

ПРОБЛЕМЫ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ РАЗВИТИЯ СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВА МЕЖДУ СТРАНАМИ ЮГО-ВОСТОЧНОЙ ЕВРОПЫ В РАМКАХ ЧЕРНОМОРСКОГО ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКОГО СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВА И ГУАМ

РЕЗЮМЕ

В условиях глобализации международного бизнеса, дальнейшее укрепление торгово-экономических и финансово-технических отношений с Евросоюзом приобретает существенную стратегическую важность для Грузии.

Ключевые слова: Интеграция в Евросоюз, внешняя политика Грузии, глобализация международного бизнеса, привлечение инвестиций

SUMMARY

In conditions of globalization of the international business, future strengthening of the trade-economic and financial-technical relations with the European Union has an essential strategic importance for Georgia.

Keywords: Integration into the European Union, Georgia's foreign policy, globalization, international business, investment

WEB-BASED TOURIST INFORMATION SYSTEMS

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The development of tourism and information society is a priority for the Bulgarian economy and, as such is included in its strategy. The tourist industry is very dynamic and it seeks new ways for promoting its products and services to the potential customers.

The modern user of tourist information wants not only to be acquainted with it, but to be able to actively take part in the formation of the rich information environment. The information and communication technology (ICT) penetration into the tourism area is a world trend, which Bulgaria follows, but still not enough actively and effectively. It is a matter of fact that most of the hotels and tourist agencies, are present at Internet, but in a way formally, with online sales still confined.

The main reasons for this are:

- Low degree of computers usage.
- Confined Internet access. As a whole Bulgaria takes 42nd place in the world rank for e-readiness. In fact only Turkey, Romania, Russia and Ukraine left behind us [1].

- E-payments being still not enough popular, due to the low rate of credit card usage and fraud threat risks.

One of the latest researches on the information-reservation systems application in the Bulgarian hotels and tourist firms shows that 58% of the hotels don't use ICT at all, another 42% apply them mainly in accounting, front desks and restaurants, and only 12% have adopted complete reservation systems [2]. Even more eloquent is the fact, that 85% of Bulgarian tour operators and 75% of the tourist agencies do not use any other tools, except phone and fax.

Presumably, **web-based information systems** refer to those *applications and services that are resident on a server, which is accessible from anywhere in the world via the Web*. Most of electronic commerce (e-commerce) applications run on the Internet using web based features, making them very suitable for the tourism industry and enabling the seamless conduction of business transactions for 24 hours a day and seven days a week and so on. The main advantage of the web-based information systems is that millions of people could reach them instantly from anywhere and at any time.

In general the **basic task** of the information system is to provide complete, timely and reliable information about the business processes and management functions of the tourist firm. Very important is the information about the business environment – suppliers, customers and business partners. Furthermore, it should offer statistical information for analytical and planning purposes, as for example planning the tourist stream of people, analyzing its diversification and behavior stereotypes. This information is the basic factor for the correct assessment of the tourist business, problems identification and taking effective management decisions for sustainable development and application of appropriate managerial strategies. It helps tourist managers prepare marketing analysis and improve tourist products and services in order to improve their competitive advantage, which will ultimately increase revenue.

The basic **features** of web-based tourist information systems could be presented as follows:

- **To be based on the Internet and the Web as a platform** that lets people collaborate and share information online in perceived new ways, such as social networks, blogs etc., providing gold opportunities for internet marketing and sales for the tourist firms;
- **Integration** of the data, which supposes data to be input once and to be used repeatedly;
- **Module structure**, which includes different components and abilities for upgrade and addition of new modules;
- **Balance** between centralised and distributed data processing;
- **Flexibility and adaptation** according to all changes inside and outside the tourist firm;
- **Maximum user coverage** combining all online tools to improve services, reduce costs and increase efficiency;
- **Supporting mobile communications** for buying and selling tourist products and services in a wireless environment – basically cellular telephones and personal digital assistants (PDAs).

The tourism is one of the three priority sectors in the Bulgarian economic development program, comprising about up to 10% of the GDP [3]. Therefore one of the expected trends in the tourism development is the considerable extension of the ICT role in the hotel and tour operator activities, in regard with demand, planning and selling the tours [4].

