



YOUNG GENERATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS OF WARFARE TOURISM: WHERE IS CROATIA?

UTICAJ VEB-PREzentACIJA RATNOG TURIZMA NA MLADE GENERACIJE U HRVATSKOJ

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Abstract:

Nearly the entire territory of Croatia offers various types of war remains. The field of warfare tourism may be considered a micro niche of special tourism interest. The main objective of this multidisciplinary research is to empirically clarify the nature of the phenomenon of warfare tourism by focusing on the attitudes and opinion of young Croatian residents. In addition, the qualitative analysis of some representative cases of warfare web pages was also performed. A total of 292 filled questionnaires was used in the empirical analysis. We found out that only a small share of the youth considers visits to warfare sites/events uninteresting, while remembrance and educational purposes were at the top of the identified reasons, which means that warfare sites/events visits from this point of view has potential for Croatian tourism. Web presentations of relevant sites are very unattractive and weak; while there is no information on the Internet about some destinations and sites. Concluding remarks point to some limitations and suggestions for further research.

Key words:

warfare tourism, youth, web page, Croatia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Croatia, as one of the Eastern Adriatic countries, is highly dependent on tourism. During the war in the 1990s, 15% of the housing units and 2,423 cultural heritage sites, 334 schools, numerous hospitals and traffic infrastructure were destroyed or damaged (Beskrajna obnova od rata, 2010). In addition, different wars and totalitarian regimes in the 20th century had adverse effects on people of different nationality and political and religious affiliation: The WWI and WWII (including the Independent State of Croatia) and Tito's socialist Yugoslavia had a negative impact on people of different national, political and religious orientation. Consequently, nearly the entire territory of Croatia offers war remains, prisons and labour/concentration camp buildings, monuments, and cemeteries, along with different stories of the affected people. Could these sites also be a tourism asset presented on the Internet? Accordingly, the main objective of this study is to further clarify the nature of the phenomenon of warfare tourism in relation to the war in the 1990s through empirical research from the perspective of young Croats. Such a local resident-oriented approach is still needed in dark tourism studies where conceptual research is still dominant (Seaton & Lennon, 2004; Stone & Sharpley, 2008; Stone, 2010; Biran, Poria & Oren, 2011; Kidron, 2013). Additional objective is to identify the cases of warfare web presentations in Croatia and their quality. The main reason for that is virtual world (including virtual tourism), which generally characterizes today's young generation.

Apstrakt:

Na gotovo celokupnoj teritoriji Hrvatske mogu se pronaći različiti tipovi ratnih ostataka. Oblast ratnog turizma može se smatrati mikro nišom od posebnog značaja za turizam. Osnovni cilj ovog multidisciplinarnog istraživanja jeste da se empirijskim putem objasni priroda pojma ratnog turizma oslanjajući se na stavove i mišljenja mladog stanovništva Hrvatske. Takođe, sprovedena je i kvalitativna analiza reprezentativnih primera Internet prezentacija ratnog turizma. Ukupno je popunjeno 292 upitnika koji su obuhvaćeni empirijskom analizom. Došli smo do saznanja da samo mali procenat mladih smatra da posete ratnim lokalitetima/događajima nisu zanimljive, dok se kao glavni razlozi za posetu navode sećanje na pomenute događaje i edukativni razlozi, što znači da posete ratnim lokalitetima i događajima predstavljaju veliki potencijal za razvoj turizma u Hrvatskoj. Prezentacije važnih ratnih turističkih lokaliteta na Internetu veoma su loše urađene i neupečatljive, dok se informacije o mnogim destinacijama i mestima čak ne mogu ni naći na Internetu. Zaključci ovog rada ukazuju na određene nedostatke kao i na predloge i ideje za buduća istraživanja u ovoj oblasti.

Ključne reči:

ratni turizam, omladina, veb-stranica, Hrvatska.

2. WARFARE TOURISM

Tourism involving travel to sites, events or other attractions linked in any way to disaster, suffering, violence or death is denoted as dark tourism which should be understood as a complex socio-cultural phenomenon. One of the earliest attempts to classify suffering- or death-related tourism activity resulted as holidays in hell (O'Rourke, 1988; Pelton, 2003). Rojek (1993) introduced the terms fatal attractions and black spots, but there are also other terms in use, such as thanatourism, morbid tourism and the attraction-focused artificial morbidity-related tourism, fatal attractions, atrocity tourism (Ashworth & Hartmann, 2005), grief tourism (Grief Tourism, 2009), trauma tourism (Clark, 2006) or memorable tourism (Kim, 2013) which are not synonyms. However, Foley and Lennon (1996) and Lennon and Foley (2000), have defined the phenomenon and the concept of the so-called dark tourism on the basis of preliminary works.

