

On the Balkans – History, Nature, Tourism and Dilemmas Faced by Researchers

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Uvod

The topic of the special issue of the magazine is “Tourism in the Balkans – Between history and modernity – what image to offer to tourists?” As a region that has been increasingly drawing attention to itself with its controversies in recent years – developed and authentic vs. dynamic development, politically and economically unstable, culturally complex and diverse regarding the effects of development. The Balkans have been the topic of many scientific conferences and the object of research of scientists from all around the world. What is it that makes it such an interesting region? Can the same be said of its tourism and its development? The aim of this theme issue has been to prompt the tourism scientists to address and answer these and other questions. Has it been achieved?

Eight groups of authors have answered our call. Two of these papers were written by non-Balkan authors. Seven were published in this issue. The submitted topics have covered very diverse aspects of tourism development. We could say that four papers treat the issue of history and the consequences visible in the present day region in the field of culture and tourism. Topics came from three countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia and, each in its own way, these topics lead to the same kind of reflection and conclusions – history has been and still is, but its consequences must be overcome. Tourism, with such a goal, has the power and holds options acceptable for all. Two papers in this issue have reflected upon the nature, the one modified and transformed by men into tempting wine regions, enjoyable and attractive, with its enticing tastes of past and present. One of them covers the topic from the point of ecology and the need to preserve the natural environment. Finally, one of the papers is rather specific, philosophical and anthropological in nature. It clearly sets the dilemmas on ways to present history and tradition through tourism. Seeing as the Balkans were primarily a very complex social and political region, is it justified to believe that that is the very way it should be presented to tourists?

The researchers have set very interested goals for their papers. Following the entire procedure, we are delighted to present you with the special issue consisting of 7 papers that set very open, debatable and interesting topics and. It is interesting to notice that in the minds, and eyes of scientists and researchers, the Balkans are dominantly considered a region of history and culture. No papers addressed the beauties and attractions of the seas, the mountain regions or rural development. The invaluable and diverse wealth of nature and the life of common people still seems to be in the shadow of history, mighty empires and wars!?

Lastly, I wish to thank all 18 reviewers from 5 countries, for their efforts towards putting these articles in better shape for publication.

About the Balkans

From ancient civilisations to this day, the Balkans have been a region of dynamic developments, diversity of lifestyles, replete with conflicts, disputes and reconciliations. The region has been a home to great civilisations (pre-history, Ancient Greece, Byzantium, Ottoman Empire, the Slavs, Austro-Hungarian Empire) and to a number of lesser states. It was in this region that different religions, cultures, lifestyles, dynamics and visions of development converged and conflicted. The Balkans are still a very underdeveloped region and unstable, in the political, economic and socio-cultural sense. The burning topics of everyday life in the Balkans are full of remnants of tradition and streaks of modern lifestyle. The Balkans are full of contradictions, not only because of a number of widely diverse political, economic, military, confessional and cultural options of development, but also because of expectations that the world community has from the Balkans. There are traces of ancient cultures in the Balkans, diverse wildlife and landscapes, large modern cities, but also completely underdeveloped and underconstructed villages; there are modern seaside regions with developed infrastructure, but also inaccessible sites of untouched nature. Everyone wishes to aid the development of the Balkan region, the solution of its conflicts, the rule of peace,

the discovery of its forgotten history... What do the Balkans do to deserve it and what is it to blame for? However, let us turn our focus on tourism.

What is the current image of the Balkans in the world? From the aspect of tourist demand, such image is more than welcome. The power of attraction of the Balkans, from the aspect of tourist attractiveness, lies in its very diversity, dynamics and unforeseeability. The modern tourist is on a constant quest for something new, undiscovered, not previously experienced, but also modern, safe, preserved. The Balkans are offering the tourists a new experience, excitement, flamboyance, anything but the everyday monotony.

Is tourism possible in the Balkans and what image should Balkan have or build? The region of culture or the region of savagery? The line may be very thin, but it is firm and attractive.

Managing tourism in countries which face economic and socio-cultural problems is by no means an easy task. What is expected from the development of tourism is a respect of environmental, ethic and socio-cultural codes of behaviour; a sustainable and responsible tourism which contributes to the development of local regions and builds with a view to the future. Do these processes occur in the Balkan countries? What are the problems of management of this development in the countries still quivering with the unsolved problems? To miss the opportunity yielded by the strength of history, culture, diversity and modern market demands is impermissible and to realize a good goal is, we believe, difficult.

