

## VOLGA RIVER AS CULTURAL-AESTHETIC TOPOS OF TOURISM AND TRAVELLING

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*Today the role of cultural heritage in the process of creation of the images of national identity becomes the sphere of intent research interest. In the focus of this interest there are the following matters: participation of tourists in the processes of globalization and cultural exchange. Touristic world is structured according to aesthetic criteria. In the pictures of the artists of the XIX century who took off to travel down Volga, to observe and to work in the open air we can trace artistic evolution of landscape painting. The largest European river is a spatial object regularly recalled in academic and artistic discourses, which is also scenery and a place of observation for many generations of aborigines and tourists. Volga River serves a certain highlighter of construction of national identity, symbolizes historical succession of cultural heritage, is a cultural-aesthetic topos of tourism and travelling filled with personal images.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Modern tourism reflects historically determined and anthropologically endless multiplicity of ways to construct own local experience and identity. Modern practices of tourism mean thoughtful and constructive message of organization of the whole travel. Today “an intent look of a tourist” becomes a universal notion. Analysis of modern sociological theories allows to determine the concept of posttourist, co-tourist and classify the practices of consumption of characteristics, symbols, destinations which become more and more unified (Harvey, 2006). In the age of global instability the role of cultural heritage in the process of creation of the images of national identity becomes the sphere

of intent research interest. In the focus of this interest there are the following matters: tourists' participation in the processes of globalization and cultural exchange, consumption and construction of cultural identities by means of tourism practices, production and construction of images and symbols of "your own" and "other" cultures. According to J. Urry metaphor "tourist" appoints to an organized movement of people, inclined to impose own meanings to strange places (Urry, 2000: 27).

The collective team project of 2000-2002 aimed at investigation of cultural diversity in the modern world and realized with the support of Boston University had summed up massive research work in China, Taiwan, Japan, India, Germany, Hungary, the SAR, Chile, Turkey, the USA which allowed to make a number of conclusions. First, today we are watching the incipient global culture as the search of the identity "between global homogeneity and provincial isolation". Second, global culture is accompanied by the elements of modernization and locality such as local alteration. Third, cultural globalization may be considered as a process of "creating an appropriate platform for reviving tradition, not only as a political or economic movement, but also a cultural movement with its driving forces and theoretical construct". Fourth, varied tourism intended for representatives of all groups is an important means of cognition of cultural multiplicity of the modern world (Many Globalizations, 2002: 17, 336).

Close interconnection of tourism and culture in the modern variable world is traced by J. Urry: contact of cultures occurs as the result of different mobility including touristic one. National identity is more often defined in terms of not only local but also global scene (Urry, 2002: 146). Z. Bauman believes that touristic world is entirely structured according to aesthetic criteria: what tourist wants may be defined by "the right not to be bored" and "freedom from everything but aesthetic measurement" (Bauman, 1996: 30).

## **TO THEME HISTORY**

V. O. Klyuchevsky studied the Russian history and national unique identity and singled out three elements which had influenced the genesis of Russian soul. They are forest, steppe and river. According to this historian Russian soul is close to river with its not rough stream and cyclic recurrence of spring floods which teaches to order and gives the feeling of peace. C. Ely addresses to analysis of genesis of Russian landscape with regard of content of tourism in the Volga region and Russian landscape aesthetics. The main idea of landscape is visual

aesthetic perception of scenery as a characteristic feature of the modern history connected with urbanization and mass tourism. He believes that a unique approach to the environment in which a very important place belongs to Volga has been developed in Russia. When in the end of the XIX century steamship tourism appeared the river got the main role in articulation of the new aesthetic principles. The following representations of Volga in tourist guide-books, films about journeys and visual mass media became attempts to coordinate a tourist's look which is able to appreciate the beauty of the scenery with an adopted concept of Russian nature which addressed to its moderate picturesqueness (Ely, 2003).

### **CULTURAL-AESTHETIC TOPOS AS A COMPONENT OF TOURISTS' SPACE**

Distinctive highlighters of the modern tourism and travelling are spatial mobility and temporality. Unlike time which is steadily turning "away", space is always fixed "here". It is something that can be seen or imagine. Looking at spatial and temporal components in practices of tourism and travelling we base on the following points.

First, space is anthropological. It presents the field for actions; constructed place for inhabitation of people – «home», «world», «country». Space is a concept, it embraces a look of a human being (Urry, 2002: 31) – an aborigine and tourist. Cultural-aesthetic topos is constructed by means of emotionally filled personal meanings as the result of impressions acquired in trips, places visited, literature, and artistic images. Some components of topos are real and clear, some are diffused, others are imaginary, all together they make fragmentary and at the same time broad picture of individually constructed space of our motherland (Chernjavskaia, 2006: 41).

