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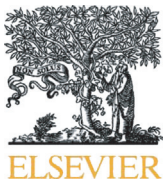

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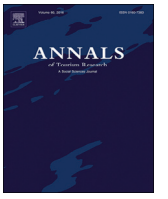

Memory and the everyday geopolitics of tourism: Reworking post-imperial relations in Russian tourism to the 'near abroad'

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the geopolitical implications of memory production in Russian tourism to post-Soviet cities. Based on fifty qualitative interviews conducted in Tallinn, Kyiv and Almaty in 2019, it reveals how, by remembering the shared Tsarist and Soviet past, tourists rework relations to places that used to be part of their own state. Tourist memories are ambiguous, showing imperial nostalgia for a former homeland as well as recognising the significance of national independence. Bringing together perspectives from memory studies and tourism geopolitics, this article illuminates how memory is implicated in the construction of geopolitical relations and shows the significance of everyday encounters that tend to remain below the radar of researchers.

Introduction

The production and consumption of memories is an essential part of tourism: tourism marketing regularly refers to history and cultural memories to convey the uniqueness of a place. Heritage sites and objects are commodified to attract tourists, and cultural memories circulated in tourism also shape tourists' destination choices, experiences and perceptions of the place they are visiting. From a more general perspective, memory in tourism can be seen as contributing to the making of destinations and thus is part of what Hollinshead, Ateljevic and Ali call the "world-making function of tourism", the idea that "tourism does not just axiomatically reproduce some given realm of being (…) but commonly makes, de-makes or re-makes" it (Hollinshead, Ateljevic, & Ali, 2009, p. 428).

This article seeks to illuminate the intersection between tourism and memory by bringing together perspectives from memory studies and the emerging body of scholarship on tourism geopolitics. Focusing on tourism in a post-imperial setting, namely Russian tourism to post-Soviet cities, it examines memories generated by tourists as they travel to destinations that used to be part of their own state and engage with the local people and material heritage around them. The article analyses how tourists remember the shared, tsarist and Soviet, past and interrogates the geopolitical implications of these memories, showing how, by recalling these pasts, Russian tourists rework the relations to former Soviet republics. The research on which the article is

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based was conducted in three cities, Tallinn (Estonia), Kyiv (Ukraine) and Almaty (Kazakhstan) in summer 2019, prior to the Russian military invasion of Ukraine. While Russian attitudes may have changed and hardened since then, the article offers important insights into citizens' relations to their neighbours in the context of an already assertive Russian nationalism and neoimperialist revisionism (Dunn & Bobick, 2014; Pain, 2016).

Examining cultural memories in Russian tourism, the article also makes two contributions to the wider literature on memory and tourism geopolitics: firstly, it sheds light on the ways in which memories are significant for understanding the (geo)political implications of tourism. Over the past years, the emerging body of scholarship on tourism geopolitics has made significant contributions to the study of tourism. Understanding geopolitics in a broad sense, scholars have examined how tourism works as "part and parcel of state geopolitical programs" (Rowen, 2016, p. 392; see also Rowen, 2014; Bianchi & Stephenson, 2014). Following the tradition of critical geopolitical inquiry, they have also more generally drawn attention to the production of geopolitical discourses and practices in tourism (Mostafanezhad & Norum, 2016).

Notwithstanding its contributions to tourism research, the scholarship has however been limited by its narrow temporal focus on present-day relations and imaginaries (see for example An, Zhang, & Wang, 2020; Huang & Suliman, 2020; Rowen, 2014, 2016), overlooking that tourism does not just take place at a particular moment in time – shaped by geopolitical relations and imaginaries of that particular moment – but is situated within particular historical contexts that act in and on the present (Klinke, 2013). If memory has been considered, this is usually done through an analysis of particular forms of tourism, namely heritage tourism, as well as particular heritage sites and an analysis of official discourses around memory and heritage (see for example Bhandari, 2019; Gillen, 2014; Lisle, 2007; Miller & Del Casino, 2018; Norum & Mostafanezhad, 2016).

For example, Gillen (2014) has undertaken an interesting analysis of Vietnamese nation-building through a reading of the exhibition in the War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City. Bhandari (2019) and Gillen and Mostafanezhad (2019) have adopted a more processual approach to study cultural memory and examine heritage discourses by tourism stakeholders such as tourism managers and community groups in (geo)politically contested settings. While these studies shed light on the geopolitical implications of memory, they are conceptually limited in how they approach memory. In line with a general tendency in research on tourism and memory, they approach memory by studying specific heritage sites and focusing on a limited number of actors, usually those seen as responsible for producing heritage (see for example, Park, 2011; Winter, 2009; Zhang, Xiao, Morgan, & Ly, 2018). As Marschall remarked, "the nexus between tourism and memory, both in its individual and collective expressions, is far more complex and multifaceted" than existing research acknowledges (Marschall, 2012, p. 2216). Memory-making in tourism "does not necessarily require the presence of monuments and precious cultural objects, but relies on embodied memories that evoke emotions" (Marschall, 2012, p. 2217).

Particularly, the role of tourists as active memory-makers beyond their consumption of particular heritage sites deserves more attention. A focus on tourists as consumers of heritage is limited because it constructs them as passive receivers of knowledge and, based on a "transaction - consumption nexus", examines what they have learnt and in what ways their understanding is deficient (Smith, 2021; Watson, Waterton, & Smith, 2012). It also overlooks that tourist memories go beyond the consumption of sites: Memories of past events and periods are actively used by tourists to construct particular images of self and other. Prior to their trip, when making decisions of where to travel, and during and after their trips, tourists draw on their own past experiences as well as socially and culturally transmitted understandings of the past.