Web-based tourist information systems have to comply with European quality standards for the included information and to be open for integration with national and foreign tourist portals. Furthermore, they should give a chance to the not so popular tourist destinations to be presented at the electronic market and to be in touch with different clients and partners.

Creating a strategy for the development of web-based tourist information systems requires some potential **problems** to be envisaged. Let's mention some of them:

- Building a suitable **information infrastructure**, that will provide access to the telecommunication networks in global and national scale (Internet, Intranet, Extranet);
- Submission of **complete and variable information** about less utilized and underdeveloped tourist destinations, services and entertainments;
- **Professional computer literacy** of the staff at all management levels not only about computers' abilities, but specialized software;
- **Lack of financial resources** for ICT investments, creating and supporting of dynamic website for online reservations and payments;
- **Integration and compatibility** of all kind of tourist information systems (hotels, restaurants, airlines, trains, buses etc.);
- **Necessity of stimulating and law regulations** for encouraging modern ICT application in tourism accompanied with suitable financial tools.

The evolutionary processes towards internet economy impose new behavior models in the tourist business. Internet submits alternative ways for promotion, distribution, marketing and advertizing of tourist products and services, which in practice generate new electronic tourist market.

Unfortunately we haven't built yet national information reservation system in Bulgaria. This is due to lack of coordination of the activities of the responsible factors and combining the resources available in the tourism. This definitely jeopardizes the market positions of our country in the global tourist market. The introduction of integrated web-based information reservation system for Bulgarian tourist industry is an important prerequisite for the tourism sustainable development and will give the country an image of competitive world tourist destination.

The most important **challenges** of the web-based tourist information systems could be summarized in the next directions:

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- Accomplishing **online sales** of tourist product and services at any time round the clock and anywhere at every single place all over the world;
- **Eliminating intermediates** by direct offering tourist products and services to the end users;
- Opportunities for **adopting virtual offices** with lower costs for their maintenance;
- **High level of interaction** with clients for exploring their opinion about the tourist product and services they have used through inquiry or tracing their behaviour model during the site visiting;
- Carrying out **marketing researches** to follow the tourist market trends and keeping the competitors under observation;
- Building **permanent customer relationships** and retention of the loyal clients;
- Creating a **demographic profile** of the different tourist market segments;
- Opportunity for **instant ordering and buying** tourist products and services at the moment of website examining;
- **Product range expanding, innovations and personalising** of the offered services.

The Internet is a perfect place to plan, organise and economically arrange all kind of trips in long or short distance. By online tourist services one could purchase travel tickets, reserve hotel rooms, rent a car or bike. Most tourist sites use function for sending e-mail messages about low-cost flights or last minutes packages to favourite destinations. The most popular tourist portals are Expedia.com, Travelocity.com, Orbitz.com, Hotels.com and Priceline.com [6]. The last one allows the customer to set a price he is willing to pay for an airline ticket or hotel accommodation and after that attempt to find a vendor, who matches this price.

Lately mobility has become a strategic part of the web-based tourist information systems. We are at the stage of a wireless revolution that is transforming computing and information systems. Although it is still in the beginning, but already, it is changing the way businesses produce and sell their products.

Mobile business (m-business) is supposed to be done in a wireless environment via the Internet. It is expected to be the next generation e-business that enables users to access the Internet, without needing to find a place to plug in. So called smart phones offer Internet access, fax, e-mail, and phone capabilities, all in one, paving the way of m-business. Mobile technology not only provides convenience and efficiency, but also can lead to competitive advantages that impact entire strategies and business processes.

M-business is growing rapidly in parallel with the explosive growth of mobile devices and networks. It creates opportunity to deliver new services to existing customers and to attract new ones. Concerning the tourism, so called mobile vacationers become very popular lately, as they are connected with the Internet from any place at any time during their holiday.

There are two basic characteristics that differentiate m-business – **mobility** and **broad reach**, which is based on the fact that users carry a mobile device anywhere they go and at any time. These two characteristics create additional attributes that drive the development of m-business and these are:

- **ubiquity** - real-time information and communication, independent of the user location;
- **convenience** - through Internet-enabled mobile device, such as a smart phone, it is easier and faster to access the Web from most of the hotels equipped with Wi-Fi connections – so called “hot spots”;
- **personalization** – it refers to the preparation of customised information for individual consumers as travel-related information and advertisements;
- **localization** of products and services – knowing where the user is located is a prerequisite for offering relevant products and services. This is possible only when GPS is attached to the user’s wireless device and the nearest hotel or restaurant could be found.

