



Review Article

Issues of Croatian Touristic Identity in Modern Touristic Trends

Lana Marinković*

Abstract

Contemporary worldwide processes have brought many significant changes to all economic and social spheres on a global scale. Informational and scientific progress has helped to create efficient and swift communication channels so that one can easily reach all needed information. Because of globalisation, the world is virtually becoming smaller and more accessible, which has greatly affected and therefore encouraged tourism as a phenomenon since all destinations can now equally compete in the broad tourist market. To distinguish one destination or tourist attraction from another, one should develop a firmly and clearly defined touristic identity, which is nowadays almost a prerequisite for a land or a region to draw new guests. Local, regional, and even national touristic identities include historical and geographical features, cultural heritage, language, beliefs, and traditions created over centuries that are valued through cultural tourism. A story put together like this creates a local brand that could potentially not only boost the tourism flow but also help to define and strengthen the overall national identity, which has still not been defined because of past historical and political circumstances. Since tourism is currently the most propulsive economic branch in Croatia, this is a process of utmost importance that the Croatian identity needs to go through. Through the responses of several tourism stakeholders, this paper will show the present vague state of the Croatian touristic identity, assess various solutions that it will have to undertake, and, finally, suggest the means and strategies that are necessary to avoid unplanned exploitation and drowning in the global tourist market.

Keywords

Croatian touristic identity; Cultural heritage; Cultural tourism; Destination branding; Identity

Introduction

What is the picture of Croatian tourism today? What does Croatia have to offer, and how can it cope with its competitors in the tourism market? Is Croatia a country that is known only for its 3S effect (sun, sea, and sand), or can it offer something more? Can it offer culture and history, untouched nature, or perhaps interesting events? Experts of various profiles in the tourism industry as well as tourism professionals ask similar questions. These themes are being discussed in the media and in economic forums, as well as in the process of planning tourism strategies. A uniform answer does not

exist. The array of possibilities is wide, but only one set of questions defines the ultimate goal: what kind of a tourist destination do we want to be, what do we want to offer, and, in the end, what do we want to gain from tourism? The path to this goal will then be much easier to find. Tourism in Croatia is a very important and almost the only stable economic branch at this moment (in terms of repeating every year). Therefore, it can be expected that it will remain stable barring some unforeseen circumstances. This means that planning in tourism will largely affect the present and future generations, as, e.g., future employment in the tourism industry, price policy, the demographic structure of tourist destinations, and staff in the tourism education system, will depend on this planning. Thus, the author's attitude towards the question of defining the position of Croatia on the European tourist map (and even the world map) is extremely resolute given the current political and economic moment since this might provide an excellent starting point for resolving many other unresolved issues that have been lagging behind since the 1990s. Namely, the territory of today's Croatia has for centuries been either a part of great joint countries such as the Austro-Hungarian Empire or Yugoslavia, or some parts of its territory belonged to neighbouring countries (as was the case with the Istrian peninsula that belonged to Italy for a certain period). During those times, one was not permitted to publicly claim and demonstrate the distinctive features of the Croatian people as a separate population. Only since the 1990s has Croatia begun to build its own independent identity on a national, ethnical, lingual, and cultural level. The process is still well ongoing but important to understand the lack of vital foundations on the matter.

The main questions refer to the issues of identity: who the people in Croatia are, who they want to be, and how they want to represent their country to others. The discussion in this paper will centre on the themes of cultural heritage in a narrow sense and cultural touristic identity, which is a very important formative factor for a national identity. The aim of this article is to highlight ambiguity and slow-paced thinking, i.e., taking a stand regarding the identity system, which is a vital process for a young country such as Croatia. Through this article, the author intends to warn of and mediate what some professionals in the tourism sector think about this relevant topic. Interviews with several travel organisers, information centre clerks, and tour guides gave greater insight into the subject based on their own experience gained through constant direct contact with tourists and their impressions and feedback. These will be discussed to show the disparities between the theoretical background and the real everyday obstacles that one faces being in contact with tourists in Croatia.

Establishing Identity in Modern Tourism

The concept of identity became a subject of professional and scientific research only around the end of the 1990s, and it has continued to be especially interesting since the beginning of the new millennium. The topic of rethinking identity is still relatively new in Croatian professional circles, and, in practice, it still largely lags behind the theory. In the 1990s, the first prerequisite was to find a way to rethink the identities of the newly established independent countries that arose from ex-Yugoslavia [1]. Nowadays, not having

*Corresponding author: Lana Marinković, Faculty of Science, Department of Geography, University of Zagreb, Zagreb, Croatia, E-mail: iana_marinkovic@yahoo.com

Received: December 05, 2014 Accepted: April 16, 2015 Published: April 20, 2015

finished that task, Croatia already faces new challenges as the youngest member of the European Union, which will definitely have an effect on tourism, as it has for other European countries [2]. Papers from the late 1990s clearly point out that the stepping-stone of the future development of Croatia should be the culture–tourism–agriculture trio, creating a needed and emphatic identity [3-5]. Furthermore, some recent titles [6-8] also speak about the meaning and relevance of cultural heritage in the process of identity formation and management. Nonetheless, terms such as ‘branding in tourism’ began to appear, thus giving completely new roles to well-known economic terms. Skoko was among the first to research the topic of the Croatian national identity in general [9] its present state, and the image that potential guests perceive. Comparing it with examples of other countries, further research led to the introduction of the term ‘country as a brand’. Hence, his recent book [10] discusses methods and examples of managing a national identity to become recognisable and competitive as a whole country. Still, many authors have focused on case studies of local traditional heritage [11,12] rather than on a comprehensive study of the national identity.

