CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL POTENTIAL OF ETHNOCULTURAL TOURISM IN DEVELOPING NATIONAL IDENTITY IN STUDENTS

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Abstract. The thesis substantiates ethnocultural tourism as a cultural and educational means that provides students with direct engagement with historical-cultural spaces, living heritage, and local communities. Its cognitive-hermeneutic, mnemonic-identificational, axiological, communicative-dialogical, activity-creative, and reflective potential for developing national identity is examined. A sequence of preparation, field interaction, cultural interpretation, creative production, and reflection is proposed to transform a tourist visit from passive observation into a meaningful pedagogical experience.

Keywords: ethnocultural tourism, national identity, cultural heritage, living heritage, historical memory, cultural space, local community, education, experiential learning, reflection.

Ethnocultural tourism is often associated with visiting a historic city, museum, shrine, craft center, or folk festival. However, such a visit in itself is not sufficient to develop a student's national identity. A student may see the object, but not comprehend its historical meaning; observe a ritual, but not understand the values of the community sustaining it. For this reason, the educational potential of ethnocultural tourism is determined not by the mere existence of the trip, but by the cultural and pedagogical content with which it is organized. In his modern definition of cultural tourism, G. Richards notes that the traveler's primary motivation is to study, discover, and comprehend tangible and intangible cultural heritage objects through experience [1, p. 13]. This definition allows cultural tourism to be viewed as a phenomenon broader than simply viewing monuments: in it, art, architecture, historical heritage, music, literature, gastronomy, lifestyle, beliefs, and traditions merge into a single field of cultural experience. Ethnocultural tourism within this field is directed toward a deeper understanding of the historical memory, daily life, and symbolic world of a specific people or regional community.

The impact of ethnocultural tourism on national identity is not limited to a simple chain such as "object – impression – pride." This process encompasses several internal stages: the student first acquires basic knowledge about the cultural phenomenon; then observes and emotionally perceives it in real space; understands its symbolic meaning through the commentary of local knowledge holders; compares this meaning with their own historical and cultural experience; and finally forms a position of personal belonging and responsibility. In this way, an external cultural object becomes an internal meaning.

The first potential is the cognitive-hermeneutic potential. The content of knowledge deepens when historical or ethnographic information studied in the classroom is connected with a real site, object, architectural detail, melody, craft technique, and ritual action. J. Dewey links the value of educational experience to its ability to develop subsequent experiences and expand a person's active interaction with the environment [2, pp. 25–27]. Therefore, for a trip to be educational, in addition to remembering facts about an object, a student must seek answers to questions such as: "Why did this cultural form arise, what value does it express, and how does it live today?"

D. A. Kolb explains experiential learning as a continuous cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation [3, p. 38]. When this logic is applied to ethnocultural tourism, the visit should not stop merely at the stage of concrete impression. After the trip, the student records what was seen, compares it with sources, interprets it through concepts, and re-expresses it in a new cultural product—such as an itinerary, exhibition, audio story,

photo essay, or recommended project. Only then does the experience transform into knowledge and a personal stance.

The second potential is the mnemonic-identificational potential. A historic site and living tradition embody collective memory in a tangible form. J. Assmann interprets cultural memory as collective knowledge that guides behavior and experience through social practices repeated across generations [4, pp. 125–128]. When a student directly engages with the architectural environment, melodies, rituals, or craft technologies created by ancestors, history is perceived not as abstract time, but as an ongoing cultural process of their own life. This state elevates national belonging from "pride in the past" to "understanding one's place in cultural continuity." Ethnocultural space does not merely preserve memory; it selects and interprets it. Museum displays, guide narratives, monument inscriptions, or festival scripts determine which events and images are brought to the center. For this reason, it is important to prepare the student not as a passive recipient of ready-made interpretations, but as a researcher who compares sources and understands the politics of memory. Along with the question "What is being displayed?", they must also be able to ask: "Why was this specific content chosen, and which voices remained unheard?" Such a critical approach does not deny national identity; on the contrary, it strengthens it with historical truth and responsibility.

The third potential is the axiological potential. Direct engagement with cultural heritage activates the student's attitude toward values on emotional and practical levels. Assmann highlights the educational, humanizing, and norm-setting functions of knowledge preserved in cultural memory [4, pp. 131–133]. Observing years of a craftsman's hard work, seeing the complexities of preserving a historical structure, or listening to a folk performer describe the master-apprentice tradition helps frame heritage not as a off-the-shelf consumer product, but as labor, patience, skill, and intergenerational responsibility.