Along with providing a detailed analysis of tourist memories, the article is intended to highlight the significance of mundane perceptions and experiences for the making of tourism geopolitics. It shows how tourism memories are part of what we call the *everyday geopolitics of tourism*; they provide insights into the "ways in which people live geopolitics" (Dittmer & Gray, 2010, p. 1671), animate and remake geopolitical discourses in their everyday lives. Everyday life is suffused with geopolitical discourses, be it in conversations about political events, the consumption of place images on the media and accounts of travel experiences. Analysing these mundane geopolitical references in tourism memories, the article responds to recent calls to examine everyday tourism encounters as a crucial "part of the co-production of political, economic, cultural, social and/or geopolitical assemblages" (Gillen & Mostafanezhad, 2019, p. 71).

In the context of Russia's military invasion of Ukraine and discussions of Russian neoimperialism in the whole region, an examination of everyday tourism geopolitics in the post-Soviet space is particularly significant. After the break-up of the Soviet Union, former Soviet republics have engaged – to different degrees and at different moments in time – in the rewriting and nationalisation of history, emphasising suffering and earlier national and transnational histories that position the countries within different geopolitical constellations. Geopolitical discourses in Russia on the other hand have focused on the collective trauma of the Soviet collapse (Dunn & Bobick, 2014; Oushakine, 2009; Toal, 2017) and use nostalgic memories to support a rising imperial nationalism (Pain, 2016).

The article's characterisation of the post-Soviet space as post-imperial centres the attention on Russia's historical status as an empire and its relation to its former territories. It is furthermore based on a *long durée* perspective that includes the history of the Russian empire alongside the Soviet Union. The article shows how tsarist and Soviet pasts are significant lenses through which Russian tourists make sense of their relations to their neighbours. When visiting cities that used to belong to their own state, tourists routinely encounter material traces of the shared past and often come to reflect on past Russian presence and relations between nationalities. In particular, we highlight the ambiguities of memory production within a contested post-imperial space, showing how tourist memories put forward opposing imaginations of empire and sovereignty. They are shaped by imperial nostalgia and resentments; at the same time, we observe the emergence of diplomatic and pluralist attitudes, reflecting a reconfiguration of contested relations.

Tourism geopolitics and the production of memory

The scholarship on tourism geopolitics has been interested in examining the nexus between tourism, space and power, examining how tourism – often conceived as banal due to its association with leisure – is geopolitically relevant. Tourism geopolitics is part of critical geopolitics (Tuathail & Dalby, 1998; Dodds, 2007), a body of scholarship concerned with spatial assumptions embedded in geopolitical discourses and practices. Originally focused on the analysis of foreign policy as well as ideas constructed by political institutions and think tanks, writings in popular and feminist geopolitics have widened the field: they have shown the significance of popular representations in producing the spaces of world politics (Dittmer & Gray, 2010) and highlighted the connections between international politics and intimate ways of relating to others (Hyndman, 2004). The literature on tourism geopolitics has been inspired by these approaches, examining a range of different actors and media to provide insights in tourism's geopolitical relevance.

Tourism has traditionally been connoted with positive assumptions by tourism scholars and practitioners alike, as a benign form of mobility, promoting peace and understanding, a "force for productive and peaceful cross-cultural understanding that helped to break down barriers, create powerful moments of recognition, and bring diverse groups together" (Lisle, 2016, p. 183; see also Bianchi & Stephenson, 2014, p. 142–151). For this reason, international tourism has also been promoted systematically since the end of World War II by the United Nations. As part of a critical examination scholars have questioned those idealistic understandings, pointing out how war and (neo)colonialism (Lisle, 2016), nation- and state-building (Gao, Ryan, Cave, & Zhang, 2019; Gillen, 2014; Rowen, 2014, 2016) as well as the regulation of mobility and documentary regimes (Bianchi & Stephenson, 2014) are articulated in the field of tourism. They show how tourism is used as a soft power tool and becomes entrenched in struggles over representations and territoriality. Particularly in post-imperial settings a geopolitically sensitive analysis of tourism has found how tourism "both reinforces and is embedded in postcolonial relationships" (Hall & Tucker, 2014, p. 2).

Tourism geopolitics has increasingly been conceptualised as multi-scalar, with authors such as Hall (2017), Mostafanezhad and Gillen (Gillen & Mostafanezhad, 2019; Mostafanezhad, Azcárate, & Norum, 2021) pointing to the geopolitical significance of intimate, micro-political encounters that often are below the radar of researchers. Drawing on Dittmer and Gray's (2010) article on the role of everyday life in geopolitics, we refer to these encounters and experiences as *everyday geopolitics of tourism*. Considering the everydayness of tourism geopolitics draws attention to geopolitics as a mundane exercise of power, as well as to its "diffuse and relational" nature (Dittmer & Gray, 2010, p. 1665). The study of the everyday geopolitics of tourism encompasses tourism encounters as theorised by Gillen and Mostafanezhad (2019) but more generally includes the study of mundane and routinised experiences, emotions and imaginaries articulated in tourism.

