



## A Study on the Use of Tourism as a Soft Power Instrument in International Relations\*

Bahadır İnanç Özkan<sup>1</sup> , Yasin Boylu<sup>2</sup> 

### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of the political crisis between the Russian Federation and Turkey in 2015 on the tourism sector in the latter. The political crisis was sparked by shooting down of a Russian military aircraft by the Turkish warplanes on the Turkish – Syrian border in November 2015. During that period, the Russian Federation implemented a number of decisions, one of which was a travel ban to Turkey, and this negatively impacted the Turkish tourism sector, particularly in Antalya. The research involved obtaining information on how tourism was used as a soft power instrument by the Russian Federation as a deterrent. A qualitative method was used, as well as phenomenology. The data were collected through a semi-structured survey that included five themes about which the selected tourism partners in Turkey were interviewed. For the research, with its subcategories of tourists and tour operators, tourism is regarded as a soft power instrument. The findings show that political crises have negative reflections on the tourism sector. This paper may assist researchers who interested in studying tourism within international relations.

### Keywords

Tourism, Tourist, International relations, Foreign Policy, Soft power

\* This article is based on a PhD thesis.

1 **Correspondence to:** Bahadır İnanç Özkan (Dr.), Ankara, Turkey. E-mail: inancozkan@gmail.com ORCID: 0000-0002-7665-6765

2 Yasin Boylu (Prof. Dr.), Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University, School of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic. E-mail: yasinboylu@gmail.com ORCID: 0000-0002-4226-232X

**To cite this article:** Ozkan, B. I., & Boylu, Y. (2021). A Study on the Use of Tourism as a Soft Power Instrument in International Relations. *Journal of Tourismology*, 7(1), 73-99. <https://doi.org/10.26650/jot.2021.7.1.0004>



## Introduction

While much is known about the relationship between tourism and international affairs, the literature on linking tourism with international relations is still limited. Against this background, the central question that motivates this article is: how were tourism and tourists used by the Russian Federation as a soft power instrument against Turkey during the crisis period in 2015 and 2016? The link between tourism and international relations is established through international travel. The attractiveness of destinations, curiosity, increased national income, and mutual visa agreements are some of the factors responsible for the increase in international travel. On the other hand, countries may take restrictive or prohibitive decisions affecting travel for political reasons (Prezident Rossii, 2015).

One of these bans occurred due to the political crisis between the Russian Federation and Turkey in 2015 (BBC, 2016). Due to the travel ban imposed on Turkey by the Russian Federation, tourism shareholders, accommodation businesses and travel agencies, and tourism employees serving the Russian market in Turkey were negatively affected. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study regarding tourism reflections of the Russian Federation and Turkey.

Although the crisis between the two countries in 2015 had a political dimension, the damage caused by the crisis should not be interpreted only using numerical data. In a crisis, it is assumed that tourism can be a political tool in international relations, and the effects may be felt in employment, investment, and transportation in the tourism sector. Furthermore, situations such as countries' deteriorating relations in international relations and situations leading to a showdown can plunge businesses into a crisis they were never expecting (Çakmak, 2019, p. 14).

Among the causes of tourism crises, economic, political, socio-cultural, technological, and environmental factors can be listed (Henderson, 2007, p. 3). Reasons such as stagnation or recession in the economy and fluctuations in exchange rates may lead to a tourism crisis. Depending on the nature of the change occurring within the economy, the demand will recover or worsen in the resource markets while simultaneously making the markets more or less attractive in terms of targets, prices, and products (Davidson & Cope, 2003, p. 14).

In politics, tourism crises are a dimension of political crises, and tourism itself is a matter of political debate and contention (Cheong & Miller, 2000). Government structures and processes shape tourism movements and the sector's functioning at home and abroad at the national and international levels. Good relations between countries facilitate the flow of tourists. The opposite is also true, and international tensions tend to reduce or control the flow of tourists. (Henderson, 2007, p. 34).

The present study explores the ways in which tourism is used when there is a political crisis between countries. To put it in simple terms, when the crisis arose between the Russian Federation and Turkey in November 2015, everyone thought that it was a political one and it would soon be over. However, when this political crisis reached its climax, tourism was recognized as among the sectors negatively affected due to the number of foreign tourists coming to Turkey from the Russian Federation. As stated above, travels to Turkey were banned by the Russian Federation and it was not taken into account that tourism may be used as a soft power instrument under the circumstances. However, little is known about the relationship between soft power and tourism, and it is not clear what factors are used as a soft power instrument in terms of tourism during a crisis. Thus, there are two primary aims of this study: 1. To examine the relationship between soft power and tourism 2. To ascertain which tourism actors are used to exert soft power. A qualitative method was adopted, and the study was conducted in the form of a semi-structured survey with data being gathered via phone conversation, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with Turkish tourism partners. The findings should make an important contribution to the field of tourism. This study is unable to encompass all Turkish and Russian tourism partners. The remaining part of the paper proceeds as follows: a) Soft Power and Tourism, b) Literature review, c) Methodology, d) Results, and e) Discussions. Six factors related to tourism as a soft power instrument were established.

### **Soft Power and Tourism**

The concept of soft power first introduced by J.S. Nye to the literature in 1989 expresses an element's ability to shape other elements' preferences. Soft power is based not only on the ability to persuade and mobilize people but also to attract the other party. Soft power employs the charm created by shared values and the correctness and responsibility of contributing to these values to ensure cooperation between actors. The soft power of a country is based on the following three sources: culture (where it attracts others), political values (demonstrating behaviour at home and abroad in line with the political values possessed), and foreign policies (other actors perceiving these policies as legitimate), and the elements of soft power are as follows: media, nongovernmental organizations, and higher education institutions (Nye, 2017, p. 24-32).

The effects of tourism on soft power can be divided into two parts in terms of host and sending parties. One of the priority tasks that decision-makers in the tourism sector should execute is to create an attractive image of the country as a travel destination for the global tourism market. Moreover, a well-designed image becomes a powerful trump card to counteract negative impressions about the destination. Thus, the country will have the opportunity to tell its story to the whole world. Secondly,

based on Nye's theory, both foreign policy and cultural consumption are soft power sources. Tourism policies can be used in foreign policy in a particular country or worldwide by influencing the target audience's ideas and transferring political values, cultural values, beliefs, and agendas. For the sending party, tourism may encourage countries to pursue good diplomatic relations and follow some criteria determined by the countries that receive tourists (Yang, 2019, p. 6-8).