Key Results of Research Done by Paper Authors

In their paper, titled “**Semblances of ‘War Tourism’ in Sarajevo, Post-2005**”, the authors **Wise and Mulec**, apply the method of analysis of the content of newspaper articles in English on Sarajevo and the consequences of war from the perspective of tourism. A very recent and sensitive topic. At the time of an increasing “popularization” of several forms of dark tourism and even war tourism, the researchers ask a question – do memories of war need to be presented to tourists, to what extent and in what way? Furthermore, should the memory of war be a key call to tourists or do memories belong to museums and memorial grounds, where they can educate people or be visited by those who are fond of experiencing wartime memories, honoring the victims and the past times. The authors state their attitude in the end: «The city’s Tourism Authorities want to develop different types of tourism in Sarajevo, including MICE, cultural touring, events, youth, sport and SPA tourism, among other opportunities including a city-break destination. Images and memories of the war between 1992 and 1995 are fading, and what remains are becoming restricted to certain areas just outside the city centre. More formal memorials have been constructed and artefacts are kept in specialized museum(s) dedicated to the ones who really enjoy the dark part of the city’s histo-ry—for war tourists. In conclusion, semblances of war tourism in Sarajevo are rapidly fading and images of the city are being replaced by its ascending cosmopolitan life-style with only some attractions and scars in the landscape hinting at the tragic memories of the past.» [1].

The second paper, authored by two ladies – Šešić-Dragičević, M. and Rogać-Mijatović, Lj, titled: “Balkan Dissonant Heritage Narratives (and Their Attractiveness) for Tourism” deals with the question of ways and means of scientific and practical restoration of the dissonant cultural legacy in the Balkan region. The authors emphasize: “Cultural heritage is often seen as an important factor in explaining the post-socialist landscape of the Balkans. In terms of symbolic geography, the Balkans has been and still remains inserted in the long standing binary oppositions East - West, Europe - Asia, Christianity - Islam, Centre - Periphery, etc. These are in variations present also in travel writing through the dominant negative label of Western travel accounts. In investigating the historical heritage of the Balkans and its dissonant narratives, we put focus on those that left the deepest imprint on the region's multilayered identity: the Byzantine, the Ottoman and the communist / socialist.” [2].

This research has shown that the Balkan discourse offers a range of narratives of a dissonant legacy. In producing new tourist products, these stories should be considered. The authors further state: “Only tourism might contribute to overcoming barriers – contemporary borders of nation-states, lack of mediated information, and deliberate manipulation through school manuals, memory site recognition and narrative creation. Raising the collective consciousness throughout the Balkans for the most important cultural sites and their incorporation into tourist routes as common products, is imposed as the first task in creating attractiveness for tourists outside the Balkan region. By mapping specific points related to Balkan cultural heritage we tried to point out numerous possibilities which exist for cultural tourism beyond border development (through cultural routes as an instrument).

In their final remarks, the authors also give concrete suggestions of possible ways in which tourism can create a free choice of interpretation of occurrences and processes, emphasizing that it can occur through tracing of cultural theme routes, formation of competitive narratives, creation of regional cooperation, control of content of promoting the Balkans as a unique cultural area, etc.

The paper by the authors Milošević, S., Jegdić, V. and Škrbić, I. titled: “Multicultural history of the city of Bar (Montenegro) as a basis of development of cultural tourism – attitudes of tourism workers” is specific in its approach for this theme issue. Choosing to do the research on the small maritime city of Bar in which tourism “fights” for the development with the busy port of Bar, the authors have adopted the position of analyzing the rich cultural heritage of Bar from the point of view of the possibility to become at least as popular as the sea beaches. Hence, in the region of Bar, where the sea and seaside tourism dominate, the authors have researched the possibilities and means to overcome the shortcomings of tourist presentation of cultural heritage. The research was based on answers obtained by surveying tourism workers. The authors thus come to an interesting conclusion: “the development of cultural tourism implies a need that the inhabitants of Bar must become hospitable and forthcoming and must become aware of purposefulness of this sort of tourist movement and wellbeing that it brings. The approach to tourists must be appealing, not repelling. One of the most significant obstacles can lie in incompetence, uninformedness, non-collegiality, untimeliness, disorganization, lack of education and other bad characteristics of management and tourism employees. Thus, education in the field of cultural goods must be an indispensable part of education of all those who are included in the activities of cultural tourism, which is especially true of interpreters of cultural goods who are in a direct contact with guests.” [3] The authors thus confirm their starting point that the cultural values of the city of Bar must become an integral part of the tourist offer of the city of Bar, making it more competitive and more recognisable on the Balkan level.