This article uses the lens of memory to examine the everyday geopolitics of tourism, shedding light on the geopolitical relevance and implications of processes of remembering in tourism. We contend that memory is relevant for tourism geopolitics for several reasons: Firstly, memory has emerged as a crucial issue in international politics, as reflected in the recent transnational turn in memory studies and the burgeoning scholarship on memory and international relations. Collective memory is used to build the international image of the nation (Bekus, 2021), and discussions on cultural restitution and repatriation of heritage (Hicks, 2020), public apologies as a diplomatic tool (Olick, 2007), as well as memory wars and the instrumentalization and securitisation of memory in international conflicts (Blacker, Etkind, & Fedor, 2013; Fedor, Kangaspuro, Lassila, & Zhurzhenko, 2017; Mälksoo, 2015) show its growing significance in international politics.

Tourism as a key arena for the international production and circulation of memory is particularly suited to examine the geopolitical role of memory. The past forms a valuable resource to mark what is special and unique about a place and to communicate particular, usually favourable, narratives about the place to visitors (Rivera, 2008). Tourism also routinely brings different memories into conversations, as visitors can bring with them particular images and memories of a place, and their encounters with people and places in their destinations become discursive opportunities for the negotiation of the past (Pfoser & Keightley, 2021; West, 2010).

Furthermore, as noted earlier, drawing on memory research allows more generally to account for the temporal dimension of tourism geopolitics, examining how memories of the past play an important role in informing geopolitical imaginaries generated in tourism. Klinke (2013) highlights how assumptions about temporality are used geopolitically, whereas Norum and Mostafanezhad focus more specifically on the area of tourism and show how ideological assumptions about backwardness and authenticity as well as discourses of discovery and nostalgia "mediate tourism practice, discourse and imagination" (Norum & Mostafanezhad, 2016, p. 157). An account of memory not only adds temporal sensitivity to the study of tourism, looking at how the past is understood in the present, but also allows us to take account of multiple and diverse temporalities (Norum & Mostafanezhad, 2016; Pfoser, 2022), including those produced by tourists.

The literature in the field of memory studies is based on the general assumption of multitemporality (Macdonald, 2013, p. 52–56; Keightley & Pickering, 2012) and has highlighted the multiplicity of stories that can be told about the past. Past experiences are recast from a present-day standpoint and are put into narrative forms that depend on who does the remembering as well as the particular situation and structural context in which it takes place. Zerubavel (2003) for example highlights different plotlines that can be used in relation to past events, representing the past in different ways and with different effects. An examination of memory-making from this perspective can shed light on the production of particular geopolitical imaginaries and relations: for example, how are memories used to construct particular images of places as exotic, frozen in time, or sites of progress? What assumptions about relations between guests and hosts, including hierarchies and asymmetries, are embedded in memories about the past?

Following a significant body of writing in memory studies, we understand memory as processual and dynamic (Misztal, 2003; Olick, 2007; Rigney, 2018). Assuming that memory cannot be neatly divided into communicative processes on one hand and cultural forms on the other, we are interested in *processes of memory-making* through which cultural memories are reworked and brought to life (see also Pfoser & Keightley, 2021). This understanding of memory highlights the malleability of the past as well as the importance of individuals who, as mnemonic agents, use, interpret and change cultural forms. Memory is not necessarily a reproduction of the past but an active process that involves telling stories as much about the past as the past's relation to the present (Keightley & Pickering, 2012). Not only will the intensity with which past is debated change over time but also, as Ann Rigney highlights, "its moral register and the cultural forms appropriate to its expression" (Rigney, 2018, p. 244). Changes in interpretation can be driven both by overt conflict or more gradual processes including "dynamic transfers (…) between diverse places and times" (Rothberg, 2009). In this sense, memory does not come with any guarantees in how it might be actualised. Processes of remembering do not necessarily reproduce existing relations but can help to constitute new social relations (Rigney, 2018, p. 251).

Following these insights, the article examines how memories rework post-imperial relations, being both sensitive to how memory is implicated in the re-production of power relations, while at the same time acknowledging the multiplicity of tourist encounters, their transformative nature and often unexpected outcomes (Tucker, 2009). As scholars of tourism in other post-imperial/colonial constellations have shown, for the former colonisers tourism is often based on nostalgic sentiments and positive visions of empire that reproduce long-seated stereotypes. At the same time, it can also follow more complex patterns, allowing for alternative readings of colonial heritage and offering opportunities for the rethinking of colonial pasts (Jørgensen, 2019; Park, 2016; Tucker, 2019). Indeed, as Anne Gorsuch (2011) shows in her fascinating analysis of Soviet tourism, even in highly regulated tourism settings, tourism encounters regularly exceed official discourses and intentions. The Soviet state and its agents screened tourists, instructed them prior to their trip and kept them under surveillance to ensure they returned as patriotic citizens. However, "even as experiences abroad were politically and culturally mediated, individualized reactions persisted" (Gorsuch, 2011, p. 166), often undermining ideological intentions. Although interpretations of the past have been increasingly streamlined and securitised in Russia, control is incomplete and selective. Furthermore, the post-Soviet cities that Russian tourists travel to offer tourist services as part of a diversified capitalist service industry with no or little ideological control over the circulated messages.

Russian tourism to post-soviet cities: context and methods

Until recently Russia was one of the largest outbound tourism markets in the world (Bianchi & Stephenson, 2014, p. 9). Every year several millions of Russian citizens used to travel abroad for leisure and entertainment until the coronavirus pandemic and the international sanctions imposed on the country after Russia's military invasion of Ukraine dramatically cut down the possibility of travel. In 2019, according to the Russian statistical agency Rosstat, Russians undertook 45.3 million international trips (Rosstat, 2020). Among Russians' favourite destinations were the former Soviet republics, constituting four out of the ten most popular tourist destinations in Russia (Rosstat, 2020). For many cities in the post-Soviet region, Russian tourists were among the largest groups of incoming international visitors. Beyond their quantitative and, arguably economic, significance, these transnational tourist mobilities constituted a discursive opportunity for Russians for encountering people and places that used to be part of their own state (on tourism encounters see Gibson, 2010; Crouch, Aronsson, & Wahlström, 2001). Already in 2019, when the research was conducted, the geopolitical context in which these encounters took place was characterised by tensions and controversies on how to interpret the shared past.