According to Smith (1998) and Ryan (2007), warfare sites and events probably present the world's largest and most recognisable single category of tourist attractions. There are nowadays numerous sites dating from period of World War I and World War II, especially in Europe and Asia. Moreover, we also have to mention the sites linked to the Vietnam War, War in Korea, the Balkan conflict, Cambodian conflict, War in Iraq and Afghanistan and many conflicts in Africa, as part of contemporary history and consequently, potentially interesting to tourists. Warfare tourism is a particular form of dark tourism, and it includes visiting war memorials and war museums, "war



experiences”, battle re-enactments (battlefields tours) (Dunkley, Morgan & Westwood, 2011, 860; Naef, 2013a; Naef, 2013b). Henderson (2000), Goulding & Domic (2009) and Stone (2010) highlight that the interpretation of war-related sites is a sensitive issue. In this context, Naef (2013a) and Baillie (2012) problematize Croatia’s monopolisation of memory in the case of Vukovar where such circumstances could provoke new conflicts among the local society, which could slow down the economic and tourist subsystem development.

As the web is becoming a major communication channel to bridge sites, events and visitors, huge marketing efforts should be made to attract new and regular visitors. The design of website pages is related to both marketing and information systems (ICT). Some approaches to evaluate websites generally involve the perceptions of users, while others don’t (Law & Cheung, 2005). In resort industry, Perdue (2001) developed a conceptual model for website evaluations, which is also relevant for our research. He found that the overall website evaluation includes three parts: site navigation, visual attractiveness, and information content. Nevertheless, a wide variety of studies have been conducted to identify the factors that could affect tourist behaviour on the web (Jeong & Choi, 2004; Bai, Law & Wen, 2008). Hausman and Siekpe (2009) claim that “website design research suggests that providing richer media with more real environment has a more positive impact on the user’s involvement”. Thus, it is proposed that the quality of online websites (website design, information quality) is positively associated with the story and quality of physical environment (in our case warfare tourism site). However, no research has been documented on this issue.

3. CROATIAN AND SOME OTHER BALKAN CASES

According to their research in Bosnia & Herzegovina (B&H), Causevic and Lynch (2011), claim that war memories are essential for the concept of post-war tourism development, where using the dark tourism context reduces their meaning to a rather narrow tourism context. Another recent example of a destination with great potential for dark tourism is Croatia. Here, we can see that national culture, memory, and economy are mutually embedded (Rivera, 2008), which means that the history and heritage can also be used as a vehicle for promoting political views and Croatian “nationhood” (Goulding & Domic 2009, 99). Not surprisingly, Vukovar has become a Croatian mythical site where the visitors can see the remains of war, where younger generations can understand the experience of war and feel the sufferings of the Croatian people (Kardov in Naef, 2013a). Contrary to Dubrovnik or some other coastal cities, Slavonian Vukovar was never an overly popular tourist destination, but it appears that its symbolic status has attracted number of visitors. The tourism which accompanies the creation of memorials is often seen as “nationalistic” tourism intrinsically linked to the symbolic status of the city (Naef, 2013a; Baillie, 2012). Regardless of its status, Vukovar-Syrmia County has not planned the development of warfare tourism (Vukovarsko-Srijemska županija, 2011), although this should be its flagship product. Moreover, a brief review of the national strategic document (see Croatian Tourism Development Strategy till 2020, 2013) shows that Croatia has no strategic plans concerning this issue. We reached the same results upon reviewing previous or current strategic documents of some war affected counties in the 1990s, e. g. Zадarska County, Osječko-Baranjska County, Šibensko-Kninska County. Consequently, the relevant questions are: (1) what do young residents think about the war-

fare activities? (2) Are the Croatian warfare web-sites designed for young visitors? Although there is much research presenting the Balkan war of the 1990s from different points of view, many dilemmas have not been resolved in the previous research either in Croatia or B&H. The questions listed aimed to design and empirically verify the following research assumptions:

H1: Young residents of Croatia mostly visit warfare sites (including relevant events) for conservational, educational and commemorative purposes.