There are at least four interlinked ways of looking at tourism and soft power. First, tourists will provide a better understanding of the destination leading to greater empathy. Second, tourism authorities are tasked with presenting an attractive image of their country to the world. Third, the Olympics and worldwide expos are also crucial in building geopolitical impact. These attract the tourists, exhibit the destination, and communicate with their capacities. Fourth, tourists traveling abroad convey their country's messages (Ooi, 2016, p. 860).

Furthermore, tourism as a soft power tool can be used in foreign aid activities. After the earthquake and tsunami in the Indian Ocean in 2004, former Chinese minister Jiabao Wen attended the ASEAN Leaders' Meeting held with a special agenda, and at the end of the meeting, when circumstances returned to normal, the Chinese government promised to encourage Chinese tourists to travel to the countries affected by the disaster. A similar situation can be seen in the disaster experienced by Japan on 11 March 2011 (Xu et al, 2018).

International tourism cooperation agreements can be cited as an example of using tourism to exert soft power. With these agreements, countries provide each other with their experiences in tourism, their technologies, education, infrastructure opportunities and their development, the creation of a touristic product, new investment opportunities, and technical expert support for stakeholders in the tourism sector (Aydemir & Bal, 2018).

### **The Literature Review**

Based on the academic studies on the relationship between tourism and soft power, it has been determined that the use of tourists as a soft power instrument in tourism-developed regions such as the city of Tai'an in Shandong Province, China is closely related to local development, so personal perspectives to support the use of tourists in this way have been revealed (Han et al., 2012). In a study (Tse, 2013) indicating that China uses outbound tourists to exert soft power in foreign policy and that this practice constitutes an integral whole with Chinese politics (Tse, 2013), it is stated that the number of tourists to be sent to countries is determined depending on the relations between those countries and China within the context of the Chinese foreign policy. Moreover, examination of the effect of politics on tourism in China reveals that

outbound tourists can be used to exert soft power in solving diplomatic problems. In a study examining the effect of Turkish TV series sold abroad on the number of tourists coming to Turkey, it was determined that these TV series had a positive impact on the number of tourists coming to the country by using secondary data on tourism. A successful film or TV series may create a positive image of a location, and films such as *Troy*, *Brave Heart*, etc. affected the destinations positively in terms of tourist flow (Anaz & Özcan, 2016). Cankurtaran and Cetin (2016) examined the impact of political principles and foreign policy of Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party, JDP) on the number of foreign tourists from the Middle East to Turkey. That study asserted that the conservative identity and foreign policy of JDP caused a considerable increase of foreign tourists from the Middle East. The authors suggested Muslim friendly products and services should be incorporated into tourism strategies if Turkey wants to its market in the Middle East. In a study conducted on the Chinese government's use of outbound tourists for enhancing its relations with African countries (Chen & Duggan, 2016), the overlooked political effects of outbound tourists were examined. Policy documents and campaign materials were analyzed methodologically, and two people were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire. It was discovered that not all African countries were successful in attracting Chinese tourists. Another study is about Wuzhen, historic town which has become the most popular tourist destination in China in recent years. It explores how effective Wuzhen reflects the soft power of China via focusing on English-speaking countries (Mao, 2017). Khodadi (2018) analyzed the relationship between foreign policy and tourism through a nuclear agreement with Iran. It was stated that speeches of the U.S. president about the withdrawal from nuclear agreement with Iran negatively affected tourism investments in Iran. Factor and structural analysis methods as well as content analysis were used in an examining soft power in the Russian tourism sector. According to the study's results, it was discovered that the use of soft power in the tourism sector positively affected tourists' flow both on a national and regional basis (Bunakov et al., 2018). In another study based on the concept of soft power, it was analysed how China used its citizens and to whom it sent as tourists as a soft power tool and what successes were achieved. That study concluded that tourism-based soft power builds government policies that cover destination status, cultural activities, interactions between tourists and hosts, tourism as foreign aid, and tourism cooperation (Xu et al., 2018). Hussin (2018) studied the relationship between soft power and tourism in terms of 5 interrelated approaches proposed by Ooi, as a case study, and whether Malaysia attained the goals by using them. That study found that 5 interrelated approaches proposed by Ooi have sufficient criteria to analyze a country's tourism policy. In another study, the strategy of promoting Japanese culture, which was launched by Japan in 2012 called "Cool Japan." was adopted as a soft power approach. It was suggested that the relationship between anime, anime culture,

and travelling to Japan should be based on conceptual framework as a soft power, and the effect of anime on travel motivation has been investigated. It was found that anime fans can create tourism potential and they have implications for destination marketing (Agyeiwaah et al, 2018) Research examining effects of the relationship between soft power and cultural tourism on Lithuanian tourism, using a comparative statistical method and interview technique to determine the role tourism plays on soft power, found that cultural tourism can be a channel of soft power and tourism has an indirect effect on soft power (Jureniene & Jurene, 2019). Seyfi and Hall (2020) investigated the relationship between international sanctions and tourism. They found that international sanctions seriously affected the tourism sector, accommodation facilities, travel agencies, and the image of destinations, and that these sanctions also negatively affected financial investments and supply chain.

### **Methodology**

This study aimed to determine the damages caused to tourism by the crisis between the two countries in 2015, to assess tourists' role in putting pressure on a country, and to reveal why alternative markets could not be found during the crisis in question. In line with the study's aim, a qualitative research technique, phenomenology, was used (Kocabiyik, 2016).

The research data were obtained from interviews with tourism partners in Turkey using a semi-structured interview form consisting of five themes. In determining the research themes, the effect of income and investment, i.e. tourism's monetary economic effects, and the employment effect, one of the real economic impacts of tourism (Ünlüönen et al., 2009), were considered. In determining the crisis management theme, macro-environmental factors, which are among the factors that businesses producing touristic goods and services should consider in their tourism marketing activities, were also considered (Kozak, 2014). Maximum variation sampling, a purposeful sampling method, was used to form the study group.