The following paper in this theme issue is: **“Visits to local museums in Serbia - the average model and programmed exception”, autora Krivošjević, V. I Damjanović, I.** The authors have chosen a museum as a place for observation – a place where traces of past times converge and are presented. Citing the basic principles of modern museology which aims to overcome the stereotypes about the museum being an elite scientific institution entitled to preserve the historical artefacts. [4] A contemporary museum is also a place of active events, changes of means and kinds of presentations of evidence of life and cultures. In addition to that, the modern lifestyle that involves competing with other products with which the potential visitors could fill their free time entails a permanent struggle for importance and attention to the attractions of a museum. A rich and diverse offer and promotion of a museum is a task that should not be relinquished to others. Relating this to the topic of the Balkans, the authors claim that:

«Acceptance of these new tasks by the museums in the Balkans is much more complex because they firstly had to give up their roles of established local guardians of communist ideology in order to get into the overall reform process. Only then could they embark on making permanent museum exhibitions interesting and understandable to both visitors from the region and tourists, along with the tasks of heritage conservation. Among other classifications, museum exhibits can be complex, thematic and open-air. Analysis of visits made to local museums in Serbia showed that their permanent exhibitions are sparsely attended, with large disparity according to their type. Complex exhibitions are least visited, while thematic ones are much more so, whereas the most visited are the open-air ones.» [5]. In this paper, the authors analyse a very successful work and development of the Valjevo Museum in Serbia, which uses three different exhibitions every year to attract attention of the public and the visitors. The success is the result of the work of museum managers and experts. This example has been cited by the authors themselves as an example of overcoming the stereotype of impossibility of popularizing the museum visits, even in the Balkans.

One of the papers in this theme issue deals with wine tourism, analyzing the wealth of resources of the Balkan countries for inclusion in the international network of wine regions. **John Hundelson in his paper titled: Eastern Promises: The potential future for wine tourism in the Balkans**, gives an argued and rich overview of potentials, results and models of development of wine tourism in the Balkan countries, based on the documentary material, but also the interviews with experts from these countries. A key recommendation of this paper is that every region should build its unique model of development which can create competitive recognizability and market position, respecting the specificities of nature, history and culture of living. In conclusion, the author claims:

«Nations and industries often look for models to follow when they are reinventing themselves. Most of the Balkan nations in this survey seem to have chosen the New World as a model for the new, leading wine nations they wish to become. Many of the winery and tourism personnel interviewed spoke of marketing concepts from the United States and technology from Australia and New Zealand. Analysis of the material here suggests that they would do well to also look closer to home, in particular to Central Europe, for the strategies that will lead them to success.

The Balkan wine industry, and maybe the tourist industries as well, have historic, geologic, and demo-graphic similarities to those industries in France, Italy and Germany. Like Central Europe, the Balkan's new nations are built on the ashes of

dreadful wars. On the other hand, America's wine industry was predicated on the conquest of lands owned by Mexicans and Native Peoples. Large parcels were bought or stolen. Most vineyard land in Central Europe is in small parcels, and has long been owned by tens of thousands of families. This is similar to land tenure in many Balkan states. In contrast, most of America's vineyard land--the total which is greater in size than the sum of vineyards in Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia and Montenegro--is owned by corporations.» [6].

The next paper is authored by four ladies from the western Balkans and is titled: "Responsible Community Based Ecotourism Initiatives in Protected Rural Areas of the Balkans: Case Studies from Serbia and Croatia". The authors Đukić, Volić, Tišma and Jelinčić speculate with options and models of tourism development in protected natural areas, which, apart from the natural ones, also have significant cultural values. They base their research, conducted by means of three qualitative methods, on the examples of two destinations in two Balkan countries within the Danube region. The authors start from the experience of implementation of the model of "Community based tourism" in the researched region, and subsequently propose a model of development that would respect all developmental specificities of destinations such as these. In conclusion, they state:

«Analysis of the two destinations with similar characteristics indicated the situation and the problems they encounter, and the general conclusion that can be drawn is that the successful operation of community-based ecotourism destinations needs the support of state and local governments, because in this way the institutional framework is being set and strategic planning of destination is being provided. The highlight of these examples is the existence of local stakeholders' initiatives that have participated in the preparation of strategic documents at the local level and have ensured planning niches for their initiatives.