The post-Soviet states have since the break-up of the Soviet Union undergone – to different degrees – nationalisation and derussification processes. These processes are directed at filling the states "with national content, bringing population, territory, culture and polity into the close congruence that defines a fully realized nation-state" (Brubaker, 2011, p. 1786). Nationalisation processes have played out in diverse fields such as language and foreign policy, land restitution and memory politics; they have not only affected the significant Russian-speaking minorities in post-Soviet countries but also have clashed with Russia's vision and geopolitical ambitions, particularly in the context of Russia's renewed interest in post-Soviet integration.

With the beginning of Putin's third presidence (2012) Russia has increasingly framed the break-up of the Soviet Union as a collective trauma and has used civilisational and nationalist narratives to support "imperial 'holding together' strategies" (Ryazanova-Clarke, 2017, p. 106). In particular the Great Victory of 1945 has been used to justify its status as great power and a liberator of Europe in World War II (Zhurzhenko, 2007). Considered to be part of an East Slavic core, Ukraine has special significance for Russia, and a Russian imperial optics has repeatedly denied the existence of a Ukrainian nation (Snyder, 2022). Russia's 'geopolitics of memory' has been actively contested in many post-Soviet states, which have emphasised the violent and 'colonial' character of Soviet rule and put forward narratives of collective suffering and resistance. Since the 2014 annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and the beginning of the proxy war in Donbas, memory conflicts between Russia and its neighbouring states have intensified. In Ukraine, where memory used to be divided along regional lines, contested issues such as the memory of wartime nationalist underground organisations, the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalist and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army nationalist, who collaborated with the Nazis, have gained greater support, being seen as an anti-Soviet and anti-imperial memory in the context of Russian aggression (Budrytė, 2021; Siddi, 2017). Although in Kazakhstan memory politics have been less divisive, historical narratives focusing on the ancient roots of the nation and discussions of the colonial dimension of Russian and Soviet rule are evidence of a nationalisation of memory (Kudaibergenova, 2016; Kundakbayeva & Kassymova, 2016; Yusupova & Pfoser, 2022).

To analyse how tourists deal with contested memories, comparative ethnographic research was conducted in three cities, Tallinn (Estonia), Kyiv (Ukraine) and Almaty (Kazakhstan) as part of the research project "Tourism as memory-making: heritage and memory wars in post-Soviet cities" (ES/R011680/1). The methodological approach is situated broadly within a qualitative interpretative paradigm. It builds on recent efforts of developing ethnographic comparison within qualitative social inquiry (Palmberger & Gingrich, 2014; Scheffer & Niewöhner, 2010) and the departure from single contained fieldwork sites within ethnography (Falzon, 2009) that have suggested a focused analysis of particular interactions and social relations over the traditional examination of a whole field (Knoblauch, 2001). The fieldwork sites were purposefully selected as the countries in which the cities are located are shaped by different geopolitical relations to Russia. Whereas Kazakhstan currently follows a non-antagonist strategy and positions itself as a strategic partner, both Estonia and Ukraine's geopolitical relations to Russia have been conflictual. In the case of Ukraine, Russian-backed separatists had been waging a violent conflict in Eastern Ukraine at the time of the fieldwork.

Estonia's capital Tallinn (437,000 inhabitants) is one of the best-preserved Medieval cities in Europe and listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site. Tallinn's tourism industry is well developed; the medieval Old Town with its city walls and towers, narrow lanes and churches attracts visitors from all over the world. Other significant sights include the 18th century Kadriorg palace built under Peter the Great and the Song Festival Grounds, associated with Estonia's Singing Revolution. At the time of the data collection, Tallinn had 4.5 million foreign visitors a year. Russians were the second largest group of visitors, counting for 10 % of all overnight stays (Alamets, 2020).

Ukraine's capital Kyiv (3 million inhabitants) was a significant centre of tourist attraction due to its status as the cradle of the Kyivan Rus and centre of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. The UNESCO World Heritage Sites of the Cave Monastery and the Saint Sophia Cathedral were some of its main attractions for tourists and pilgrims alike. In 2018, Kyiv was visited by 2 million foreign tourists (UA News, 2019). Until 2013 one third of tourists came from the Russian Federation. While tourism to Kyiv plummeted in the context of the annexation of the Crimea peninsula and the Donbass war, in 2019 a significant number of Russians continued to travel there (Schlegel & Pfoser, 2021), constituting just over 10 % of foreign visitors at the time of the fieldwork.

Kazakhstan's former capital Almaty (2 million inhabitants) is the largest city in the country with a rapidly developing tourism sector. In 2019, Almaty attracted 436,000 foreign tourists, 20 % higher than in the previous year (Almaty Tourism Department, personal communication). While the most popular attractions are national parks and recreational zones surrounding the city, including Shymbulak Mountain resort, Kok-Tube Hill and Medeu Skating rink, tourists also like visiting sights such as the cathedral, the Green bazaar and parks. Local authorities have launched ambitious plans develop already existing city attractions and build new ones linked to Kazakh ethnic heritage in order to increase Almaty's attractiveness as a tourist destination (Yusupova & Pfoser, 2022).