The development of m-business in tourism is driven by the following **factors**:

- **widespread availability of mobile devices** – they have as much processing power as personal computers and very soon will become the foremost tool that connects people to the Internet;
- **widespread use of cell phones** – this is a social phenomenon especially among young people;
- **declining prices and increasing functionalities** – paying a flat fee per month encourages more users for mobile devices;
- **improvement of bandwidth** – it should be sufficient for transmitting all kind of information – text, voice, video and multimedia.

Thus, wireless devices could become the preferred way to access tourist information instantly.

Tourism sector gives very favorable conditions and circumstances for m-business. Such example is the web portal *3Deja-Vu* [7] for tourists and skiers that promote the skiing resorts collectively known as the “Portes du Soleil”, the skiing area situated between France and Switzerland. The portal has 3D visualization system that enables web users to geographically identify and view business locations (tourist resorts and service providers) on a 3D terrain model by using satellite and aerial photography.

Businesses will increasingly use wireless networks and applications to cut costs, improve flexibility, and create new products and services. **Ford Motor Company** has a totally wireless body shop and staging area for truck assembly in Dearborn, Michigan, with a customized materials-replenishment system and wireless tracking of each vehicle as it moves through assembly. Doctors are prescribing medications using wireless handhelds as they walk down hospital halls. Real estate agents use Palm smart phones to access all the available data on a house as they are showing it to prospective buyers.

Sprint insurance company provides a wireless service for insurance adjusters to access data from corporate systems to process claims on site, find local repair shops, and even issue checks to customers on the spot. The implications for organizational productivity and performance are truly astounding.

Wireless communication helps businesses stay more easily in touch with customers, suppliers, and employees and provides more flexible arrangements for organizing work. Companies can save on wiring offices and conference rooms by using wireless networks because they do not have to pull cables through walls. Wireless networks also make additions, moves, and changes much easier.

A lot of mobile portals occur lately that aggregate and provide content and services for mobile users. Besides news, sports and entertainments they include rich travel and event information that help tourists to find the preferable places. For example **AvantGo** is one of the largest mobile Internet services that deliver rich and personalized content.

Besides wireless Internet access, hotels could provide mobile technologies for check-in and check-out, making purchases from hotel vending machines and for opening room doors instead of keys. Other examples are information about the weather and tourist attractions (hours and prices).

Lately mobile technologies gradually penetrate the social networks through which people with similar interests exchange information with one another. The basic characteristic of the social networks is greater collaboration among internet users that trust themselves. They share opinions and experiences about their trips through publications presented by text, photos and videos. The key point here is that people rather than the organizations control and use this information and it is at little or no cost. There is a trend for social networking websites such as MySpace and Facebook to add wireless capabilities. This not only generates faster and cheaper marketing results, but also fosters effective feedback and closer relationships with customers.

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Finally, to sum up we could say that the competitiveness and success of the tourist firms considerably depend on the adoption of new ICT decisions, which progress is a key factor not only for the success, but for the tourist firm survival in the new information age. The dynamics of the global tourist market stimulates the ICT application in the tourist business. The global trends in the world tourism development impose the necessity of modern, flexible and powerful web-based information systems that are supposed to integrate Bulgarian tourism to the electronic tourist market.

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РЕЗЮМЕ

У роботі розглядаються проблеми, що стоять перед інформаційними системами туристичних фірм і викладаються їх основні особливості. Представлено основні характеристики мобільного бізнесу, які є корисними як для клієнтів так і для працівників сфери туризму. У статті дається огляд деяких факторів, які показують переваги розвитку мобільного бізнесу у сфері туризму.

Ключові слова: веб-системи туристичної інформації, мобільний бізнес

РЕЗЮМЕ

В работе рассматриваются проблемы, стоящие перед информационными системами туристических фирм и излагаются их основные особенности. Представлены основные характеристики мобильного бизнеса, которые являются полезными как для клиентов так и для работников сферы туризма. В статье дается обзор некоторых факторов, которые показывают преимущества развития мобильного бизнеса в сфере туризма.

Ключевые слова: веб-системы туристической информации, мобильный бизнес

SUMMARY

The paper examines the problems and challenges facing the tourist firms' information systems and outlines their main features. It presents the basic characteristics of mobile business that are useful for both customers and suppliers in the tourist activities. The paper provides an overview of some factors that give advantages to the mobile business adoption and development in the tourism industry.