H2: Warfare Web sites in Croatia do not follow modern trends.

4. METHODOLOGY

Empirical data for this study were collected from the undergraduate students of tourism- and/or business-oriented university departments, faculties or universities of applied sciences in Croatia. Students belong to a generation that has no direct experience of the war in the 1990s. In the country, 7 public tourism- and/or business-oriented university departments or faculties and 4 public universities of applied sciences were involved in the study. Prior to collecting the data, questionnaires were tested. After a few corrections, undergraduate students of the participating institutions were asked to fill out the web surveys. Students could fill out the survey in the classroom or at home. For the purpose of this study, we used a questionnaire in the Croatian language; only part of it was relevant for the paper. The relative part of the questionnaire included a set of items regarding students’ reasons for visiting or not visiting war sites/events (multiple choice type items) in Croatia - only war of the 1990s was relevant. The questionnaire was based on some previous research (e.g. Kim, 2009; Stone, 2010; Biran *et al.* 2011) and adapted to Croatian circumstances. SPSS 2.0 software was chosen as the mechanism to collate survey data, as well as to analyse and present research results.

We derived from the claim that researchers assessed website quality without generating indices or scores (Law, Qi, Buhalis, 2010). However, website and information quality (colours, special effects, structure of information and other defined characteristics as defined by Murphy, Forrest and Wotring, 1996) were collected and analysed by the researcher (author). Hence, in the present research, information on Croatian warfare web sites was gathered from Google (<https://www.google.com>). The searching keywords included museum of homeland war [muzej domovinskog rata], memorial park of homeland war [spomen park Domovinskog rata], memorial centre of homeland war [spomen dom Domovinskog rata]. After careful screening of the web sites, designed sites were found to directly pertain to the research issue. Only a very small amount of web sites have been detected and analysed. This circumstances offer limited opportunity for analytical work.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In total, there were 292 fully completed questionnaires. The survey was conducted in spring 2014 and lasted 45 days. The sample comprised 69.4% of female respondents and 30.6 % of male respondents, coming from all Croatian counties, although the largest proportion was from Osječko-Baranjska County (14.8 %). The respondents were well distributed across age groups; 26.8 % were 19 years old, followed by 21-year-olds (25.1%) and 22-year-olds (17.2%), with all other groups representing shares of less than 15% each. Most of the respondents (92 %) Croatian.



A descriptive analysis shows that 87.50 % of young residents of Croatia visited one or more times (any) warfare site, and 56.20 % attended events related to the (any) war. A total of 73 % of respondents would visit a building, monument, and museum or attend events related to the war in Croatia in the 1990s. The main reasons for that are listed in Table 1 (respondents could choose no more than three of ten offered options). Only a small share of young residents of Croatia does not directly see visits/attendances as a tourist activity (see No. 7 in Table 1), although all other reasons originated in the dark tourism theory: remembrance (No. 2, 4 and 5) and education (No. 1 and 3) are the main groups of reasons. On the other hand, respondents do not see visits to warfare sites/events as some kind of recreational, voyeuristic allure of violence, which denies the allegations of Robb (2009).

10 % of all young respondents would not visit a building, monument, and museum or attend events related to the war in Croatia in the 1990s. The main reasons for that are listed in Table 1 (respondents could choose no more than three of ten offered options). Namely, 17 % of respondents cannot decide about visits to sites and event attendance. Interestingly, one proportion of the respondents mentions the controversy of everyday social divergence in Croatia as a reason. "Opponents" (as named by the author of the paper) recognized warfare sites and events mainly as part of dark tourism which is not interesting to them.