The fieldwork in these three cities involved participant observations of 43 guided tours and semi-structured interviews with 50 tourists, 38 tour guides and 14 tourism stakeholders working for private companies and in public administration. The article draws mainly on the interviews with tourists. Qualitative interviews are a well-established method for conducting social research and allow for a nuanced investigation of processes of remembering. Mihelj (2013) considers interviews in memory research as a double-layered conversation between researcher and participant and in relation to public memory narratives. The interview protocol was developed with this in mind. Alongside general questions about their trip, motivation and experiences of travel, tourists were also asked questions of their perception of local heritage and the history of the city they were visiting. The interviews consciously avoided potentially controversial and leading terms such as 'occupation', 'colonialism', 'liberation' and instead framed the questions openly to see which cultural memories participants made use of.

The interviews were conducted at points of departure (train and bus stations, airports and a harbour) and in cafes and restaurants and often involved two or more participants who were travelling together. In addition to the in-situ interviews (in total 39), online interviews (in total 11) were conducted with tourists who had recently travelled to the destinations. Participants were between 20 and 82 years old, from a range of educational and professional backgrounds. Half of them (52 %) had travelled from Moscow and Saint Petersburg; 20 % came from regions adjacent to the destinations.

All interviews were coded using the qualitative data analysis programme nVivo and analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), a foundational method for qualitative analysis that allows to systematically identify and analyse recurring patterns within qualitative data. Joint coding exercises and regular discussions among the project members, all experts on the countries of their fieldwork, helped to ensure consistency in the coding and facilitated the interpretation of the data. Large parts of the interviews concerned cultural memories – references to the shared past were not only made in response to questions about heritage and history but also in tourists' reflections on the familiarity of the urban space, language use and current (national) politics. Interview segments were grouped into two main thematic clusters: a) positive memories of the shared past, glorifying the Soviet Union and shared homeland and b) diplomatic and pluralist approaches that recognised the sovereignty of neighbours and their divergent interpretations of the past. The following discussion provides an in-depth analysis of these themes, identifying key patterns and important variations between case study locations.

Anxious friends and good colonisers: memories of a shared homeland

According to Anne Gorsuch, Soviet tourism was "a means of imaginatively and experientially integrating the Soviet body at the larger, collective level" (Gorsuch, 2011, p. 39). Even though unfamiliar characteristics of destinations remained apparent, tourism worked to make "the more 'exotic' parts of the USSR (…) part of the central circulatory system of the Soviet Union" (2011, p. 39)

and to integrate multi-ethnic populations of the Soviet Union (2011, p. 49) through narratives of a shared homeland. Nostalgic memories of these formerly united spaces figured prominently in tourists' memories.

When making their decision to travel to post-Soviet cities, many Russian tourists were attracted by their relative geographic proximity, affordability, personal connections and interest in the city more generally. But also the shared past played an important role in tourists' destination choices. Many tourists said that they were interested in histories of the Russian empire and the Soviet period in the destinations. They referred to the presence of common historical rulers and personalities such as the writer Mikhail Bulgakov, the explorer Ivan Fedorovich Krusenstern and World War II heroes, and they visited heritage sites linked to these histories and personalities. Tour guides working with Russian tourists in all destinations were well-aware of this: they all emphasised connections and communalities to tourists' places of origin to make their tours more engaging for them.

The shared past played a particularly important role in narratives of tourists visiting Almaty and, to a somewhat lesser degree, Tallinn. The significance of the Soviet period for Almaty, which was the capital of the Kazakh Soviet Republic at that time, meant that tourists often remarked upon Almaty's Soviet character, whereas in Tallinn tourists expressed interest in tsarist and Soviet pasts alongside its Medieval heritage which was considered Tallinn's distinctive feature. Tourist memories in Kyiv were more politicised than in other countries. Interviews were conducted in 2019, after the annexation of Crimea and the start of the Donbas war, making it comparatively more difficult to talk about positive memories of the shared past as memories were interpreted as expressions of one's political siding within the on-going confrontation with Russia.

Tourists' interest in the tsarist and Soviet periods derived first of all from their familiarity: it is a past that tourists knew about and could easily relate to, based on their historical knowledge and their own experiences. Particularly the Soviet past was valued by tourists as it linked to childhood memories and earlier visits to the destinations. Several tourists had explicitly nostalgic motives, wanting to trace their roots and to reconnect with earlier experiences: some of them had themselves grown up in these cities during the Soviet period, had relatives originating from them or had visited them during their youth. A tourist in his 70s, for example, told us during a guided tour in the old town of Tallinn that he had come to show his wife the city he saw as a young Red Army soldier based in Soviet Estonia. Like so many others, he fondly remembered Tallinn's Old town, its medieval narrow lanes, coffeehouses and distinct, sophisticated atmosphere.

Positive memories of the shared past were furthermore based on a sense of recognition and affective connection to a once shared homeland, particularly in interaction with tsarist and Soviet material heritage that was present in all three cities. Especially for tourists over the age of 35, for whom the Soviet period was a time of personal significance, such memories constituted an intrinsic part of their experience of visiting post-Soviet cities. One participant reflected on her unexpected encounter with a memorial to the Soviet soldiers in Almaty. She noted its visual appearance and soundscape, the Soviet music playing in the site, which brought back memories of that period:

> I experienced this particular atmosphere, visually, emotionally, acoustically. And I had such a wistful feeling inside (…) Well, some sort of nostalgia … When you understand that we have something in common, something we had in the past. And it is gone now. I think it's a similar feeling when you come to places where your ancestors lived (…) Much has changed, but they used to live there, it is somehow close to you, and you try to feel what happened to them there, how it used to be. (…) a positive feeling of something from the past that is still dear. (CS3Almaty_Tourist interview10).