Second, space is existential. It forms interrelated images which allow creating long-term and steady personal and group living strategies. Potential of space is in creating existential-geographic images as the system of signs, symbols, archetypes, stereotypes characterizing a certain territory from the point of view of living significance and strategies (Josiam, 2008). Cognitive source for construction of new existential-geographic images is interference of topos of inner mental spaces with a certain geographic route (Zamyatin, 2009: 61).

Third, presenting itself in time and space cultures suggest that they are eternal and potentially cannot be destroyed. Cultures fix their uniqueness in a certain "mirror" which is the image of nature. By means of image-symbolic interaction directed to imaginary here-and-now past

the image of place is enlarged and symbolic appropriation of space happens through its imaginary expansion. Image-symbolic transformations of the modern space transfer past into future, while present acquires its own valuable cultural coordinates “tied” to a certain territory (Zamyatin, 2008: 44).

Fourth, informational support of a cultural landscape is formed due to literature and artistic process (Dritsas, 2006). Cultural-aesthetic topos is constructed in the process of the co-authorship of the artist with natural and socio-cultural processes.

## **THE RIVER VOLGA IN RUSSIAN PAINTING OF A XIX-TH CENTURY**

Panoramic landscapes and anthropogenic elements of Volga scenery are reflected in the works of art of Russian painters of the second half of the XIX century. Artists took river trips by boats and motor ships, moved from one Volga town to another, made drafts, sketches and studies. Travels and artistic studies resulted in creating unique authentic landscapes, showing the smallest details of the Volga scenery. In 1838 N. G. Chernetsov and his brother took a trip down Volga and made the panorama of its banks. He created a canvas “Zhigouli on Volga” (figure 1). In 1860s A. P. Bogolyubov had been travelling along Volga for a long time. As a result appeared landscapes “Ipatiev monastery near Kostroma” (1861), «Religious procession with cross and banners in Yaroslavl» (figure 2), “Winter in Borisoglebsk”, “Nizhniy Novgorod” (1877). Thanks to common trip of I. E. Repin and F. A. Vasiliev appeared drawings and canvases among which the most colorful is “View on Volga. Barges” (figure 3). “Barge haulers near Volga” created by I. E. Repin (figure 4) after travelling over Volga towns showed that the 29-year-old painter was able to raise the genre of landscape to epic one. The picture was sent to the World exhibition in Vienna where the audience and the experts unanimously recognized it to be the best piece of the Russian section of the exhibition. In 1887-1890 I. I. Levitan used to take trips to Volga and during them he created canvases “Evening. Golden reach of river” (1889), “After rain. Reach of river” (1889), “Village on the river’s bank” (1890), “Evening bells” (1892), “Over the eternal rest” (figure 5), “Refreshing breeze. Volga” (1895). In 1888 A. E. Arkchipov and his friends from Moscow school of Art, Sculpture and Architecture took off to a travel down Volga where he got the plot of picture “Near Volga” (figure 6) which depicts emotional experience of the

character by means of landscape painting. In 1900 Saratov artists P. S. Utkin and P. V. Kuznetsov started travel by boat down Volga from Simbirsk to Saratov, which resulted in creating canvas "Near Volga" by P. S. Utkin (figure 7). The beauty and uniqueness of Volga scenery was depicted in their canvases by such painters as G. Soroka "Fishermen" (the second half of the 1840s); A. K. Savrasov "Volga" (figure 8), "High water of Volga near Yaroslavl" (1871), "By the end of summer on Volga" (1873), "Spring of a big river" (1880s), "Spring" (1883); L. L. Kamnev "View to Kazanka river (1875); F. A. Vasiliev "View near Volga"; M. K. Klodt "Volga near Simbirsk" (1881); V. E. Borisiv-Mousatov "In the boat" (1892); N. N. Doubovskoy "Near the Volga" (figure 9); A. I. Savinov "The Volga sketch" (1904); J. Weber (collection of Volga landscapes in the local lore museum of Engels). In the pictures of the artists of the second half of the XIX century who took off to travel down Volga and Volga towns, to observe and to work in the open air we can trace artistic evolution of landscape painting. Travelling down Volga becomes a sacral way for artists finding an existential sense of their life in it.

## OPINIONS OF TOURISTS ON TRAVEL ON THE RIVER VOLGA

During June 2009 we carried out an empiric research in the form of a half-structured interview among tourists such as passengers of cruise motor ships travelling back and forth Volga. Particularly, opinions of 22 cruisers travelling on board of motor ship "Alexander Nevsky" from Volgograd to Kazan and back were summarized. As a motivational factor of travelling down and up Volga, cruisers mentioned aesthetic pleasure of looking at natural landscapes and cultural places of interest. They admit that they are charmed by the Volga scenery viewed from the spacious deck.