In the qualitative part, some representative cases of warfare tourist sites were first identified. Major part of warfare web presentations represents web pages of general museums or local tourist boards/offices, e.g. The Karlovac City Museum - Turanj Military Complex (see <http://www.gmk.hr>) or Dubrovnik tourist board - Museum of Croatian War of Independence (see http://experience.dubrovnik.hr/vodic_novost.php?id=1598&id_main=1585). These warfare sites do not have their own web page. Examples of web pages of Place of Memory, Vukovar hospital, (<http://www.ob-vukovar.hr/mjesto-sjecanja/place-of-memory.htm>) and Ovčara Memorial Center (see <http://www.hdlskl.hr>) were identified as only representative cases of war in the 1990s. However, the design of home page and other sub-pages, search engine results, classifications, website basic functions, website communication functions (as defined by Murphy, Forrest & Wotring, 1996) were employed for analytical work. Based on these perspectives, web page of Ovčara Memorial Center is very weak and simple. It offers very basic solutions to the user, such as textual descriptions and some images. Much better and also much friendlier presentations to young user are offered for the Place of Memory, Vukovar hospital: dark colour, sophisticated graphics, more effects, images and short films, text, and writing impressions of visitor, as an option. Consequently, this web presentation has greater potential than the first one and is more attractive to younger generations.

Variable	Event attendance		Site visitation	
	F	%	F	%
1-In order to better understanding everything that happened during the war in the 1990s.	130	26,92	136	27,15
2-Because of empathy with victims and survivors of the war in the 1990s.	97	20,08	101	20,16
3-To learn more about the war in the 1990s.	87	18,01	101	20,16
4-I want to pay tribute to all victims of the war in the 1990s.	86	17,81	80	15,97
5-Because of the memory of the victims of my family and relatives.	38	7,87	38	7,58
6-Because I am personally interested in visiting sites/events associated with death, suffering, and similar.	15	3,11	15	2,99
7-Because they are recognized tourist sites/events in Croatia.	14	2,90	12	2,40
8-Because of interesting leisure time activities.	7	1,45	10	2,00
9-For fun.	5	1,04	5	1,00
10-Other.	4	0,83	3	0,60

Table 1: Reasons for warfare event attendance and site visitation

Source: author

Variable	Event non-attendance		Site non-visitiation	
	F	%	F	%
1-I am not interested in forms of tourism that are associated with war and violence at all.	17	30,91	22	25,58
2-I believe that the war should be forgotten as soon as possible.	12	21,82	16	18,60
3-I think that such activities do not contribute to the reduction of the past and existing divisions in the society.	10	18,18	16	18,60
4-I think would not be a significant experience for me.	9	16,36	15	17,44
5-I have already visited one / more of them and I am not interested in a new visit	4	7,27	7	8,14
6-I do not want to disturb the local population that is most affected by the war.	2	3,64	6	6,98
7-I have difficulties in finding company for joint visits	1	1,82	0	0,00
8-Other	0	0,00	4	4,65

Table 2: Reasons for warfare event non-attendance and site non-visitiation

Source: author



6. SUMMARY

The paper explores some of the main challenges associated with warfare tourism development from the perspective of the young generation in Croatia. Based on the research findings, we claim that one part of the young population believes in warfare tourism potential; only a small share of the youth see visits to warfare sites/events as non interesting (for various reasons); remembrance and educational purposes were the top reasons. Consequently, we accept Hypothesis H1. This is very promising, because as Štrukelj and Šuligoj (2014) pointed out, “cultural heritage sites provide an excellent base for the development of less developed states and regions that lack other natural resources and industry”. This link with culture is mostly evident in the case of Croatia where national culture, memory, and economy are mutually embedded (Rivera, 2008). On the other hand, we found out one painful side of developing warfare tourism in Croatia. Web presentations are very unattractive and weak; many sites have not been present on the Internet. Thus, hypothesis H2 was supported.

The potential applicability of the proposed research should be underscored from a warfare site and destination planning and marketing perspective. It allows tourism destinations to be consciously aware of warfare tourism as a vehicle for their development, and to plan and market their offerings interesting to different target groups. We should also take into account the claim of Lennon and Foley (2000) that sites/events that are more recent are darker than those with a longer history, as well as the claim that areas of recent conflicts still have open wounds, memories and emotions which may disable normal regional/local socio-economic development (Causevic & Lynch, 2011). There might be other relevant elements to analyze, such as the Internet marketing, awareness and national/regional/local brand image that influence warfare destination end vice versa, economic and political standards in the country, perspective of other generations and veterans *etc.* However, these factors are beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, we believe that they should be explored in future research. In any case, warfare tourism remains an under-researched topic in the region between the Adriatic Sea and the Danube River and yet, in addition to holding much potential, it is also less susceptible to any global downturn. This paper seeks to fill this void, because it is the first to deal with warfare tourism in this part of South-Eastern Europe.

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