This quotation shows the affective quality of nostalgia, based on the recognition of something shared. Her nostalgia was not based on earlier visits of Almaty but had a temporal reference point, a past that was familiar and "dear" and made Almaty recognisable as part of a once shared space.

Positive memories of the shared past were also linked to a sense of pride, achievement and progress associated with this time. Several tourists went to see heritage sites and symbols associated with the tsarist and Soviet periods such as Medeo, the world's largest high-altitude skating rink in Almaty that was built during the Soviet period:

> Medeo was always an icon for me. That is, I always knew that there is Medeo in Almaty. (…) And, finally, I visited it for the first time. (…) This is a place that, at one time, was admired by many but was so far away. And now I saw it and visited it.

[(CS3Almaty_Tourist interview10)]

While such sites often have an ambivalent status for local place-branding projects (Yusupova & Pfoser, 2022), they continued to be significant for tourists. Narratives around Soviet symbols were often tied to an understanding of the Soviet period as a time of economic and cultural progress and the idea of a better life. While some tourists focused on the state's achievements, others highlighted the efforts of the Russian people contributing to the construction and development of the cities, making them comfortable and beautiful. There were different understandings of relations between Russians and their neighbours embedded in these positive evaluations of the past: some tourists referred to Soviet symbols as part of a past experience of belonging to a community of "Soviet people", uniting different nationalities under the banner of a "friendship of people". Being asked about the best time in Tallinn's history, one participant in his thirties noted that it was during the Soviet period when "everything was livelier … there were more people, more diversity, it was more fun, I think." (CS1Tallinn_Tourist interview 17). Another participant stated:

> I did not live the USSR, my mom did, and she says that before all this was much more accessible to all of us, Russians, because we could travel without visas, without any problems, and we were friends for Estonians.

[(CS1Tallinn_Tourist interview1)]

Other participants in contrast imagined the relations between Russians and other nationalities as uneven, emphasising the Russian role in developing the destination and asserting a hierarchy between Russians as good colonisers and their minor brothers (Toal, 2017). A 41-year old women from Saint Petersburg said she was interested in coming to Tallinn because "our histories are very much connected. I remember Peter I, what he did for Estonia (…) he contributed to the history of Estonia, to its development" (CS1Tallinn_Tourist interview3). The notion of Russians as good colonisers was especially prominent in interviews with tourists in Almaty:

> Everything that we see around us is built by the infrastructure of the Soviet Union and the people of the Soviet Union. Without it there would be nothing here. If it hadn't been for the Tsar's decision back then, there would have been the Chinese here now. … China and Turkey were huge, strong civilizations and if they had wanted to seize these lands, they could just come here, and no one could have done anything.
>
> [(CS3Almaty_Tourist interview1)]

The Russian empire and the Soviet Union are constructed as benevolent states, which developed Almaty and laid the foundation for the Kazakh state (Toal, 2017, p. 72–80; see also Lillis, 2019). The idea of Russia and the Soviet Union bringing infrastructure and statehood to Kazakhstan, the active forgetting of the nomadic population of the steppe, and the double standard in the perception of states are characteristic for many interviews; while Russians came to protect and develop the land in the interest of the local peoples, China and Turkey, used here in place of the Ottoman empire, are constructed as potential exploiters.

While some tourists focused on their positive memories of the shared past, others used these memories to reflect on and critique the changes since the Soviet Union's break-up. Tourists expressed insecurity over the perception of the shared past in their destinations and were often anxious about encountering anti-Russian and anti-Soviet sentiments. Some also expressed explicit disappointment and resentment over the nationalisation of history. For example, a 35-year old woman, travelling to Almaty from Tomsk, criticised what she saw as the insufficient acknowledgement of the Soviet impact on the city development:

> It is clear that in Almaty in Soviet times a significant part of the population… of course, the Soviet people was one people, but by nationality all here were Russians. But now try to find a monument to anybody [ethnic] Russian. These monuments have been removed somewhere, and all monuments are only to [ethnic] Kazakhs. (…) Why this discrimination?
>
> [(CS3Almaty_Tourist interview1)]

While factually incorrect – Almaty was historically a multiethnic city – this quotation constructs Russians as builders and inhabitants of Almaty whose role has been erased in public commemorative efforts and replaced with the statues of Kazakhs. This reevaluation of historical memory is read as 'discrimination': rather than being grateful for Russian efforts, locals were seen as consciously eradicating their memory.

In her seminal discussion on nostalgia, Svetlana Boym calls nostalgia a "longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy" (Boym, 2001, p. xiii). Nostalgia, as Boym herself acknowledges, can take different forms; it can be characterised by ambivalence, irony and self-reflection, or articulated as a restorative dream that drives religious and nationalist movement. In their reflections on a shared material culture, cultural affinities and a common homeland as well as in their desire to be recognised as civilising force, Russian tourists also displayed different modes of relating to the past and different geopolitical visions embedded in them. Some memories were reflective and based on egalitarian relations, others were resentful and reproduced imperial hierarchies, positing Russia as the centre of a great imperial civilisation. While none of them was explicitly restorationist, post-Soviet territories were generally constructed as part of a *wider/old* "*homeland*", based on an idealised notion of the past. Nostalgic memories can be explained by different factors: the longing for one's childhood and the lived experiences of internationalism and its distinct cosmopolitan sociality (Grant, 2010), the mourning of a lost great power status and the difficulty of a negative identity. As Kevin Platt points out, positive discourses of the shared pasts continue to be powerful "given that the alternative is to identify with the role of the occupier who brings no gifts and leaves behind no benefits, but only humiliation and destruction" (Platt, 2013, p. 138). This can also explain the blindspots for the violence and suffering under Russian and Soviet domination in the memory of many Russians. However, as we discuss in more detail below, tourist interviews also reveal a more complex picture that show the emergence of pluralist and cosmopolitan ways of remembering.