The famous trilogy of Castells [13] also reflects the power of identity, giving an extensive analysis of how the economy, society, and culture are being transformed within the new circumstances of globalisation and the information era. Moreover, Anholt is one of the leading scholars and experts who introduced a new scientific term into this field – instead of using the standard term ‘brand’, which for this topic was too rigid, he created the concept of a ‘competitive identity’. This phrase easily describes its true meaning, which is branding the country, by presenting its whole structure and analysing the path that needs to be taken to establish it practically, especially in the function of the national identity [14]. Roca et al. [15] gives a geographical point of view on the transformation of landscapes and identities in their collection of works. Several papers by Pritchard et al. [16] discuss the interdependence of culture, heritage, and tourism and marketing strategies. In addition to marketing and brand strategies, different authors have tried to develop further theoretical concepts and models based on which identity is assigned to heritage [17-20]. Since heritage is a just a pure resource without the story around it [21]. From a practical point of view, which was a guideline for this paper, there are two different angles in the research. Many involved working with tourists on the spot to examine the relation between their prior perceptions and later impressions of the travel experience [22-27]. Other studies (although fewer) have been based on insights and suggestions from the interviewed tourism employees, which provides a great starting point when one decides to improve and change some aspects of the process [2,28,29].

Defining identity

Castells [13] defines the term ‘identity’ as a process of creating meaning based on a cultural attribute or a related set of cultural attributes that are given priority over other sources of meaning. Many different identities that reflect the performance of different social roles may exist for individual or collective actors. The emphasis is placed on the process of self-built concepts and individuation. Thus, each individual will first build himself or herself and then participate in the construction of the collective identity. One can consider the issue of social, cultural, or general national identity in the same way. It is necessary to define and build the desired identities, e.g., cultural or touristic, and they would all be a part of a larger generic concept – the national identity [1,20]. The concept of identity can be subdivided into several segments: from an ethnical or social point

of view there is cultural, historical, religious identity, etc., while as from a geographical point of view one can differ local, regional, and overall national identity, which is not only the sum of these few mentioned ‘lower-level’ identities but a much more complex picture. The fundamental determinant of an identity and meaning is precisely this sense of belonging to a group or area and differentiating oneself from everyone else – a sense of uniqueness, to be exact [14].

The identity of a country, region, or nation should be built on oneself, or knowing oneself, including all the distinctive elements that make up the group or an area. In the past, one defined his or her own identity according to that of others: for example, ‘we’ as opposed to ‘them’ (‘we are not like them’, etc.) or defining oneself by the negation of another. These distinctive features of identity mainly relate to historical and geographical characteristics and developments as well as the language, culture, religion, customs, etc., that are derived from them, which means that the main links of an identity can be found in the sphere of cultural identity. Cultural identity is therefore a basis for building a common national identity, and, in the case of Croatia, one can determine that this foundation is somewhat weak. However, during the last decade, cultural diversity as a notion has appeared in all the important documents of the European Union, UNESCO [30], and other international organisations that are becoming more aware of the potential loss of identity in today’s globalised world. This resulted in the development of awareness that a nation’s cultural diversity is a form of wealth, seeking to encourage the preservation and restoration of its own identity and respect for the identity of ‘others’. The same tendency runs through the levels of a national identity as well as the associated cultural touristic identity. A touristic identity can be defined as a complete and comprehensive presentation of a certain tourist destination or country to create its visibility in the market, i.e., highlighting the differences in relation to other destinations or countries.

An identity is an image that one creates about oneself and it should represent who he or she is, or what wants to be. It is a completely different thing from how neighbours, guests, or tourists perceive this picture – that is a question of image. An image is therefore an experience, impression, or perception in someone’s head about what we have presented. A number of factors influence its creation, such as previous experiences, reviews, prejudices, news, other people’s experiences, etc., which accumulate over the years and create a specific image that is very difficult to change, especially if there is no systematic effort to do so. For example, a country’s poor image can become a considerable barrier when it comes to attracting new guests, considering that, in today’s information age, information travels the world with astonishing speed and in such quantities that a person can be overwhelmed with data. Therefore, tourists will resonate with the few selected pieces of information that they weigh according to their own internal value system, i.e., upon their perception. Since practice and psychology have proved that the image of a country will have a more powerful impact on the tourist than the identity itself, it is no wonder that many more scientific studies have been conducted on this topic [17,22-24,26]. An emerging term is ‘destination branding’, concentrating on localities and regions as destinations and creating a recognisable identity for them [31]. Careful management of a newly constructed brand should evoke a positive perception in the minds of future visitors. Knowing this, we can conclude that, in the absence of a defined identity, the probability of matching the identity and the image is very low, which means that, if the image and the impression

of a country develop spontaneously, it will never result in the right long-term solution.

