Comprehensive assessment of tourist potential of Babushkin Street in Irkutsk

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Abstract. The article presents a comprehensive study of the tourist potential of historical Babushkin Street in Irkutsk. The research outcomes showed the possibilities to create a special tour route (a local walking trail within the study area) and the role of the street in the overall walking tour route along the historical centre of the city. The possibility of transforming Babushkin Street into the vehicle-free sector that is completely inaccessible to transport is analysed as well. Recommendations on the way of transforming the architectural space of the street, based on the findings of the research, are provided. The guidelines aim at improving the image of the street as a tourist attraction and developing its recreational zones.

1. Introduction

According to the data of tour operators, currently Irkutsk functions as a transfer hub for tourists who want to visit Lake Baikal. Those travel companies that offer services to take tourists to Lake Baikal build in one and a half or two days for getting around Irkutsk. [1-5] In spite of having unique historical and cultural heritage, tourists as well as tour operators consider the city to be "a city on the way to Lake Baikal". Thus, such an approach determines the present-day trend of developing the tourist infrastructure of Irkutsk as a regional centre. [6-18]

It is advantageous for Irkutsk to develop as a tourist centre for a score of reasons. Among other factors tourism provides an opportunity for sustainable development of historical cities: first and foremost, it allows raising investment necessary for reconstructing and restoring architectural heritage as well as it is a driving force for developing urban infrastructure and maintaining its reasonable condition. [8] Secondly, it makes it possible to increase urban residents' earnings. Moreover, developed tourism industry is considered to be a source of creating jobs. [9]

In the view of contemporary researchers, Irkutsk is the most underestimated tourist destination in the region. [5] The city is an ideal place for developing walking routes: road network of the historical part of the city involves a dense medieval structure with blocks of stone and wooden architecture in a good state of preservation. [19,20,7,3]

2. Materials and methods of research

The main objective of the research is to study the tourist potential of historical Babushkin Street in Irkutsk. The international experience in developing urban tourism shows that a single street of the historical centre is suitable for establishing the following tourist infrastructure:
2.1. The value of the historical street for creating the walking tour route
First of all, the tour is one of the forms of cultural and educational activities in addition to lecturing, scientific and business conferences as well as themed events and seminars. All the activities have their specific features and involve special methods. Apparently, local attractions can be seen in a travelling-rough manner when following the principle of locality and mobility. Meanwhile, this process cannot be called a tour or an excursion since the tourists do not have any specific goals and targets. Consequently, the peculiarities of tourist-excursion activities are as the following: any sightseeing tour is thematically oriented; any group keeps to the prearranged itinerary in pursuance of goals and targets of the sightseeing tour; the method of showing tourist attractions and describing them is employed within the process, which takes from 1 to 4-5 academic hours. Any sightseeing tour is organized for tourists to be taken to the location of tourist attractions according to the prearranged plan and itinerary. [10]

It follows as a logical consequence that a street suitable for organizing thematic walking tour route has to have such features as:

- there should be valuable historical and cultural sites. It is highly recommended that unique pieces of architecture should neighbour on common historical buildings since the inhomogeneous architectural environment allows balancing between showing tourist attractions and describing them when organizing walking sightseeing tours. Such an approach contributes to revealing insights into the theme of the sightseeing tour;
- the street should be long enough to locate scenery spots properly;
- traffic and pedestrian flows should be well-regulated for the street to be safe enough;
- there should be some buildings of historical value having unique architecture that is characteristic of the geographic region.

2.2. The historical street as a location for organizing self-guided walking tours
Research of the domestic and international experience of turning streets into vehicle-free zones proved that the project can be successful if the objects of the pedestrian street have several varied functions: commercial, recreational, social, residential, cultural ones. [10] It is necessary to stop vehicles from using the street at weekends (partial ban) or all the week long (total ban) to meet the need for safety when implementing the recreational function of self-guided walking tours. When it is not possible to establish the partial or total ban, there appears a traffic-calmed neighbourhood zone. [15] In addition, the following factors are of great importance: there should be well-preserved holistic architectural environment; possibility to put information boards and elements of amenities. [4]