The research universe comprised of institutions, organizations, and individuals that can be considered the tourism sector partners in line with the study's purpose, and the study group consisted of various public and private sector stakeholders in the tourism sector, determined by the maximum variation sampling method. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism and universities represented the public stakeholders in the study group. The private sector stakeholders included in the research were the Mediterranean Tourist Hoteliers Association (AKTOB), the Turkey Travel Agencies Association (TURSAB), the Turkey Travel Agencies Association's Regional Representative Councils, the Association of South Aegean Hoteliers (GETOB), the Alanya Representation of the International Skål Federation, Tourism Media

Organizations, the Turkey Hoteliers Federation (TUROFED), the Tourist Guides Association (TUREB), the Antalya Chamber of Guides (ARO), the Mugla Chamber of Guides (MUTRO), a private company that conducts data research in the field of tourism, and an international tour operator operating in the Mediterranean region. Russia is the leading country in the Turkish tourism market (TurkStat, 2020). Since a crisis with a market leader country affects destinations more, the crisis was discussed from the perspective of Turkey.

The interviews with the participants were conducted by telephone due to the pandemic process. The data used in the study were collected between 1 June and 14 July 2020. During the interview, it was observed that the participants did not digress from the subject with their answers, and no additions were made to questions. On the other hand, the answers given by participants to the questions were sorted during the analysis of data. After this sorting process, the findings were defined and categorized, and citations were made. In order to make a descriptive analysis, sound recordings were listened four times during the transcription process, and the deciphered texts were read three times as a whole. A computer-based qualitative data analysis program was not used. After the data was documented, sub-categories were generated under each theme, and sub-categories were created below these categories. A descriptive code was given to each participant.

**Table 1**  
*Information About the Study Group*

Participant	Participant Code	Number of Participants
Ministry of Culture and Tourism	MCT	1
SKAL, AKTOB, GETOB, TURSAB, TURSAB RO, TUREB, ARO, MUTRO	TPA	15
Media Institutions	MI	3
University	U	2
Private company	PC	2
Total		23

TPA: Tourism Professional Associations

When the number of tourists coming to Turkey from the Russian Federation up to 2016, when the ban was imposed, is examined, it was seen that the highest figure recorded was 4,479,049 people in 2014. This figure was 3,649,003 in 2015 and 866,256 in 2016. With the improvement in relations between the two countries, positive momentum occurred, and there were 7,017,657 tourists in 2019 (Turkstat, 2020).

On a national basis, tourism revenues followed an upward trend and reached their highest level in 2014 of 34.3 billion USD. Tourism revenue, which was 31.5 billion USD in 2015, was 22.1 billion USD in 2016 when the travel ban imposed by the

Russian Federation came into effect. With the improvement in bilateral relations, Turkey’s tourism income, the highest income of the pre-crisis period, reached 34.5 billion USD in 2019 (Turkstat, 2020).

Although there was no decline in the total number of those employed in Turkey’s accommodation and food service activities due to the 2015 tourism crisis, it is considered that there may have been regional repercussions since Russian tourists prefer the Mediterranean region. Accordingly, instead of Turkish Statistics Institute (Turkstat) statistics showing accommodation and food service activity in Turkey, the interviewees were asked about this effect (Turkstat, 2020).

**Results**

The first theme covered by the research was employment. Within this theme, the answer to the following research question was asked:

*Q1: What were the effects of the decrease in the number of tourists coming from Russia to Turkey in terms of employment during the period in question?*

Participants’ responses to this question emerged in two categories.

**Table 2**  
*The Effect of Using Tourism as Soft Power on Employment in the Tourism Sector*

Theme	Category	Sub-Category
Employment	Direct Effect	The decrease in employment in the accommodation sector, Decrease in jobs in the travel sector, Effects on seasonal employees.
	Indirect Effect	Employment decrease in food and beverage businesses, Gift sellers, Jewelry shops, etc.

**Direct effet**

*U1 - Male, 67, Academician, Sector Representative*

*It definitely affected employment negatively since tourism is a labour-intensive sector. We have three types of staff in holiday hotels: permanent staff for 12 months, seasonal staff, and eight-month staff. We also have part-time employees during the peak periods of the season. Of course, you keep the 12-month staff on even when you are closed, like security, management, or talented cooks. When you start to open up the facility, you gradually attract other staff; in this case, the facilities did not have to seek part-time employees, which negatively affected employment.*

## Indirect effect

*TPA1 - Male, 50, Business Owner*

*With the 2016 crisis, there was a sharp decrease in the number of tourists coming from Russia. Many hotels and businesses are operating only in the Russian market. Many people work in places such as jewelry shops, leather, and souvenirs shops in addition to these hotels. The decrease in the number greatly affected the sector and the employees in the places I mentioned earlier. Some people could not find a job.*

The second theme within the scope of this research was investment. Firstly, the answer to the following research question was sought regarding investment:

**Q2:** *What happened to tourism investments originating from Russia in said period?*

Participants' answers to this question emerged in three categories.

**Table 3**

*The Impact of Using Tourism as Soft Power on Russia Originated Tourism Investments in Turkey*

Theme	Category	Sub-Category
Investment	Accommodation Facility Investments	The decrease in hotel investments
	Travel Agency Investments	The decrease in Travel Agency investments
	Real Estate Investments	The decrease in housing purchases

## Impact on Accommodation Facility Investments:

*MI2 - Male, 67, Tourism Media Member*

*All of the companies that work with Russia and even dominate the Russian market are Turkish. In the Russian market, the entire Russian travel industry is in the hands of the Turks. If we look at it like this, it can be assumed that the Russians have investments in Turkey, but those who make those investments are Turks, not Russians. Ninety percent of the tourists coming to Turkey are also brought to Turkey by these Turkish companies. So, the Russians have no investment in terms of tourism in Turkey. However, these tour operators of Turkish origin that we have mentioned have serious investments in Turkey; they have investments in the network of airlines, hotels, travel agencies, and tour operators. It is crucial to evaluate the situation by looking at that fine point. When you consider that Turkish companies are already dominant in the market, they have serious investments in Turkey. These investments experienced difficulties after the downing of the Russian plane.*

## **The Impact on Travel Agency Investments**

*U2 - Male, 47, Academic*

*... Some agreements were made. The Russians had partnerships in Turkey, particularly regarding agency issues, and there were some problems in that regard... They had purchases through the agency; they stopped for a certain period. However, as soon as the incident was resolved, the investments continued where they had left off.*

## **Effect on Real Estate Investments:**

*TPA4 - Male, 62, Business Owner*

*... Mostly our southern coasts were like the summer resorts in Russia. In parallel with this, housing purchases created direct demand, but there was an immediate slowdown with the plane crisis. Some investors even sold their investments and returned to their countries.*

The third theme within the scope of the research was income. Two questions were asked on this theme.