Tourism, cultural tourism and globalisation

Tourism is a very dynamic phenomenon. The goals are constantly changing; one creates new destinations and travel motives, and, because of this, major changes have already become visible within one decade. This entire process has been enhanced by globalisation that has opened up the world to new forms of unification and convergence, starting with the creation of a common market, all the way to the connection of the world through information and communication technology. Technology has played a key role in economic progress over the past 30 years since the exchange of knowledge has become much faster and more efficient than ever before. All kinds of data are just a few clicks away. However, at the same time, it has become quite problematic to process so much information and distinguish that which is important for us. Regarding tourism, the attitude of a potential tourist about a destination does not necessarily depend on someone else's experience or a documentary [27]. Although it is currently not difficult to reach customers, it has become very challenging to attract and encourage them to choose exactly what we want them to. This is precisely where the power of identity lies. The identity 'sells' the product. It gives it a framework and a signature. That is why it is important to create a single recognisable image, which will stay in the guests' memory and prompt them to see themselves as a part of that picture. This somewhat poetic statement presents both the simplicity and the comprehensiveness of the identity concept, i.e., how a well-constructed identity can contribute to the development of tourism and consequently to a better image of a country [17,22,25,28].

The term 'globalisation' in its basic significance relates to the worldwide economic process of increasing integration into a global market through free trade, the free flow of capital, communications, and the tapping of cheaper foreign labour markets. However, there are also definitions that explain the process from a non-economic point of view. For example, according to Cambridge Dictionaries, globalisation is also a situation in which available goods and services or social and cultural influences gradually become similar in all parts of the world. This definition suggests much more, where the possible problem could lie. It is logical that globalisation can work in both ways – positively or negatively. The main advantage is that an open market and information resources are now available to almost everybody, and there is space for everyone. The same is applied to new tourism destinations, new forms of tourism offers, other countries and regions that have not yet participated in the tourism market, or those who want to change their target group or engage in another segment of tourism. However, the negative side of globalisation is that negative feedback can very quickly reach potential customers. One of the main objections to globalisation processes in culture and tourism is their impact on the gradual merging and even disappearance of some cultural specificity [32] all the way to the loss and deletion of identity. This gradually occurs especially in smaller communities. A host community sometimes tries to be as close as possible to some other more famous destination, trying to 'sell' itself through the commercialisation of culture. It borrows elements from other identities or even invents them to pass them off as its own [33]. The host community does not even know what its specific features are or, more likely, not enough local people or professionals care about the preservation of identity. This is the easiest way to suppress a local identity, which is the most vulnerable type. Culture was once built over centuries and successfully transmitted from one generation to

another, and, nowadays, when this transfer should be considerably easier, it is in great danger of fading or even disappearing in some places.

Cultural tourism is based on the evaluation of the importance of cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible. Thus, heritage can be converted into an extremely fruitful economic good if properly managed. The term 'heritage tourism' is often used in the literature as a synonym for 'cultural tourism' since many definitions of the terms completely overlap even though heritage tourism is instead a subgroup of cultural tourism [6]. In addition to natural resources, heritage tourism is a most valuable resource because it provides insight into what makes up a country, region, and its indigenous people. This is what world travellers today are increasingly looking for. In addition, heritage tourism has a very positive and wide economic and social impact because it helps to preserve the cultural heritage for the future, helps to renew tourism, and, most importantly for this topic, builds and emphasises identity. One of the most important international institutions that deals with the protection and revitalisation of cultural heritage is UNESCO [30]. According to its definition, 'cultural heritage is the legacy of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations.' It is usually divided into two major categories: tangible and intangible heritage. A detailed division and the elements of cultural heritage as it is understood in this article are presented in (Table 1). In the case of Croatia, both lists become longer with each enlargement (see footnotes ¹ and ²), and, even now, there are several candidates waiting on the tentative list.

Numerous projects that arose from collaboration with UNESCO have shown how to successfully restore and preserve local heritage for presentation in tourism, taking into account the principles of cultural tourism, factors relevant to the host community, and the quality of the tourism offer. The adequate presentation and interpretation of heritage is most important when it comes to cultural tourism. These two terms describe the key distinction of this form of tourism from all others. All experts would agree that every monument or city remains a bare rock unless it is given life; i.e., it is necessary to animate, tell a story, explain, or convey a story to a guest in an understandable way. Heritage demands a mediator or a guide that will animate history into something tangible and impressive, but not fake [32]. This interpretation must focus on the original, authentic presentation of heritage and tradition without borrowing or inventing and

¹Elements of natural and cultural heritage in Croatia are also on the list of heritage sites protected by UNESCO. There are two natural heritage sites: Plitvice Lakes National Park and Stari Grad Plain on the island of Hvar. There are five cultural heritage sites: the town of Dubrovnik, Diocletian's Palace in Split, the historical core of Trogir, St. James' Cathedral in Šibenik, and the Euphrasian Basilica in Poreč.