2.3. The historical street as a part of the city walking tour route
When organizing a walking tour route, a single street is considered to be an element of the integrated system and it has its own function. The function depends on the type of public space the street is referred to. The function of linear streets is to provide light pedestrian traffic, while open spaces such as squares and parks are meant to be used as recreational zones. As for non-linear (curved) streets, they are suited for locating scenery spots and help to follow directions of the route. [11,12]

3. Results and discussions
Contemporary Babushkin Street (its original name is Zverevskaja Street) is located in the historical town centre. It separates historical residential quarters №87 and №88. Quarters №87 and №88 were founded at the second stage of the urban development. The street was constructed as a settlement for soldiers in the period of so called "design fragment for soldiers" (the first third - the end of the 18th century). The adjacent streets built along the sub-meridional lines are perpendicular to the main street.
that appeared to follow the line of the palisade (fortress wall). Today it is Karl Marx Street. [1] Practically all original buildings of the street burned down in the fire in 1879.

The remaining buildings are dated by the end of XVIII century, 1880-1910. In November, 1920 the street was renamed after the revolutionary I.V. Babushkin. The length of the street is 439 m. Modern built-up environment is represented by well-preserved single-storey or two-storey tenement buildings and residential buildings where timber and stones we used as materials. Not all remaining buildings after the fire have been given the status of monuments of architecture. Just a few recognized monuments of architecture have the status of cultural heritage sites of regional significance. All buildings of Vintinov's manor house (Irkutsk, Babushkin Street, 12) are cultural heritage sites of federal importance. There are also some buildings that make a dissonance with the historical environment. There is a modern five-storey building that combines the residential and commercial use (Irkutsk, Babushkin Street, 14) (Figure 1).

![Figure 1](image-url)

**Figure 1. Analysis of the current state of development of Babushkin Street in Irkutsk.**

3.1. The monuments of architecture in Babushkin Street

1. Building No 1 is Trutnev's House, the end of XIX century;
2. House No 2 is Kirikov's tenement building, 1880s;
3. Building No 3A is a timber manor house, the end of XIX century;
4. Building No 5 is a tenement building of the end of XIX century;
5. Building No 6A is a stone residential building of the middle of XIX century;
6. Building No 7 is Jaremskij's tenement building, 1880s;
7. Building No 9 is a tenement building of the end of XIX century - the beginning of XX century;
8. Building No 10 A, B is Rassushin's manor house that consists of two residential buildings and an accessory building, the end of XIX century - the beginning of XX century;
9. Building No 11A is a town mansion that consists of the residential building where Konoplev S.P. lived and an accessory building, the middle of XX century, 1958-1965;
10. Building No 11B is a tenement building of the beginning of XX century; 
11. Building No 12A is Vintinov's (I.V.Vintovkin's) manor house that consists of two adjoined buildings, 1880-1890s;
12. Building No 13A is a tenement building of XIX century;
13. Building No 13A has two tenement buildings of the end of XIX century;
14. Building No 15A is a tenement building of the end of XIX century;
15. Building No 16B is a tenement building of the end of XIX century;
16. Building No 17A is a residential house, 1820-1850;
17. Building No 17B is a tenement building of the end of XIX century;
18. Building No 18A is Shevtsov's house of the end of XIX century;
19. Building No 19A has three tenement buildings of the end of XIX century - the beginning of XX century.
The preserved historical environment of Babushkin Street became recognized as being unique long ago in the key plan V.T. Shcherbin in 1980. Within the project of zonal protection of cultural heritage sites, 2006, the street was recommended to preserve as an integrated city-planning structure. The idea of preserving fully functional historical environment evolved in a more modern development plan of the central part of Irkutsk in 2012. It was offered to add architectural ensembles and complexes to the category of museum objects. Furthermore, the idea of utilising cultural heritage objects for commercial purposes (using them as hotels, offices, cafes, shops and other tourist infrastructure) was approved [2].

Babushkin Street being a one-line traffic street is accessible for private transport only. The volume of traffic passing through cannot be significantly facilitated because of low through-put capacity since the roadway is too narrow. For this reason, the street is not used for public transport routes. There is a spacious well-organized parking lot next to the building that functions both as a residential and commercial unit (Babushkin Street, 14). The roadway is narrow, five meters long only. Babushkin Street is unique due to having rather broad green spaces. They are green lawns with trees that are placed near residential quarter №87.