**Q3:** *How did the decreases in businesses' incomes with the start of reservation cancellations originating from Russia affect the businesses' primary and secondary fields of activity?*

Participants' responses to this question fell into three different categories.

**Table 4**

*The Effect of Using Tourism to exert Soft Power on the Loss in Income Drops of Tourism Businesses in Primary and Secondary Fields of Activity*

Theme	Category	Sub-Category
Income	Primary activity	Failure to pay loans, loss of personnel, difficulty in repayments, downsizing, postponement of renovation, transportation revenues, suppliers, secondary businesses (restaurant rental), tour services
	Secondary activity	The decrease in car rental income
	Multiplier Effect	The decline in the income of carpet shops; greenhouse producers; meat combines, furnishings; glassware, and bedding companies; agriculture; sellers of construction materials such as glass, tiles, paint, etc.; egg producers

### **Effects of Income Decline in Primary Fields of Activity:**

*TPA2 - Male, 58, Business Owner*

*It affected tourism very negatively. Compared with the rest of the world, tourism in Turkey has reached its present state via a much faster growth trend. It has always been with investments; it has been with excessive growth. This growth does not necessarily happen through financial resources. Therefore, this direct income loss also disrupted people's companies' financial structures, upsetting the debt-receivable balance. At that time, there were some companies that had severe difficulties with the banks, that could or could not defer loan installments, and went bankrupt.*

### **Effects of Income Decline on Secondary Fields of Activity:**

*TPA12- Male, 55, Professional Tourist Guide*

*Of course, secondary fields of activity are also seriously interrupted, such as car rental. Think of a Russian agency; the first thing it does is to cancel its rented cars immediately.*

### **Multiplier Effect:**

*M11 - Male, 57, Media Member*

*... The tourism crisis affects 54 sectors. Glass producers, food producers, and egg producers are in this category. Therefore, a broad population is adversely affected. When we look at it, it was the tourism professionals who took the most damage. However, besides this, it could be food, furnishings, chairs, glassware, and indirectly selling goods to tourism and hotels. Because some products that can be broken in hotels should be replaced within a certain period, their income is also affected.*

The fourth theme within the scope of the research was crisis management. Within the crisis management theme, categories were created according to the answers received from the participants.

**Q4:** *Was the Tourism Action Plan announced during that period satisfactory?*

Although most participants responded negatively to this question, they also made a general evaluation of the action plan in question and presented alternatives. According to the results obtained from these evaluations, it was concluded that the participants' responses fit within two categories.

**Table 5**  
*Evaluation of Tourism Action Plan by Tourism Stakeholders*

Theme	Category	Sub-Category
Evaluation of the tourism action plan	Compensation for crisis-related losses	Failure to increase the number of tourists, not being able to compensate for the loss of income, inability to reverse the decrease in investments, inability to attract tourists from alternative markets, unfair distribution of incentives, unfair use of Eximbank loans
	Action plan alternatives	A political solution, ability to take a position against the crisis, diplomatic solution, reduction of regional dependence on Russian tourists, better crisis management of the ministry and the state, package of measures to solve the problem

**Compensation for crisis-related losses:**

*TPA1 - Male, 71, Former President of TURSAB*

*There are still suspicions that the implementation was done in a way that favoured some selected businesses. For instance, the written motion asking which companies received how much support was not answered on the grounds of it being a “trade secret,” and the issue was also excluded from the Turkish Grand National Assembly audit. An incentive is a form of subsidy. It was applied via an anti-competitive and preferential approach. Once diplomatic relations with Russia improved, the incentives had little to no effect on this country’s resuming arrivals.*

**Action plan alternatives:**

*PCI- Male, 34, Operations Manager*

*...In Turkish-Russian relations, the bilateral ties between higher levels are more important in this regard, not over action plans or through various processes, but due to the two countries’ culture. If we had experienced the same situation with Germany, this action plan would have been taken seriously. There is a huge difference between persuading the German state to lift a travel warning to Turkey and convincing the Russian government. The course of bilateral relations is warmer. In Europe, it is moving a little more systematically. They are a bit more prescriptive, a little more disciplined. However, as I mentioned before, I can say that the most important thing is the foreign affairs between the two countries, whether at the level of the ministry of tourism, or directly at the presidency or prime ministry level, which are also more influential than that action plan.*

**Q5:** *Which markets could be alternatives to the Russian market in this crisis?*

The second question of the fourth theme, crisis management, was about markets that can be alternatives to the Russian market. The responses of the participants were divided into ten categories.

**Table 6**  
*Evaluation of Markets That May Be Alternative to the Russian Market by Tourism Stakeholders*

Theme	Category	Sub-Category
Evaluation of markets that can be alternative to the Russian market	Country Population	India, China
	Geographical Distance	America, India, China, Far East, South America
	Geographical proximity	Iran, Arab World, Israel, Balkans, Western Europe
	Domestic Tourism	Istanbul tourism, Black Sea tourism, Coastal tourism
	The similarity of Consumer Behaviour	Scandinavian market
	Cultural Relations	Balkans
	Market Size	India, China, Korea, Japan, Europe, Far East, Saudi Arabia
	Increasing Market Share	Europe, Russia, former iron curtain countries that are now the EU Member States
	Traveling Habits	Italy, France, America, China
	Alternative Tourism Types	High income Alternative Tourism Types

**Country Population:**

*TPA1 - Male, 50, Business Owner*

*...When there are problems with the Russian market, you cannot replace it with any other market. Even at that time, the Chinese market or a country with a large population such as India emerged as possible alternatives. Nevertheless, they could not be an alternatives since neither China nor India has the same characteristics.*