²The list of intangible cultural heritage has been kept since 2003, and the Croatian list of protected intangible assets for 2009–2013 has included as many as 13 entries, thus becoming the longest list in Europe and the third longest in the world.

The list includes lacemaking (Pag, Hvar, Lepoglava); two-part singing and playing in the Istrian scale; the festival of Saint Blaise – Dubrovnik; the spring procession of Ljelje/queen from Gorjani; the annual carnival bell ringers' pageant from the Kastav area; the Za Krizen procession (follow the cross) on the island of Hvar; the traditional manufacturing of children's wooden toys in Hrvatsko Zagorje; Sinjska Alka – a knight's tournament in Sinj; gingerbread craft, Licitar, from Northern Croatia; Ojkanje – two-part singing listed for urgent protection; Bečarac – singing and playing from Slavonia, Baranja, and Srijem; nijemo kolo – the silent circle dance of the Dalmatinska zagora; klapa multipart singing; the Mediterranean diet on the Croatian Adriatic, its coast, and parts of the hinterland.

Table 1: Division of Cultural Heritage.

Tangible Cultural Heritage	Intangible Cultural Heritage
MOVABLE cultural heritage (paintings, sculptures, coins, manuscripts)	Oral traditions (languages, old customs, traditional beliefs)
IMMOVABLE cultural heritage (monuments, buildings, archaeological sites)	Various applied artistic expressions (dances, chants, traditional crafts)
UNDERWATER cultural heritage (shipwrecks, ruins, submerged caves)	Rituals (church processions, folk parades)

Source: Adapted from UNESCO World Heritage Centre [30].

modernising to maintain the qualities that make it different from all the others [6]. Moreover, the ICOMOS [34] Charter through its six main principles guides and substantiates this procedure, respecting the benefits of both the preservation of cultural heritage and the improvement of tourists' experience.

Although there is an exceptional diversity of heritage and culture in Croatia, unfortunately, our everyday experience teaches us that the most valuable pieces are sometimes in the hands of local organisations and several individuals who do not have enough power or have the wrong interests when it comes to the management of local heritage. This can irreversibly damage the unique treasures that the country has at its disposal, which in the end can reduce the resource base for tourism development instead of having a positive influence on all the elements of touristic identity.

Travel motives have repeatedly changed since the beginning of the development of tourism. The main trend and motivation for travel used to be spending winter holidays in warm sea areas, but this trend changed after World War II to predominantly summer tourism. The mass tourism phenomenon has automatically joined the summer holiday concept, and, in many cases, it did not bring anything positive to certain destinations and has only emphasised seasonality in tourism. This is why, over the last thirty years, a positive shift in thinking has occurred, as this mass concept no longer satisfied tourists, so there was a gradual turn towards sustainable forms of tourism, which are directed towards a different clientele and different interests. Specific or selective forms of tourism that are not so dependent on the season (specifically the 'sun and sea' package) keep developing and are trying to attract guests of different affinities. Among many in Croatia, one can distinguish forms of cultural, MICE, rural, health, hunting, and eco-tourism as sub-branches in which lie huge potential or have recently started an intensive and already promising cooperation with the tourism sector.

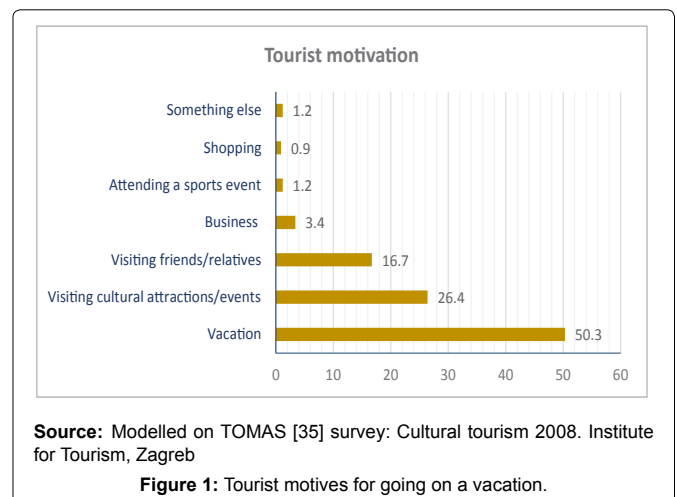
However, guests from all over the world who want to unwind and relax during their holidays also show interest in culture and cultural heritage. The cultural factor comes up as a secondary motive that prevails if guests are deciding between multiple destinations or serves as an additional offer to extend the guests' stay in a certain destination [6]. Today's tourists seek not only a place on the beach with nice weather but also a new experience. They want to get to know the local culture and local residents, try local specialties, feel the original atmosphere, and then take home with them all those new experiences 'packaged' together. This is what they will remember, what they will tell their friends about, and what, in the end, will encourage people to create their own individual impression, either positive or negative. Since one can influence this 'package' precisely, cultural heritage has great potential to become a part of the main offer at a destination and not remain merely a secondary option. This is where strategic planning, targeted marketing, and all travel experts