*"In this journey we visually percept beautiful landscapes, just delight for the sight!" [I6]<sup>1</sup>. "Here, on the water, the magnificence of the view opens itself... One thing – to follow a map, and quite another is observing ships, banks" [I17] "Positive impressions from the journey: get aesthetic pleasure, in each town there is something unique" [I14].*

The interviewees are unanimous in that Volga is an inexhaustible source of spiritual and physical health.

*"Travelling down Volga for me is rest for mind, life motivation, new impressions, plenty of fresh air, joy of life" [I3]. "I thought – it'd be nice to see Volga, Volga region, the heart of Russia, I want to get new impressions. How can one travel abroad without knowing your native*

land?" (15). "Trip down Volga gives you positive emotions – things we see, hear, and take part in, how it feels. For my granddaughter this journey is an impact for the future to broaden her view, to become more easy-going, more alive, joyful" [I15].

Many tourists emphasize their wish to find balance during this river trip which is also taken as the aim of the trip and as a condition for feeling well. "Water gives peace to soul and body. For me this is valuable rest" [I22]. "Travelling means new impressions. I love water very much. The nature is beautiful" [I16]. Tourists travelling up and down Volga possess the feeling of harmony between motion and rest.

## CONCLUSIONS

So, river trips and observation Volga scenery are impulse for artistic activity. Cultural-aesthetic topos is constructed in the process of co-authorship of a painter with natural and socio-cultural processes. Painters come to understanding their need in spatial mobility along Volga and Volga towns, they become travelers themselves. From our point of view representation of attractive artistic images of Volga scenery serves as an important informative-excursionist component of tourism in the Volga region. The largest European and Russian river is a spatial object regularly recalled in academic and artistic discourses, which is also scenery and a place of observation for many generations of aborigines and tourists. Volga serves a certain highlighter of construction of national identity, symbolizes historical succession of cultural heritage, is a cultural-aesthetic topos of tourism and travelling filled with personal images as the result of trips, places visited and artistic images. It is important to be proud, to enjoy, to make popular Volga and Volga landscapes which surround us.

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## ENDNOTES

1. Interview is taken from author's archive. I6: here and forth letter-numeric sign addresses to a number of interview

**Figure 1** N. G. Chernetsov “Zhigouli on Volga”, 1866.



*Saratov State Artistic Museum named after A. N. Radischev.*

**Figure 2.** A. P. Bogolyubov «Religious procession with cross and banners in Yaroslavl”, 1863.



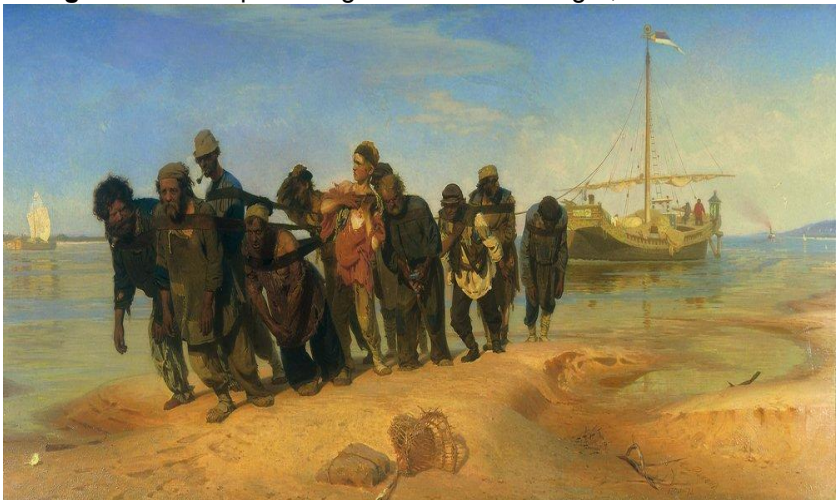
*Saratov State Artistic Museum named after A. N. Radischev.*

**Figure 3** F. A. Vasiliev “View on Volga. Barges”, 1870.



*State Russian Museum, S-Petersburg.*

**Figure 4** I. E. Repin. “Barge haulers near Volga”, 1870-1873.



*State Russian Museum, S-Petersburg.*

**Figure 5** I. I. Levitan “Over the eternal rest”, 1894.



*State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.*

**Figure 6** A. E. Arkhipov “Near Volga”, 1889.



*State Russian Museum, S-Petersburg.*

**Figure 7** P. S. Utkin, "Near Volga", 1901.



*Saratov State Artistic Museum named after A. N. Radischev.*

**Figure 8** A. K. Savrasov, "Volga", 1870s.



*Saratov State Artistic Museum named after A. N. Radischev.*

**Figure 9** N. N. Doubovskoy "Near the Volga", 1892.



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