**Geographical Distance:**

*TPA10 - Female, 48, Business Owner*

*Take Turkey, put a compass on a map, and draw a circle for 4.5 hours of flight time. You can achieve mass tourism with the countries that fall within this circle. India or China are, of course, big markets. They involve serious numbers. The market number for the two is 1 billion. The other way to get the mass tourism is to fly full charter. It is when tour operators step in and fly them in. You usually do mass tourism*

*with the countries that are 4.5 hours away. It is not an easy thing to compensate for the Russian market with only one other country.*

**Geographical proximity:**

*TPA14 - Male, 45, Professional Tourist Guide*

*There have been urgent efforts towards solving this issue. There has been a shift towards Western Europe and the Balkans. After that, we saw a shift towards the Arab market, countries such as the UAE and Qatar. They contributed a little; Iran also contributed a little.*

**Domestic Tourism:**

*TPA3 - Male, 64, Business Owner*

*Perhaps the 2015 crisis lesson taught Turkey that tourism should not be linked only to mass tourism. Some progress has been made since then, but Turkey could not sustain it. If you look at it carefully, Istanbul and Black Sea tourism have become more important.*

**Consumer Behaviour Similarity:**

*PC2, Male, 49, Company Owner*

*Now that one market can be replaced by another, it means that consumer behaviour is parallel for the hotelier, so when you think of the Scandinavian market, you can say Norwegian, if not Swedish and Finnish, because the behaviour patterns are more or less the same.*

**Cultural Relations:**

*MI2 - Male, 67, Media Member*

*Unfortunately, Turkey has a Balkan market that is not discussed much; we have cultural relations and close ties with them. Thus, there is potential in the Balkan market in addition to the existing markets. However, it cannot be an alternative to fill the gap arising from Russia.*

**Market Size:**

*TPA4 - Male, 62, Business Owner*

*At that time, there was a massive demand from the Middle East market, and we received feedback. However, even though there were periodic improvements in the markets of Korea, China, and Japan, we could not achieve the numbers we wanted.*

### **Increasing Market Share:**

*TPA11 - Male, 51, Professional Tourist Guide*

*The closest place to you is Europe. You have many tourists from Europe, including Germany with 5 million and the UK with 2.5 million. You have to add to that number the number of Russians that did not arrive, so that you can compensate for it.*

### **Traveling Habits:**

*TPA2 - Male, 58, Business Owner*

*..Where could there be more? People from Italy in Central Europe do not come here. These are regions where the populations travel a lot. France is the same. The activity is high, income level is high, but they come to Turkey very little, maybe years ago. However, we would be in a stronger position now if we had targeted them.*

### **Alternative Tourism Types:**

*TPA2 - Male, 58, Business Owner*

*.. We should have put effort into such high-income alternative tourism rather than the Middle East side. I think we could both change this whole thing internally and increase our average prices.*

**Q6:** *Has the industry achieved satisfactory results for 2016 and the years following the end of the crisis?*

This is the third question involving the fourth theme, crisis management. According to the results obtained from the participants' answers to this question, two subcategories were determined.

**Table 7***Evaluation of the Results Achieved by the Sector since the End of the Crisis by Tourism Stakeholders*

Theme	Category	Sub-Category
Evaluation of the results achieved by the sector since the end of the crisis	Economic Effect	Compensation of active income, increase in market share (increase in the number of tourists), a continuation of investments, company growth (Professionalization), the establishment of partnerships, prevention of bankruptcies, increase in bed supply, increase in the length of stay, digitalization of the market, prevention of income loss
	Social Effect	Destination adoption

**Economic Effect:***TPA3 - Male, 64, Company Owner*

*Of course, the situation could not improve in a year. Indeed, we only had good days before the crisis in 2019. While everyone wondered if they could organize the renovations they had postponed during the Russian crisis, they also believed that they should not open up too much and not take on loans due to the lessons they learned from this crisis.*

**Social Effect:***TPA5 - Male, 63, General Coordinator*

*Look at the social side of this, not only economically since Russia is a cold country. The streets are empty there because of the cold. However, they consider Antalya, the Aegean region, and the Mediterranean region as somewhere to find happiness. They fulfill these desires very easily in Turkey.*

**Q7:** *How did the crisis affect businesses? (Some hotels never opened, some reduced business volume, some turned to the domestic market)*

This is the fourth question involving the fourth theme, crisis management. Based on the results obtained from the participants who answered this question, three different categories were determined.

**Table 8**

*Assessment of the Effect of the Crisis on Businesses by Tourism Stakeholders*

Theme	Category	Sub-Category
Evaluation of the reflection of the crisis on businesses	Economic Effect	Business closure, business failure of businesses to open, businesses' half-capacity operation, failure of businesses to pay off bank loans, bankruptcy, sequestration, stopping of investments, price reduction, reduction in business volume
	Employment Effect	Unemployment, sector change, delay in recruitment, unpaid leave
	Market Effect	Alternative market, the domestic market

**Economic Effect:**

*TPA6 - Male, 58, Business Owner*

*.... If 70% of the tourists come from the Russian market and when that market is closed down, our profit as a sector is zero; it does not even cover costs. Thus, many of them closed their businesses; some could not open them; some worked at half capacity.*

**Employment Effect:**

*MI2 - Male, 67, Media Member*

*The industry is already seasonal, with employees working in regular periods for 3-4 months. During the rest of the year, they are unemployed but are not considered so under the law. Since their contracts are suspended, they cannot receive unemployment benefits. Typically, an unemployed person can receive unemployment benefits if he or she applies. However, suspension is used in the tourism sector. According to this method, "I do not fire you; I suspend your employment contract until a certain date." Until that date, the employer does not pay wages, and the employee cannot receive unemployment benefits. In this regard, employees experienced severe difficulties. This resulted in two problems. First, employees gave up on the industry and started working elsewhere. They had already been experiencing unemployment problems due to this seasonality, but when this incident occurred, they started looking for a job in another sector. The sector lost its trained workforce, which is the basis of the success of Turkey in tourism.*

**Market Effect:**

*PCI- Male, 34, Operations Manager*

*Consider a bag shop, for example. Someone who runs a shop inside the hotel serving the Russian market asks the hotelier what they will do because he knows that no Russian tourists will come. When the hotelier responds that they will continue with domestic tourists, if the shopkeeper was planning to buy goods worth, say, 100-200 thousand TL, for the winter; for example, he gives up on that idea and instead starts to buy goods that Turkish tourists are likely want to buy, such as inflatable sea mattresses.*

The fifth theme of the research subject was Tourism and Politics. Categories were created according to the participants’ answers in response to the questions asked within this theme. Moreover, some questions in this theme were combined and analyzed by categorizing them according to their answers.