need to act along with the local residents in a joint effort to present the cultural heritage as a key element of the Croatian tourism offer [3,5]. One should not forget that the offer in cultural tourism is oriented towards knowledgeable guests with specific and selected interests, so both proper segmentation and definition of target groups for each specific cultural offer are very important steps. Cultural tourism in Croatia could play a double role in the quality of the tourism offer. In coastal destinations, it could be an additional value to sun-and-sea holiday tourism, which would help to extend the stay, and in continental destinations it might create a basis for the development of selective forms of tourism and an authentic tourism product, hence the local identity.

The TOMAS [35] survey conducted by the Croatian Institute of Tourism in 2008 confirmed the relevance of cultural factors. In fact, as depicted in (Figure 1), vacation is definitely the most important motive when selecting a trip, but the next most frequently cited motive is visiting cultural attractions and exploring the local culture of the country. The share of tourists who travel only to visit cultural heritage or cultural events in Croatia is about 26%, which is very close to the European level of 25%. One can especially distinguish the difference between visits to cultural attractions on the coast and inland areas – while this is the reason to travel in continental areas for almost 41% of tourists, its share is only 15% when it comes to the coast. This confirms that the basic reason for the arrival of tourists to the Croatian coast is a sun-and-sea vacation. Of all the aspects of heritage management in the tourism industry, one that many would point out as the one that gives visible results first is the economic factor. It seems that one could thank tourism for the promotion of the contemporary scientific discipline of economic architectural heritage or the economics of cultural and civilization heritage [36]. Specifically, at the very moment of experiencing, cultural heritage it becomes an economic factor that brings revenue, and alongside spiritual and heredity treasures, it earns the attribute of an economic value from the perspective of the local and national economy.

Status and perception of the Croatian cultural touristic identity

The Ministry of Tourism has issued a new tourism development strategy to be followed until 2020 [37] in which they highlight new goals and objectives for tourism development within the given timeframe. The strategy contains the following vision regarding the



topic of touristic identity: 'In 2020, Croatia is a globally recognised tourist destination, competitive and attractive for investments, creates jobs and manages the development of its entire area in a sustainable way, while fostering a culture of quality, security, and unique variety of authentic content and experiences for the guests throughout the year'. This vision is enhanced by current guidelines of the strategic marketing plan for tourism until 2020, whose goals are clearly defined: strengthening the Croatian brand, thus extending the tourist season and increasing revenue, which requires one original story, one creative solution that will tell the story of Croatia – and once again, it comes down to the key theme of identity. This development vision might sound a little idealistic; however, it is a pinnacle of achievement in developing quality tourism, which all experts and tourism professionals should aspire to. The goal is simple; however, the path to the realisation is neither short nor simple. Let us examine why!

The conversations and interviews conducted on the topic of the perception of the Croatian cultural touristic identity as well as the initial results of the survey carried out for the purpose of the doctoral thesis research of the author have led to many interesting though partially expected results. The idea was to learn the views and honest opinions of local people engaged either in some form of tourism or in direct contact with tourists and visitors. Therefore, the interviewees who participated are employees in various branches, such as travel organisers, informants at tourist information centres, and tourist guides – people who have the closest contact with tourists – and one would expect them to be country connoisseurs as well as experts in actual tourism issues.³ The questions focused on their personal impressions and perceptions; therefore, the chosen method for conducting this research was the interview. After comparing and analysing all the responses, attitudes, and opinions, it was possible to derive the following main points:

- What are the characteristics of the Croatian cultural tourism identity, or, in other words, what makes this identity?

Since this question caused a brief confusion, it was necessary to first 'translate' the question. When it was explained that we are seeking special features by which Croatia would be recognisable to tourists, all subjects immediately concluded that 'there is a lot'. Specifically, they found that they could enumerate many elements that make Croatia special, but it is hard to single out only five or six. Most frequently, they remembered all the UNESCO cities built upon the remnants of ancient Greek, Roman, or medieval settlements; then the medieval castles of northwest Croatia, as a mix of different cultural influences condensed in this territory for centuries; numerous traditional festivals and customs; old crafts still in practice today; and great variety of folk dances and costumes. The most repeated single cited features were Dubrovnik, the Plitvice Lakes, clear water, blue sea, untouched nature, and rich history. Noteworthy is that many of the latter do not even represent cultural, but natural heritage.

- What do you personally think is the greatest potential for Croatian tourism?

Clear sea, sun, and beaches were singled out as the primary resources, but there is also great potential in rural tourism in terms of rural villas and family farm residences. Then followed health tourism, which is a relatively new segment of the Croatian market that is

nonetheless recognised by the tourist experts, as well as the stronger involvement of culture and mandatory cultural events in cultural tourism. In addition to summer beach tourism, the interviewees believe that it is finally time to start developing all the possibilities of continental tourism as well.

