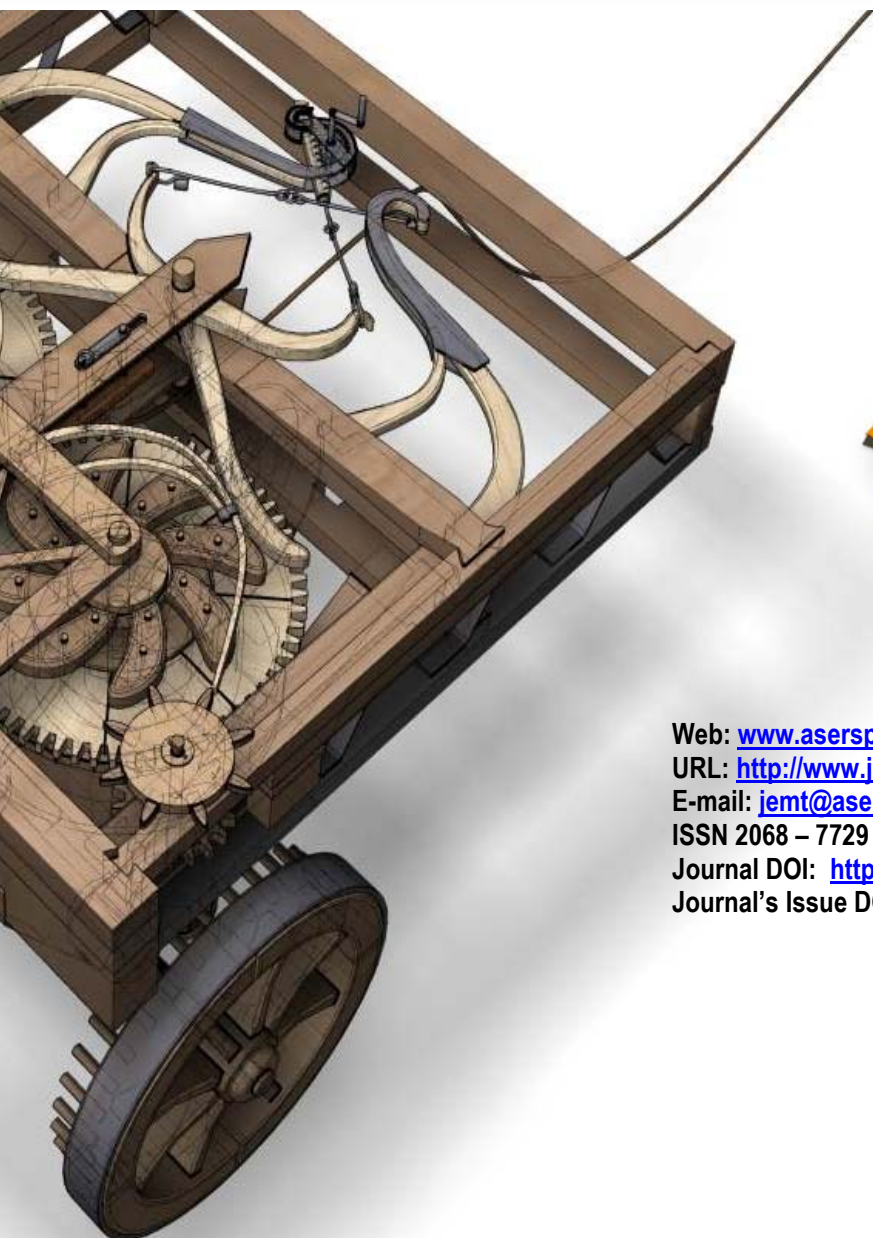
Negative impacts of mass tourism activities are also associated with the standardization of tourism products and destination development. Local community participation and the use of local resources and traditions can help in creating more individualized high-quality tourism products and experiences that are in demand now. Suzdal tourism stakeholders are trying to increase the local community involvement and empowerment in tourism development, but it takes time. It also requires competent organizational and managerial decisions of different levels to reduce social tension between tourists and local residents. If the tourism industry can provide the most effective conditions for tourists that are also beneficial for the local community, they both will succeed.

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