Recognising the 'other': memory diplomacy and cosmopolitan attitudes

Transnational memory projects which transcend national communities and borders have been extensively discussed in the scholarly literature in the recent years. The transnational turn in memory studies has highlighted normative models of remembering based on cosmopolitanism (Levy & Sznaider, 2006), memory pluralism (Kattago, 2009) and memory agonism (Bull & Hansen, 2016), rooted in the principles of radical democracy. Furthermore, the literature has put forward empirical analyses of a reconfiguration of cultural remembering over the past decades, highlighting the practical relevance of these new modes of remembering, evidenced in the shift from the (national) glorification of past deeds to an increasing acknowledgement of "negative pasts" and the suffering of others (Olick, 2007).

Despite being a key arena for the international production and circulation of memory, tourism does not sit easily in relation to these modes of engaging with the past: due to the commodification of the past, tourism is often dismissed as superficial and limited in its ability to generate understanding (for an overview and critique, Pfoser & Keightley, 2021). However, recent scholarship

has shown how the tourism industry can provide important routes for mnemonic dialogue. Guided tours for example can strive to educate tourists, and tourists can use the tour as an opportunity to ask questions and engage in discussions (Pfoser & Keightley, 2021; Schlegel & Pfoser, 2021).

Dialogic and cosmopolitan modes of remembering were also apparent in Russian tourism. Being asked about their perceptions of local history and heritage, tourists across the case study locations acknowledged their neighbours' suffering under Russian and Soviet rule and the significance of national independence. Asked about the most important time in Tallinn's history, a 68-year old participant from Petrozavodsk, a city in the Northwest of Russia, mentioned Estonian independence in 1991, adding "for us, it may have been a little unusual and difficult, because we thought that it was all one whole, but we understand you in this matter" (CS1Tallinn_Tourist interview21). A 55-year old tourist from Moscow also noted that "only Estonians, Tallinners can decide that for themselves" when the best time for the city was, adding that "when Russia was the SSSR, we had the warmest memories, I can only say the kindest words. Fate divorced us" (CS1Tallinn_Tourist interview24). While making clear that they did not share local memories, they nonetheless recognised the right of the other to hold a different view on the past.

Some tourists expressed their recognition of the "other" more directly. Firstly, they considered sovereignty a positive value in itself. In contrast to an imperial conception of Russia's relation to its neighbours, they articulated a respect for their self-determination, rooted in a Westphalian imagination of the nation-state order:

> Ukraine has slowly come to some kind of independence. It seems to me that this is a good sign, people should have the right to self-determination, how they want to live. In this, it seems to me, there is a certain milestone.
>
> [(CS2Kyiv_Tourist interview3)]

Several tourists also explicitly aligned themselves with the new memory projects and identities formed in the post-Soviet cities. Tourists expressed sympathies with decolonialisation movements in Kazakhstan, called the Soviet period in Estonia an 'occupation' and expressed sympathies with the recent removal of Soviet monuments in Ukraine.

There were significant variations across the case studies in relation to these alternative modes of remembering: in Kyiv and Tallinn, where local memory politics had more decisively broken with Russian interpretations of the past, tourists were more inclined to acknowledge the significance of independence and the violence inflicted by the Soviet and tsarist regimes. Particularly in Tallinn, diplomatic responses were common among interviewees, whereas tourists in Kyiv more clearly aligned themselves with the Ukrainian national project, praising Ukrainians' "courage and strength to change themselves" (CS2Kyiv_Tourist interview5). In Almaty, in comparison, such positions were relatively rare, as the majority of participants either put forward nostalgic interpretations of the past, or had little knowledge of the re-interpretation of Kazakhstan's past (Yusupova & Pfoser, 2022).

Whether tourists were positively attuned to local memory projects can be firstly explained by the particular groups travelling to these places. Russian tourists were internally diverse and held different interpretations of the past: particularly those choosing to travel to Kyiv at a moment of on-going conflict were often sympathetic with Ukrainian nationalism and memory politics. Moreover, tourist encounters during guided tours, museum visits and in conversations with locals facilitated the pluralisation of interpretations of the past.

Museums and heritage sites provided opportunities for hosts to convey nationally shaped interpretations that can challenge memories of international visitors (see Gillen, 2021). While some tourists refused to go to sites where they expect nationalist narratives, those who did visit them – usually those curious and already more open to dialogue – could find themselves transformed. A 29-year old tourist in Tallinn recounted how a visit to the local history museums had changed his view on Estonian history:

> I realised that the Baltic countries were a white spot for me, that is, I knew that the Swedes came, then the Germans came, then Russia came, but the fact that they had something of their own was a discovery for me. (..) Estonia is, to some extent, a country with a tragic history.
>
> [(CS1Tallinn_Tourist interview30)]

More generally, a sympathetic view of local interpretations of the past was also facilitated by tourists' experience of being treated respectfully by the hosts. Several tourists reflected on how they had expected to encounter reservedness or even hostility towards Russians but instead experienced friendliness. This was linked to the positive or improving international relations between countries (Almaty and Tallinn) or viewed in the context of a capitalist service sector that relied on Russian money (all case studies). A 77-year old participant from St Petersburg contrasted his experiences of Soviet travel to today's welcoming attitudes:

> The taxi drivers, the service personnel, everything was fine. People have become friendlier towards Russians, they have a positive attitude. We are now a source of income for them. Earlier we were the yoke, you understand?
>
> [(CS1Tallinn_Tourist interview7)]

These tourist memories showed alternative modes of relating to others that champion the other's independence and recognise their suffering. They tended to see the others as equal and deserving respect, rather than the object of paternalistic attitudes or resentment. These memories resembled modes of remembering discussed in the wider literature and new local memorialisation initiatives (Zhurzhenko, 2013). Whereas memory wars have been seen as dominant international modes of remembering in Russia's relation with Estonia and Ukraine, it is particularly in those countries that tourists showed understanding, or at least respect, for the other.

Conclusion

Research on tourism geopolitics is still in its relative infancy, notwithstanding the valuable contributions made by a number of scholars (Bhandari, 2019; Gillen & Mostafanezhad, 2019; Lisle, 2016; Mostafanezhad & Norum, 2016; Rowen, 2016). Focusing on the geopolitical implications of memory production in Russian tourism to post-Soviet cities, this article sought to contribute to this emerging field of study by drawing attention to how processes of remembering are part of the production of geopolitical relations. Questions of time and temporality have so far not been fully accounted for due to a focus on the present, or a limiting of the examination of particular memory sites and elite discourses in the existing literature. The lack of temporal depth and the limited range of actors considered as relevant means that the complex temporalities of geopolitical imaginaries haven't been sufficiently addressed. We contend that memory is not only relevant as a narrow field of study within tourism research – focused on heritage tourism – but is a more general part of tourists' engagement with other places and people, as tourists make sense of their experiences and relations to others. Particularly in contested post-imperial settings, such as the post-Soviet space, saturated with the past and shaped by demands of historical reckoning and the construction of new national narratives, memory provides a significant lens for understanding current international relations.

It is too early to estimate the extent of damage the war in Ukraine will do to post-Soviet relations but it has already sent shockwaves across the region and has severely damaged the international reputation of Russia. Coordinated economic sanctions are expected to cause significant and lasting damage to the Russian economy, which ordinary Russians are already starting to feel (Shamina, Kaner, & Fraser, 2022). Russian aviation sector has been ostracised as flights have been suspended and countries have closed their airspace to Russia. All of this will have a negative effect on Russian international tourism for the years to come. On the other hand, several neighbouring post-Soviet countries are hosting a new wave of Russian emigration caused by the war. Often the choice of residence for Russians who flee an increasingly totalitarian state is dictated by their previous tourist experiences in these countries alongside economic and other considerations. Based on research conducted prior to the war, this article illuminates how ordinary Russians used memories to negotiate the relation to their neighbours and provides indication of how they might orient themselves in the new geopolitical order.

Tourist memories showed both the influence and limitations of ideological discourses for captivating popular imaginations. Based on the recognition of familiar features of the material environment and a cultural intimacy that they did not share with destinations further away, some Russians remembered the shared past nostalgically, drawing on a sense of having left a positive contribution and mourning the present as a loss and/or betrayal. Some tourists also expressed empathy or at least diplomatic attitudes, that acknowledged the significance of sovereignty for their neighbours. In this sense, tourism in the post-Soviet space was similar to post-colonial tourism where nostalgia for empire and the acknowledgement of others' violence and suffering coexist (Jørgensen, 2019; Park, 2016; Tucker, 2019). Despite Russia's authoritarian turn and the attempt to shape memory according to its (geo)political needs, tourists' memories were diverse and reflected a broad spectrum of positions. Particularly in those countries where assumptions about the Soviet past had been decisively rejected, travellers tended to be more diplomatic and pluralist in their orientations.

This can be partly explained by the direct educational opportunities such as museum visits and guided tours as well as the general transformative potential of tourism encounters. The unexpectedly warm welcome that many tourists experienced provided opportunities for reflection and had the capacity to change perceptions. Dowler reflects on the geopolitical significance of experiences of hospitality, arguing that hospitality "promotes individuals' confidence and security while minimising fear in interactions not only between host and visitor, but also between once rival communities" (Dowler, 2013, p. 781). In comparison to other postcolonial contexts where relations are more settled, the work of hospitality played a particularly central role in reconfiguring Russians' relations to their neighbours. While hospitality is often criticised for reproducing unequal power relations, in a space characterised by tensions it could facilitate exchanges and support a pluralist outlook which does not see the other's differing standpoint as an attack on one's own.

Having a negative effect on both the possibility of encounter and the willingness to listen, the military invasion of Ukraine has undone, or at least severely diminished, the possibility of these transformative encounters. Apart from those who have left the country, Russians now encounter their neighbours above all through state-controlled media that support an aggressive geopolitical agenda and put forward binary accounts of neighbours as either loyal friends or traitors and fascists. While memories are malleable and can shift to adopt to a new political context, past travel experiences and histories of interaction will nonetheless form important resources for counter-imaginaries, portraying neighbours as victims of 'tragic histories', as role models in a struggle for an open society or simply as people who have the right to hold different views on the past and to determine their own geopolitical futures.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Alena Pfoser: conceptualisation, methodology, analysis, writing.
Guzel Yusupova: analysis, writing.

Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available in Loughborough University Data Repository at DOI: 10.17028/rd.lboro.12180150
Tourism as memory-making: METADATA (Original data)

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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