- What is the best feedback you receive from guests, and what is the strongest criticism? What surprises tourists the most when they visit Croatia?

These questions give insight into Croatia's image because the answers are obtained directly from guests who came to Croatia and already have a previously acquired idea of the country. From their positive reactions, one must highlight the noteworthy cleanliness, hospitality, spirit, and charm of some of the historical sites, as well as the vibrant urban areas with crowded terraces, which encourages guests to be a part of such an atmosphere. What they drew from the negative comments is that there is not always adequate entertainment, aside from bars. Another impression is that the cultural facilities, such as some museums, are not available every day. Elderly guests are displeased with often-overcrowded tourist destinations (mostly seasonal), which makes everything seem as if it is on an assembly line, leading to an overall impression that the tourism workers are losing interest in an individual approach to guests. As some of the biggest surprises, the tourists have emphasised the cleanliness of the streets and beaches, the organisation of work, and knowledge of foreign languages and the lack of it. However, on a general level, many guests stated that they could not have expected so much, meaning that they could not have imagined all that waited for them once they arrived (mainly in the positive sense).

- Have the responsible organisation done enough to advance tourism?

The consensus is that the progress has been slow and often insufficient. The respondents pointed out the general lack of utilisation of EU projects and funds as a possibility to improve certain aspects of tourism. The main objection is that the tourism is mainly happening by itself because, every year, the season arrives, and the tourists are suddenly around. The interviewees are familiar with the key strategic documents, although not in detail, but they are very suspicious about the realisation of the set goals, as they criticise the dependence of all elements of political developments in the country.

- What needs to be done to achieve better tourist traffic and offer?

According to the opinions of the interviewees, greater power of governing should be given to tourist offices at lower levels (city and county), and then the power of continental tourism should be activated to develop the interior of the country while taking advantage of EU funds. Moreover, it is crucial to introduce more domestic agricultural products (which would lead to the development of the rural regions as well as the improvement of the destination offer). Then follows the planning and networking of destinations and raising the bar when it comes to services, not merely forcing investments in infrastructure projects such as new hotel complexes and golf courses. Regarding this question, there was no shortage of ideas and solutions.

- What kind of a tourist country would you like Croatia to be?

The following attributes were highlighted: frequently visited or even better than today, for a season to last longer so that more people could have jobs, and a pleasant place for enjoyment that is well known to the world. The respondents offered various ideas, but always from

³The author is herself a licensed tour guide as well as an associate with the Croatian National Tourist Board with extensive work experience in the tourism sector; therefore, it is possible to have a broad overview of the variety of employees who most directly present the country to visitors

the pragmatic sphere. The visionary idea of Croatian tourism in the future was not clearly stated through the conversations.

- Does Croatia even have a (cultural) travel identity?

This question also gave the interviewees something to think about, but, in the end, they all had the same critical opinion. The answer was that there was no certain identity. Croatia is a country of sun and sea, and this is the only reason that tourists visit. Therefore, in a way, one could view this as the touristic identity. The interviewees also could not decide whether a cultural touristic identity exists, as they were aware of the cultural potential and rich heritage, but they believed that these were not adequately used and presented as a vital part of the tourist offer.

All participants spoke about the opportunities and needs of tourism development in Croatia with enthusiasm, probably because this is the focus of their existence. One could draw many useful conclusions from both their direct answers and all that they did not know or say. For example, the most important insight for this paper is the fact that there was no definite answer to the question regarding the cultural touristic identity. There were various opinions and assumptions regarding what identity could or should be, but no one offered a resolute answer. It is also revealing that there is a certain level of distrust in the ability of political structures, which is a result of various political events over the last decade, so they find it difficult to believe that something meaningful can change in tourism. They also reproached the actual tricky slogan 'The Mediterranean as it once was' (which will be retired by the end of this year, as a new marketing campaign is currently in preparation). Many resources have been identified that, unfortunately, still do not participate enough in the Croatian tourism offer, such as the entire continental region, which has been ignored in practice, although everybody emphasised strongly the need for its tourism revival. The same goes for some other market niches, such as health and congressional (MICE) tourism, which offer exceptional revenue opportunities and cooperation. Furthermore, the tourists often repeated something very indicative – they did not expect to see and to experience everything that they did; neither could they prepare themselves for everything offered to them. This is the best illustration of the unsatisfactory promotion of the whole picture that we are sending to potential customers. One might think that many guests arrived in Croatia by accident because they have seen everything else, so why not visit this area as well. Still, the most accurate thing to say would be that the tourists in general know very little about what Croatia offers. This frequent lack of knowledge of other holiday possibilities in Croatia aside from summer swimming leads to only one clear conclusion – there is no story about Croatia. There is neither a systematic publicity nor a complete product that would represent the variety of potential treasures in Croatian tourism. What is missing is a defined touristic identity that could help it rise from the grey zone of unfamiliar destinations and give it a stable position in the tourism market.