It is necessary to involve the individuals, groups and organizations in the local community in the planning and implementation of the strategy, because they are closest to the situation on the field and have a sensibility for the analysis of the capacity and capabilities at the local level. Although it requires some work on the creation of particular mechanisms, the cooperation of local authorities and other members of the community must be enabled. Moreover, the local authorities must have a high level of functionality in order to produce adequate outcomes useful for planning. Feedback from the members of the community and research are of great importance for understanding the success of this concept, as well as the constant effort to establish and maintain the quality of the original values upon which the development of tourism in the destination began.» [7].

And lastly, but not least importantly, we have the paper with the title of "The Past in the Future – the Tourism of the Balkans through the Eyes of Anthropology", authored by Major Đ. and Tomka D. They debate, from the anthropological point of view, about the basic notions of historical and cultural legacy, about the tradition, tourism, their interrelations and place in general systems of development, from the past and present to the future. We cite their key remarks made in this paper:

"The "sustainable heritage development" defined by Graham-Ashworth-Turnbridge [9] may play a highly important role in this respect: the economic potential of heritage ought to be exploited so that the cultural value content of this heritage does not get damaged during the process.

Traditions are worth preserving also because they are the sources of renewal and, at the same time, through the diversity of patterns of thinking, lay a good foundation for flexibility and adaptation to change. The role of tradition in the world is the same as its role for the individual: tradition helps us create a balance between old and new qualities, preserve durable values, i.e. things that have proven to work, and transfer the knowledge assembled of our comprehensions to others, even to new generations.

If that is achieved, tourism may be an ideal means in the Balkans for a region peacefully standing up for cultural diversity to not only be the devisee but also the deviser of values accumulated over time: values which have so far much shown a disintegrating nature. Tourism is an excellent opportunity for the Balkans to issue the best possible certificate of itself.

Consequently, the Balkans is now facing the challenge of becoming receptive and showing its authentic nature in the global space with this receptiveness. At the end authors make a question: Is tourism a political phenomenon? "One of the most appreciated tourism theories (Dieter Kramer or Gerhard Schulze) also builds upon the intention to colonise forms of experience – which makes the interpretation of tourism as a political phenomenon nearly natural." It is beyond doubt that in this context, the "field" we are talking about is often not a real city or social space which someone tries to remember, evoke, conquer or pay tribute to but merely a perception, idea, a virtual appearance which, both in its moral-memorial constructs and in the majority of the external impacts on the individual "some people" refer to as "the space of politics". [8]

Is there a Conclusion on how to Develop Tourism in the Balkans?

By concluding the presentation of the papers with which the reader can acquaint in this special thematic issue of the American Journal of Tourism Management (AJOTM), I would like to point out that sustainable and responsible tourism

based on an accepted cultural identity and local development must be a model of successfulness and presentation of those values that will not endanger the ethics and morality and will advance the development of those who created the basic values in the first place. All papers presented here support this point of view and argument it with the results of research, data and attitudes. In an earlier published paper, the coauthors ask: “If we take cultural identity, the question is: what are the possible relations of tourism products and services and identity, tradition and everyday life of local communities? How do they relate? In other words, what kind or a part of cultural identity does tourism as an industry offer to its visitors?” [10] After the research we have reached the following conclusion which may be a good waypoint for the Balkan tourism: “Tourism industry should look for ways of understanding values, habits and needs of local people and building tourist offers as extension of those. Chasing big narratives or success stories can seem tempting, but it creates an offer that is not supported from the local community. If local community rejects certain development, it may be shiny and new for couple of years, than it has small chances to survive, while one of the most common reasons for the rejection is very inability to incorporate something into the cultural identity.” [10].

And to conclude with the thoughts of Ivo Andrić, a Nobel Prize winning writer from the Balkans. On the topic of what the problem of the Balkan countries is, Ivo Andrić says:

“Why cannot the Balkan countries enter the circle of the enlightened world, even through their best and most gifted representatives? The answer is not simple. But it seems to me that one of the reasons is an absence of unconditional and consistent respect for the man, his full dignity and intrinsic freedom. It is our great weakness and in that matter we often err unwittingly. That is the wisdom we haven’t mastered yet nor have we learned that lesson entirely. That is the shortcoming that we carry with us at all times as an original sin and a brand of lesser values that cannot be hidden. This should be spoken about and worked on.” [11]

SOURCES

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