3.2. The potential of Babushkin Street as a street for walking tour routes

According to the results of the analysis of pedestrian and traffic flows, the walking tour route was designed (Figure 2).

![Figure 2](image)

**Figure 2.** The plan of Irkutsk in 1729, compiled by M. Zinoviev. From the book "The first century of Irkutsk".

The analysis of the urban development showed that the stone corner buildings belong to the streets that are perpendicular to Babushkin Street. Thus, the start point and the end point of the walking tour route do not coincide with the beginning of the street. The distinctive feature of the walking tour route starting from either Karl Marx Street or Dzerzhinsky Street is that the places of interest are located in the middle of the street mostly. The street has convenient parameters for locating scenery spots where participants of the walking sightseeing tour can see the sights in a comfortable way. There are seven scenery spots in total, counting the start point and the end point of the walking tour route. The average distance between them is about 50 and 80 meters.

The things that can make the walking tour worse are its traffic flows and some pieces of architecture that are in an advanced state of decay. Transport means have to park on the roadway and get in the way of the walking tour route. Traffic is busier up to building No 14 of Babushkin Street in contrast to other parts of the street. Another disadvantage is the spacious parking lot that to some
extent prevents from turning the street environment into the place where walking tours can be conducted easily.

3.3. The potential of Babushkin Street for organizing the self-guided walking tour route

The route was designed on the base of the conditions that Babushkin Street has for organizing walking tours (Figure 3).

![Figure 3. The project of the walking tour route in Babushkin Street in Irkutsk.](image)

For self-guided walking tours, Babushkin Street has the following advantages: it is a linear type of public space that is full of cultural and historical heritage sites. The sites are perceived through collecting all the images appearing when tourists go along the axis that is determined by the geometry of the street space. The street development is a kind of uniform architectural ensemble that was evolving in a certain historical period and, as a result, all the construction elements and building are attuned. [15]

The following disadvantages to organize self-guided walking tours were found out when assessing the potential of the street. They are a lack of facilities, narrow sidewalks that are placed too close to the facades of the historical buildings, as well as the residential function of the street that is prevailing.

3.4. Babushkin Street as a part of the overall city walking tour route along the historical centre

In 2011 the project of the walking route along the historical centre "Green line" was launched in Irkutsk. The idea of the project is to develop a walking tour route covering some sights and some historical streets of the historical part of the city. The project contributed to setting information boards and signs showing main sightseeing areas of the route. The route was marked with a green line on the paving asphalt and the audio-guide was installed. The analysis of the project "Green Line" showed that the route is of observation type and has not covered a great number of historical architectural ensembles in the city. [14,16]

Babushkin Street was not the objective of the project "Green Line". However, it is possible to add the street into the existing through-the-city walking route when working out the self-guided walking tour. As a result, the street under study will be able to connect "Zhelabovsky Complex" and the preserved area "Decembrists in Irkutsk". In order to increase the potential of the street the following issues should be solved:

- to regulate traffic and pedestrian flows properly. It is possible that the street should be vehicle-free all the week long or at weekends and on holidays only. Such measures enable
comprehensive perception of architectural ensembles as well as healthy development of the urban environment [6,13].

- to develop the traffic-calming zone for the safety of pedestrians along the street (either while taking a walk or during the walking tour). According to the international experience, such zones are organized in areas with quite different levels of traffic density [17].
- to remove the parking lot near building No 14, Babushkin Street (it is possible to remove it into inner-block public spaces). It will contribute to making traffic less heavy in the street;
- curb extension;
- reconstruction of facades of all the buildings that make a dissonance with the historical environment of the street;
- restoration of facades of historical buildings;
- improvement of the green space of the street.

4. Conclusion

Due to the preserved architectural ensembles and other features, the street is suitable for organizing both guided and self-guided walking tour routes. Within the guided through-the-city tour walking route that pursues cultural and educational goals, the street with its features can be of great importance when connecting the two historical areas. Based on the above facts, the tourist potential of Babushkin Street is considered to be significant.

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