**Q8:** *Is it possible to see tourism as a part of international relations?*

Participants addressed this question in two ways. The first of these is the effect of foreign policy on tourism and the effect of foreign policy on cultural relations.

**Table 9**  
*Evaluation of Tourism as a Part of International Relations*

Theme	Category	Sub-Category
Evaluation of tourism as a part of international relations	Foreign policy’s impact on tourism	Aggressive foreign policy damages tourism, tourism reduces political tensions, and tourism helps break prejudices. Tourism contributes to world peace; political crises are reflected in tourism; tourism is used as a tool in diplomacy. The EU’s keeping its citizens within its borders ignores the benefits of politics and tourism, and the country that accepts tourists should have a soft style. Tourism affects international relations; political tensions hinder tourism investments. The aggressive foreign policy affects tourist demand, the use of tourism as an economic weapon and a means of pressure in foreign policy.
	Foreign policy’s impact on culture	Tourism enables cultural recognition, provides cultural proximity, intercultural reconciliation, and cultural interaction.

**Foreign Policy’s Impact on Tourism:**

*MI3 - Male, 42, Media Member*

*Just as an economy is a part of international relations, tourism is a much more significant part. You can also use the travel industry as an economic weapon and a tool of political pressure. There are many examples of this; travel alerts are issued frequently. It says in those warnings, “do not go unless it is necessary.” what does that mean? It says if you do not have a funeral or an emergency, do not go to this country as a tourist. However, there is a critical point there, that is, when a country officially says nonessential travel, that is, do not make non-compulsory trips, insurance companies do not provide you with travel insurance. As Europeans know this very well, they tend to avoid going to the countries for which there is a travel warning unless it is necessary.*

**Foreign Policy’s Impact on Culture:**

*MCT1 - Male, 52, Consultant*

*...There is a saying that “Man is the enemy of what he does not know.” With the flow of tourists between countries, people’s capacity to learn and understand each other’s cultures increases and leads to positive thoughts.*

**Q9:** *Is tourism used as a pressure tool in international relations?*

From the answers given by the participants, it was concluded that they responded to this question in two categories.

**Table 10**

*Evaluation of the Use of Tourism as a Pressure Tool in International Relations by the Sector*

Theme	Category	Sub-Category
Evaluating the use of tourism as a pressure tool in international relations	Direct Effect	The adverse reaction in tourist behavior due to the use of hard style, economic, harsh foreign policy
	Indirect effect	Embargo, pressure tool, the transmission of international messages through tourism, tourism marketing and politics relationship, blackmail

**Direct Effect:**

*PC2 - Male, 49, Company Owner*

*They use it as a tool of pressure because your soft belly is tourism; the man looks at your balance of payments and decides accordingly. That is why, it is used as a tool of political pressure.*

**Indirect Effect:**

*MI2 - Male, 67, Media Member*

*... When we chat from time to time, the Germans say, “Isn’t tourism important for you? Isn’t Germany a critical market for you?” He is talking about NATO, Syria, about Libya, something purely political; but he’s speaking softly but carrying a big stick regarding tourism. As a matter of fact, Putin spoke frankly when the Russian plane was shot down. As far as I know, tourism is an important sector for Turkey and Russia plays a vital role in tourism, he said. What does this mean? Behave yourself, your industry depends on us, so tourism plays a crucial role in political relations. Even today, Turkey develops its relations with other countries through tourism.*

**Q10:** *Can tour operators and similar organizations play a constructive or destructive role in international relations?*

From the answers given by the participants, it was concluded that they responded to this question in two categories.

**Table 11**  
*Evaluation of the Constructive or Destructive Role of Tour Operators and Similar Organizations by Tourism Stakeholders*

Theme	Category	Sub-Category
Evaluating the constructive or destructive role of tour operators and similar organizations by tourism stakeholders	Constructive Role	Guiding, decision-maker, the nationality of the capital owner, promotional arguments, market demand, firm cost, commercial concerns, monetary power provided by government agencies
	Destructive Role	Publicity arguments, number of tourists it has, bankruptcy, monetary power provided by government agencies, travel warnings by governments

**Constructive Role:**

*MII - Male, 57, Media Member*

*They play a constructive role. The aim of the tour operator that sends tourists to Turkey, regardless of their origin, is to earn money. If he is making money from Turkey, he will not have a negative attitude towards Turkey. Indeed, we see that in recent years, western-based tour operators of Russian origin have encouraged tourists to go to Turkey. They do business and make money and so they do not shoot themselves in the foot.*

**Destructive Role**

*MI2 - Male, 67, Media Member*

*Politicians can use it as a tool, but the industry cannot do it on its own. It is not without reason that the sector has gained great importance. The tourism sector cannot itself affect the relations between countries positively or negatively, but the governments can by using tourism.*

**Q11:** *Do you think tour operators are used as an instrument of soft power in international relations?*

**Q12:** *What are your thoughts on the use of tourists as a soft power tool?*

The last questions within the fifth theme are given above. Since tour operators and tourists are identified as two elements involved in the soft power of tourism, these two questions were perceived as a single question. The answers were categorized according to the participants’ responses.