The fourth potential is the communicative-dialogic potential. In ethnocultural tourism, an exchange of knowledge takes place between local residents, museum staff, artisans, artists, guides, and students. J. Lave and E. Wenger establish that knowledge is acquired through participation in a meaningful community of practice [5, pp. 29–37]. When students view the local community not as an "exotic object to be shown," but as knowledge holders and authors of their own heritage, an ethic of communication is formed. This process leads to understanding national identity not merely as an individual feeling, but as a form of collective cooperation and mutual responsibility.

Dialogue with the local community also allows for the revision of stereotypes. The culture of a region is often simplified in the mass media down to one or two symbols. Direct interaction, however, reveals the generational, professional, and aesthetic diversity within that region. The student realizes that national culture does not possess a single, frozen appearance, but that its various regional forms harmonize to create a shared cultural space. This realization shapes national identity in a way that is multi-layered and vital, rather than stereotypical.

The fifth potential is the activity-creative potential. S. Bell demonstrates that project-based learning develops independence, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking in students [6, pp. 39–43]. In the process of ethnocultural tourism, instead of repeating ready-made information, students can identify a problem and create a product intended for a real audience. For instance, developing a responsible tourist itinerary for a lesser-known historic site, documenting the oral history of a local master, creating an inclusive audio guide, or analyzing the risk of commercializing a ritual connects the activity with national-cultural responsibility.

Digital tools also expand this potential, though they should serve as a means of cultural interpretation rather than an end in themselves. B. R. Robin notes that digital storytelling combines images, sound, text, and personal narrative to develop research, writing, and visual literacy skills [7, pp. 220–228]. When a student creates a video story about an ethnocultural object, they must also consider the reliability of sources, consent of locals, copyright issues, and the boundaries of making sacred or personal content public. Only then does the digital product become a form of responsible cultural mediation rather than content that oversimplifies heritage.

The sixth potential is the reflective-identificational potential. S. Hall connects cultural identity not with finding a ready-made copy of the past, but with how a person positions themselves within historical narratives [8, pp. 222–225]. Reflection following an ethnocultural visit allows the student to transition from the question "What did I see?" to "How did what I saw change my perception of national culture?" Reflective journals, essays, group discussions, and cultural mapping serve to analyze the student's knowledge, emotions, and positioning as a cohesive whole.

The development of national identity should not be confused with a sense of superiority over other cultures. A. D. Smith demonstrates the interconnectedness of historic territory, shared memory, public culture, and collective obligations within the structure of national identity [9, pp. 13–15]. While deepening the student's belonging to their own culture, ethnocultural tourism must also reveal that every element of heritage developed as a result of historical ties, migration, trade, and religious and aesthetic exchanges. A student who deeply understands their own culture will view another culture not as a threat, but as an opportunity for dialogue and comparative understanding. To realize the educational potentials of ethnocultural tourism, a five-stage logic is advisable: during the preparatory stage, the history of the region, basic concepts, and field ethics are studied; during the direct experience stage, observation, interviews, and visual recording are carried out; during the cultural interpretation stage, materials are compared with scientific sources; during the creative-project stage, a responsible cultural product is created; and during the reflective stage, changes in the student's knowledge, emotions, and national belonging are analyzed. If one of these stages is omitted, the educational integrity of the trip is weakened.

Assessment should also not be limited solely to factual questions. Along with the student's knowledge of the object's history, their ability to verify sources, respect for the local community, sensitivity to stereotypes, interpretation of cultural symbols, group work, and development of practical proposals for heritage preservation are also taken into account. G. Richards notes that in the practice of cultural tourism, tangible and intangible resources, the meanings assigned to them, and the competencies to interpret them are interconnected [1, p. 17]. Therefore, the result should be measured not by the number of visited objects, but by the quality of the student's creation of cultural meaning.

In our view, the cultural-educational potential of ethnocultural tourism in developing national identity is manifested in three transformations: the transformation of knowledge into personal experience; the transformation of historical memory into emotional belonging and a value-based stance; and the transformation of belonging into practical responsibility aimed at preserving and promoting heritage. These transformations do not occur automatically. They are formed through the unity of pedagogical purpose, reliable sources, ethical cooperation with the local community, creative activity, and reflective analysis. In conclusion, ethnocultural tourism can transform the student from a consumer of information about national culture into a subject who studies its meanings, interprets them, and responsibly transmits them to future generations. Its power lies not in showing numerous objects, but in turning the connection between historic-cultural space, living heritage, and human communication into an experience of personal significance for the student. Only then does ethnocultural tourism become a tool for developing national identity not in a closed and declarative form, but as a conscious identity grounded in historical memory, cultural diversity, and practical responsibility.

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