Concluding Guidelines

Let us return to the initial question: what does Croatia have to offer, and what can be done to change the current situation? The interviews showed that it is not hard to recognise the value of the entire cultural heritage and to be aware of its faulty management. It is time to talk about improvement – visions, changes, and actions. The most important guideline that should find its way through to the appropriate decision-making structures is contained in the following message:

'All the countries that have led an active tourism policy that has enriched the offer, developed new products and services, improved quality, and had higher capacity utilization, thus, higher profits. No country was able to protect its own tourism if the tourism product was not competitive on the world market. What makes a particular destination different from all the others gives it a competitive advantage and makes it interesting to potential tourists and visitors. None of this would be possible without a consistent adjustment of the existing resources, without innovation and new ideas, without continuous restructuring of existing and construction of new and ever more attractive tourist attractions. This is nothing else but creating your own future!' [39].

Accordingly, both the future of the Croatian tourism sector that will surely bring profit for some time and the increasing number of staff members who will have to adapt to the new economic trends in the global and national markets essentially depend on understanding that the concept of a tourism identity is the basic foundation of further planning and tourism development. Afterwards, it easily blends in as an indispensable part of the national identity that is still missing in Croatia because of various historical and political reasons, and it can only contribute to a better positioning of the country. Many countries, regions, and cities have launched extensive programs to differentiate themselves from others and reach out to their customers. Indeed, numerous studies have already demonstrated and proved this process. If one is looking for a practical example, i.e., how individual countries have created their identity and thereby profited in every sense, many have been thoroughly examined in the research of Anholt, Croatian authors [3,20,40] and various case studies [17,20]. Branding creates a differentiation and uniqueness, a distinction from the competition, a unique emotional association, a relevant stake in consumer awareness, brand longevity, and a higher financial value [7]. In today's globalised world, countries are forced to approach the diverse global market with a clear, credible, appealing, distinctive, and fully planned vision, identity, and strategy. In particular, Anholt precisely appoints tourism promotion as one of the six natural channels through which one creates a national image because the tourists will spread the news about a country faster and further through their own travel experiences. The focus has definitely shifted from classical promotion to identity and image management.

Therefore, the following three factors are essential when creating an identity: first are a vision and a strategy, not on paper but put into practice. However, it is primarily necessary to change the mentality and behaviour. A bad image is often not created by the media or the public itself but rather by a lethargic state that is not doing enough to sustain the attention of their targeted audience. It is time that we stop letting tourism happen by itself in Croatia. Instead, we need to plan it and direct it in the desired way. The tourism flow somehow still surprises workers and organisers in the tourism industry at the beginning of every summer season, so the reactions and responses to it come either too slowly or too late. We only need to look at other Mediterranean countries as examples, and it becomes very clear where the summer mass tourism approach has led them. Even when the summer tourism is the only resource, one should control it so that the foundations on which it is based are not destroyed, thereby taking into account the principles of sustainable development. Here, education is the key factor. Croatia, like other countries dealing with tourism, should educate in this field from an early age to create young enthusiasts who will be proud of their own heritage and consequently be able to transmit these positive attitudes easily. Another aspect

of education refers to the targeted training of professional staff that is required every season in all tourist destinations. Unfortunately, the seasonal workers very often appear uninterested and cranky since they are aware that this is only a summer job, so they have no intention or will to put all their efforts into the quality of their work. Through timely education and encouragement, one might positively change that attitude and achieve a higher quality of service.

The creation of an identity for a country, region, or city, as stated by Anholt is composed of 80 per cent innovation, 15 percent coordination, and only 5 percent communication. The emphasis is on work, action, and desire to create a new, successful image of the country because, without engagement, there will be no results. The strategy is clear: use innovation to create a unique identity within the target audience, provoke the desired impression, and encourage them to travel to the country. Briefly, it is necessary to change the attitudes about what Croatia really is today. If we will not create our own brand or identity, someone else will do it for us – the media, the public, and our tourists. In that case, we should not be surprised if the results are not satisfactory.