**Table 12**  
*Evaluation of the Use of Tourists and Tour Operators as Soft Power by Tourism Sector Representatives*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Sub-Category</b>
Evaluating the use of tourists and tour operators as soft power	Tour Operators	Economic interests of states, lobbying activity in current and target markets, image studies in current and target markets, political interests
	Incoming Tourists	Satisfaction, word of mouth marketing, image, promotion, tourism ambassador, propaganda, advertising

**Tour Operators:**

*MI2 - Male, 67, Media Member*

*...From here, they, the tour operators themselves, have no chance to do such a thing. For instance, let’s take TUI; TUI is the pioneer of Europe’s tourism sector. It has no chance of doing anything to any country alone. However, the German government can use TUI to oppress Turkey or develop good relations with Turkey. Likewise, Turkey can also use the current tour operators in the countries they are going to, France, China, Singapore, and the tour operators actively working in these countries. So, the public can use them, but there is no chance of doing anything like that on their own. When the public sector uses it, it gets results that no industry can achieve.*

### **Incoming Tourists:**

*U2 - Male, 47, Academic*

*...I believe that tourists should be used to exert soft power since political problems between countries can always be solved or exacerbated. Tourists who have visited the country before and are familiar with it find a way to return despite the restrictions imposed by politicians. I think it is an exceptionally important form of soft power; it can also facilitate politics. Every satisfied tourist is a source of positive propaganda and of soft power for people who want to go to the country.*

### **Discussion**

According to the study results, one of the areas most affected by the crisis experienced with Russia was employment. The reflection of a specific decrease in the number of tourists coming from Russia had negative repercussions on employment in the tourism sector. The sector's employees turned to other sectors during the crisis, resulting in the loss of the qualified workforce. The Turkish tourism industry was unable to compensate for this loss.

Regarding investment, it was concluded that there was no tourism investment by Russian businesspeople in Turkey. It was surmised that most of Turkey's touristic assets consist of Turkish companies operating in Russia. What stands out in the field of investment is that, with the amendment made in the Russian Commercial Code after the crisis broke out, foreign capital enterprises operating in Russia must acquire Russian partners. This amendment aimed to exclude Turkish companies, which dominate the Russian market, from the country due to their inability to find partners, reduce their market shares in the country, make Russian companies dominant, or make the Turkish companies continue their activities with Russian status.

In terms of income, it was concluded from the numerical data that there was a decrease in Turkey's tourism revenues due to the absence of Russian tourists. Moreover, this situation negatively affected enterprises' revenues. Projects such as planned renovations could not be fulfilled. Simultaneously, the multiplier effect in tourism affected fifty-four sectors linked with tourism, and a decrease in income occurred. To recover from this situation, tourism enterprises and other sectors connected to it changed their markets. However, this situation caused price decreases in the new markets they entered. The main reason for this was the inability to recognize the market and consumer behaviour.

According to the crisis management theme, alternative markets could not be established immediately. It was discovered that the markets suggested as alternatives were not satisfactory for the sector. Concerning crisis management, the

tourism sector failed to receive the crisis signals that may have arisen and was not prepared for any crisis that may have occurred. Although there were efforts to contain the crisis, they were not successful. The tourism sector experienced difficulties in areas such as income and employment. This crisis also, however, brought benefits to the tourism industry. For instance, the Russian market became more professional and switched to the online reservations. Simultaneously, another positive development was change in focus towards the domestic market. As the crisis had a political character, it was solved by a meeting between two political leaders.

It was discerned that tourism and politics are two directly proportional phenomena. When states do not have vital interests, they should adopt a foreign policy with constructive language, and that this attitude will reflect positively on tourism. Furthermore, this situation reveals that tourism is an element of international relations.

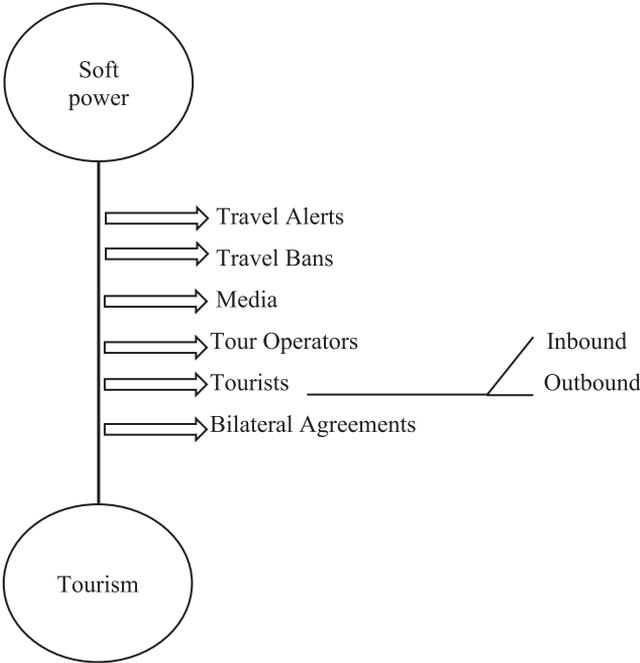


Figure 1. Tourism actors as soft power tools

The decisions taken in the international arena, such as those concerning economics, law, and politics, also affect tourism. This situation arises from the political relations of states with each other. It is recognized that the stronger party in this relationship is the country that sends tourists. Thus, the relationship of tourism with soft power is born. Tourism actors used to exerting soft power are shown in Figure 5.1. The countries sending tourists take decisions such as imposing a travel ban and issuing travel warnings concerning the destination country. When the travel ban was

imposed, it was realized that international flights, which naturally constitute tourism movements, were not possible. At the same time, when a travel warning was issued, it was seen that the companies that provide holiday insurance to tourists did not offer this service.

The use of the media to exert soft power in tourism is only possible by providing information about the country's tourism in the print media of the target markets, writing promotional articles, and making frequent visual media statements. These actions may assist in attracting more tourists to the country.

Stakeholders such as tour operators and travel agencies that make up the travel industry cannot exert pressure on a country by themselves. However, the political mechanism can use these touristic businesses as a means of pressure. The European Union can achieve specific political results by using tour operators. The European Union can direct tourism to any destination, thanks to the financial and flight support it provides to tour operators. One of the most obvious examples apart from such applications is the People's Republic of China. Due to good bilateral relations, the People's Republic of China has provided support to a country or countries on the opposite side by using tour operators.

Every tourist who comes to the country and leaves satisfied can be considered as a soft power factor. This tourist can promote the country he/she has visited in his/her own country by word of mouth. In times of crisis, especially when security risks to the country are high, using these tourists coming to the country, incoming tourists in order to make a positive contribution to the country's image is another example of tourists being used to exert a soft power. Such an application may be one example of what can be done in times of crisis.