Key words: web-based tourist information system, mobile business

HISTORICAL ASPECTS OF ECONOMIC INTEGRATION BETWEEN COUNTRIES OF SOUTH CAUCASUS

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Currency of the research theme: Creation of so-called post-soviet space from 1990 year is a logical result of global, political and socio-economic development; however, definite subjective factors were influencing these processes too. Under the conditions of new economic and political environment, new independent states, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan among them, were unprepared for the way of state construction. However, direct result of political independence should become an origin of development and strengthening of the countries' national economy.

Economic policy carried out in independent Georgia is directed toward establishment of regulated market economic system. It is noteworthy that foundation of transition economy and creation of new statehood are simultaneous processes in Georgia that is resulted in many unsolved problems. In the course of decades, actually Georgia was isolated from international economic life. Nowadays, the country has an opportunity to direct foreign economic relations to serve to the national development.

In Georgia, like in other new independent countries, the fight for economic independence was reflected in change of character of foreign economic relations and direction. Transition from closed system to open economy requires complex and separate elaboration of each aspect. Similar new analysis is needed for regulation of relations with neighboring states, specifically – regulation of trade relations with Azerbaijan and Armenia.

South Caucasus is one of the most difficult and at the same time interesting regions of the world, which with its potential is able to take honorable place in the civilized world. For this aim, first of all, it is necessary to correctly select priorities of economic development and foreign economic relations. All three countries of South Caucasus have officially declared that they are establishing regulated market economy system; however, they have different specific ways of implementing this system. It is noteworthy that they have different orientation in international economic relations too. Due to the war in mountainous Karabag, there are no economic relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. While Georgia is successfully developing relations with both neighboring countries.

In a post-soviet period, issue of regional integration between South Caucasian countries required very careful approach. Classifying trade relations with neighboring states is a current issue, as ongoing integration processes in the world require regional unification – that in our case implies South Caucasian integration that might enable us to actively get involved into world market. Initial and widespread form of foreign-economic relations is the trade, therefore study should be started from the most simple form. "Trade history is quite broad and important issue of economic life in general or history of public economy. It concerns every sector of economy more or less; moreover, it goes on demarcation lines of the country's domestic and foreign policy, state, public and cultural evolution and at some extent it defines their nature and directions" [3;6] These words of great Georgian scientist economist, Ak. P. Gugushvili shows us necessity of studying history of trade relations between South Caucasian countries. This study might enable to discover obstacles of trade development and find solutions.

Importance of modest capabilities of South Caucasian countries will be increased in case if they integrate in some coalition or union on regional and sub-regional levels. In order to find complex solution of complicated political, socio-economic and ecological problems presented in Caucasian region application of traditional methods might be less effective. Therefore, search of new ways requires simultaneous study of rules of modern social development and of external factors. Strengthening of economic integration will influence establishing of peace in this region and its political stability.

Current situation of scientific studies of the problem:

Research subject and object: Subject of the research is historical factors defining economic integration of South Caucasian countries, while object of the research is trade relations of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Theoretical and methodological basics of the work: Academician P. Gugushvili gave an origin of complex study of economic development of South Caucasus with his eight-volume monographic work – "Economic development of Georgia and Transcaucasia countries in XIX-XX centuries". It has studied economic development of Transcaucasia in details in a pre-Soviet period. Volume-VI of these monographs is dedicated to the trade development in Transcaucasia in 1831-1883YY. Century before events are curiously similar to the nowadays reality. On the basis of the mentioned work is has become possible to draw parallels with the modern world and to have alternate, new view on problem solutions. Another work that provides support in this is M. Maksoev's "Caucasus". Solution of the issues of vital importance presented in this region requires cardinal changes in our conscience. Author's this conclusion was once again proved by the events of recent years.

Study of trade relations is impossible without considering production. While discussing historical factor of economic integration, we have presented analysis of functional peculiarities and essence of Economic region of Soviet Transcaucasia. In the research of industrial development of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia great assistance was derived from T. Khoshtaria's work on "Issues of industrial development in Transcaucasian economic region".

Many scientists-economists are studying Caucasus as an economic unit. These researches are somehow connected with the subject of our research.