References


- Hall D (2002) Brand development, tourism and national identity: The re-imagining of former Yugoslavia. *Journal of Brand Management* 323-334.
- Hughes H, Allen D (2009) Central and Eastern Europe and EU accession 2004: Views of the impact on tourism. *THR* 185-198.
- Fox R (1997) Towards a recognizable cultural identity of Croatian tourism. *JTHM* 33-44.
- Meler M, Ružić D (1999) Marketing identity of the tourist product of the Republic of Croatia. *Tourism Manage* 635-643.
- Fox J, Fox R (2000) Croatia and cultural tourism: A social and economic imperative. *The Tourist Review* 14-18.
- Jelinčić DA (2006) Turizam vs. identitet globalizacija i tradicija. *Etnološka istraživanja* 11: 161-183.
- Jelinčić DA (2009) Abeceda kulturnog turizma. *Meandarmedia*.
- Jelinčić DA (2010) *Kultura u izlogu*. Meandarmedia.
- Skoko B (2004) *Hrvatska – Identitet, image i promocija*. Školska knjiga.
- Skoko B (2009) *Država kao brend: Upravljanje nacionalnim identitetom*. Matica Hrvatska.
- Blagus Ž (2010) Autohtona glazba i oblikovanje imidža turističke destinacije. *Tržište*. *Market* 22: 77-92.
- Demonja D, Bačar R (2013) Ruralna graditeljska baština u funkciji turističke ponude Hrvatske. *Podravina: časopis za multidisciplinarna istraživanja* 133-149.
- Castells M (2002) *Moć identiteta*. Golden Marketing.
- Anholt S (2009) Konkurentan identitet: novo upravljanje markama država, gradova i regija. *M Plus*.
- Roca Z, Claval P, Agnew J (2011) *Landscapes, identities and development*. Ashgate Publishing Company, Burlington, Vermont.
- Pritchard A, Morgan NJ (2001) Culture, identity and tourism representation: Marketing Cymru or Wales? *Tour Manage* 167-169.
- Diesbach PB de (2012) Touristic destination ambassadors, case analysis and conceptualization: How to better understand and use brand ambassadors in cognitive, affective and experiential approaches. *JTHM* 229-258.
- Vukić F (2009) Brand is an identity system. *Acta Turistica Nova* 3: 279-298.
- Salazar NB (2012) Tourism imaginaries: A conceptual approach. *Ann Tour Res* 39: 863-882.
- Miličević K, Skoko B, Krešić D (2012) The power of tourism in creating a national brand: The case of Croatia. *Destination branding & marketing IV* 236-247. Welsh Centre for Tourism Research/Cardiff Metropolitan University, Cardiff, Wales.
- Ashworth GJ (1994) From history to heritage – From heritage to identity: On search of concepts and models. *Building a new heritage: Tourism, culture and identity in the new Europe*. London, UK & New York, Routledge. New York.
- Ivanov SH, Illum SF, Liang Y (2010) Application of destination brand molecule on destination image and brand perception: An exploratory study. *Tourism* 339-360.
- Kesjić T, Jakeljčić M (2012) Utjecaj determinirajućih čimbenika na imidž turističke destinacije. *Ekonomski pregled* 486-517.
- Milfelner B, Snoj B, Pisnik Korda A (2011) Mjerenje međudodna percipirane kvalitete, percipirane vrijednosti, imidža i zadovoljstva hotelskim uslugama: Usporedba gostiju iz Slovenije i Italije. *Društvena istraživanja* 605-624.
- Ye S (2012) The impact of destination personality dimensions on destination brand awareness and attractiveness: Australia as a case study. *Tourism* 397-409.
- Konečnik Ruzžier M (2010) Extending the tourism destination image concept into customer-based brand equity for a tourism destination. *Ekonomika istraživanja* 24-42.
- Hughes H (2008) Visitor and non-visitor destination images: The influence of political instability in South-Eastern Europe. *Tourism* 59-74.
- Camprubi R, Guia J, Comas J (2009) Managing induced tourism image: Relational patterns and the life cycle. *Tourism* 241-258.
- Hughes H, Allen D (2005) Cultural tourism in Central and Eastern Europe: The views of 'induced image formation agents'. *Tour Manage* 173-183.
- UNESCO World Heritage Centre. World heritage list.
- Morgan N, Pritchard A, Pride R (2002) *Destination branding: Creating the unique destination proposition*. Butterworth-Heinemann Ltd. Oxford, UK.
- Krznar T (2009) Globalizacija kao destruktor identiteta. Primjer okolišnog osiromašenja. *Filozofska istraživanja* 29: 131-143.
- Chhabra D, Healy R, Sills E (2003) Staged authenticity and heritage tourism. *Ann Tour Res* 30: 702-719.
- ICOMOS, International Council on Monuments and Sites (1999). *International Cultural Tourism Charter – Managing tourism at places of cultural and heritage significance*.
- TOMAS survey: Cultural tourism 2008 (2009).
- Geić S (2002) Turizam i kulturno-civilizacijsko naslijeđe. *Veleučilište u Splitu*.
- Vlada Republike Hrvatske (2013) *Strategija razvoja turizma Republike Hrvatske do 2020.godine*.
- Visitor and non-visitor destination images: The influence of political instability in South-Eastern Europe. *Tourism*, 59-74.
- Vukonić B (2010) *Turizam: Budućnost mnogih iluzija*, Visoka poslovna škola Utitus, Plejada.
- Pende H (2013) *Hrvatski turizam – Upravljanje identitetom*, Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada.

Author Affiliation

Top

Faculty of Science, Department of Geography, University of Zagreb, Zagreb, Croatia

Submit your next manuscript and get advantages of SciTechnol submissions

- ❖ 50 Journals
- ❖ 21 Day rapid review process
- ❖ 1000 Editorial team
- ❖ 2 Million readers
- ❖ More than 5000 
- ❖ Publication immediately after acceptance
- ❖ Quality and quick editorial, review processing

Submit your next manuscript at • www.scitechnol.com/submission

This article was originally published in a special issue, **New Trends in Tourism Management** handled by Editor, Dr. Claudia Seabra, Polytechnic Institute of Viseu, Portugal.