The use of outbound tourists as soft power tools becomes more apparent, as explained above. This can be backed up with some statistical data. States have a decisive role regarding outbound tourists. They can easily direct these tourists to other destinations, but this does not apply to incoming tourists. This is because the countries they go to, namely the destinations, have no power on their home country. Accordingly, outbound tourists are considered a more influential factor in the use of tourists to apply soft power.

Finally, the relationship between tourism and soft power can be shown by interstate agreements. While there may be issues such as the sharing of experiences of tourism between the parties signing the agreement, a specific tourist flow between countries will be ensured by providing visa liberalization. For future research, more participants from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Turkey, nongovernmental organisations that are related to the Russian Federation, and embassy employees of

the Russian Federation should be incorporated into the research to gain detailed data about such kind of crises.

---

**Peer-review:** Externally peer-reviewed.

**Conflict of Interest:** The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

**Grant Support:** The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

**Authors Contributions:** Conception/Design of study: Y.B.; Data Acquisition: Y.B., B.I.O.; Data Analysis/Interpretation: B.I.O.; Drafting Manuscript: B.I.O.; Critical Revision of Manuscript: Y.B.; Final Approval and Accountability: Y.B., B.I.O.

---

## References

- Anaz, N. and Özcan, C. C. (2016). Geography of Turkish soap operas: Tourism, Soft Power, and Alternative Narratives. In *Alternative Tourism in Turkey*. Springer, Cham.
- Agyeiwaah, E., Suntikul, W. & Carmen, L. Y. S. (2018) “Cool Japan”: Anime, Soft Power, and Hong Kong Generation Y Travel to Japan, *Journal of Chine Tourism Research*, 15(2), 127-148
- Aydemir, B. & Bal, K. (2018). Bir Dış Politika Aracı Olarak Turizm: Gana Örneği, *Türk Turizm Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 2(1), 71-84.
- BBC News (2016). “Turkey faces big losses as Russia sanctions bite”. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35209987> 09/11/2020
- Bunakov, O. A., Zaitseva, N. A., Larionova, A. A., Zhukov, V. A., Morozova, M. A., & Dmitrieva, N. V. (2018). The Use of the «Soft Power» Concept in the Modern Russian Tourism Industry. *Espacios*, 39(22), 9.
- Cankurtaran, B. S., & Cetin, G. (2016). Ideology, Foreign Policy and Tourism: The Case of Turkey – Middle East Relations. *International Journal of Turcologia*, 11(21), 45-64.
- Chen, Y. W., & Duggan, N. (2016). Soft Power and Tourism: A study of Chinese Outbound Tourism to Africa. *Journal of China and International Relations*, 4(1), 45-66.
- Cheong, S. M., & Miller, M. L. (2000). Power and Tourism: A Foucauldian Observation. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 27(2), 371-390.
- Çakmak, T. F. (2019). *Turizm Endüstrisinde Bütüncül Yaklaşımla Kriz Yönetimi ve Örnek Olaylar*. Ankara: Detay Yayıncılık
- Davidson, R. and Cope, B.(2003). *Business Travel*. London: Pearson
- Han, S., Cui, C. M., & Zhang, X. P. (2012). The Study on the Tourist Soft Power Promoting the Economic Development of Taian City. In *Advanced Materials Research* (Vol. 524, pp. 3290-3293). Trans Tech Publications.
- Henderson, J. C. (2007). *Tourism Crises: Causes, Consequences and Management*. Burlington: Elsevier
- Hussin, H. (2018). Gastronomy, Tourism, and the Soft Power of Malaysia. *Sage Open*, 8(4), 1-11
- Jureniene, V. & Jurene, S. (2019). Impact of Tourism on National Soft Power. *Transformations in Business & Economics*, 18.
- Khodadadi, M. (2018). Donald Trump, U. S. Foreign Policy and Potential Impacts on Iran’s Tourism Industry: Post-Nuclear Deal. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 26, 28-30.
- Kocabıyık, O. O. (2016). Olgubilim ve Gömülü Kuram: Bazı Özellikler Açısından Karşılaştırma. *Trakya Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 6(1), 55-66.

- Kozak, N. (2014). *Turizm Pazarlaması*. Ankara: Detay Yayıncılık
- Mao, L. (2017). Between Tradition and Modernity: Wuzhen and China's Soft Power in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, 7(11), 1457-1477.
- Nye, J. S. (2017). *Yumuşak Güç: Dünya Siyasetinde Başarının Araçları* (Çev. R. İnan-Aydın). Ankara: BB101 Yayınları.
- Ooi, C. S. (2015). Soft power, Tourism. In J. Jafari & H. Xiao (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Tourism*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
- Prezident Rossii (2015). "Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii Ot 28.11.2015 g. No 583". Retrieved from <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/40248> 04/11/2020
- Seyfi, S. and Hall, C. M. (2020). Sanctions and Tourism: Effects, Complexities and Research. *Tourism Geographies*, 22(4-5), 749-767.
- Tse, T. S. (2013). Chinese Outbound Tourism as a form of Diplomacy. *Tourism Planning & Development*, 10(2), 149-158.
- TurkStat (2020). "Turizm İstatistikleri". Retrieved from [https://www.tuik.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt\\_id=1072](https://www.tuik.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt_id=1072) 18.07.2020
- TurkStat (2020). "Turizm İstatistikleri". Retrieved from [http://www.tuik.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt\\_id=1007](http://www.tuik.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt_id=1007) 18.07.2020
- TurkStat (2020). "Turizm İstatistikleri". Retrieved from [http://www.tuik.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt\\_id=1072](http://www.tuik.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt_id=1072) 28.08.2020
- TurkStat (2020). "Turizm İstatistikleri". Retrieved from [http://www.tuik.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt\\_id=1072](http://www.tuik.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt_id=1072) 28.08.2020
- Ünlüöner, K., Tayfun, A., & Kılıçlar, A. (2009). *Turizm Ekonomisi*. Ankara: Nobel Yayıncılık.
- Xu, H., Wang, K., & Song, Y. M. (2018). Chinese Outbound Tourism and Soft Power. *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events*, 12(1), 34-49.
- Yang, J. (2019). *Analysing the Effects of International Tourism on Soft Power*

