

Ewa Dziedzic

Culture as an Input into Induced Destination Image : the Case of Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia

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Ewa Dziedzic*

Warsaw School of Economics SGH

**CULTURE AS AN INPUT INTO INDUCED DESTINATION
IMAGE: THE CASE OF POLAND,
CZECH REPUBLIC AND SLOVAKIA**

Abstract

The paper addresses the issue of the use of culture as an input into induced image formation by NTOs. It shows the potential dimensions of such input as far as tourism offering, identity and creative communication are considered. All dimensions are further elaborated and the findings applied to content analysis of official websites of Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia NTOs. The outcome of the analysis reveals that they promote traditional built heritage, only occasionally some examples of arts or creative industries input can be traced. The presentation of the offer is also rather conventional. Only the Czech Republic may be seen as destination that positions itself through rich cultural themes, intangible heritage including.

Keywords: culture, destination image, NTO

Introduction

The growing tourism market attracts more and more competitors who perceive it as an opportunity for setting up a business and more generally for economic growth. The success of those undertakings will depend on the power with which particular places can attract visitors. It is commonly posited that the power is strongly related to the image of the place. Although the concept

* Email address: edziedz@sgh.waw.pl.

of image is slightly ambiguous as both theoretical and practical approaches are concerned,¹ it has got a lot of attention as a subject of research and theoretical reflection. One of the strains of the scrutiny focuses on agents of image process formation. As image of tourism destinations is concerned, the most robust model was proposed by W. Gartner.² The model is founded on the distinction between the “organic image” formed by many influences and sources of information a person encounters during life and the “induced image” that is purposefully created by parties interested in shaping it. Among the latter destination marketing/promotion organizations play the key role. They are the only agents of destination image formation for whom that task is a priority and a basic responsibility. At the same time destination marketing organizations (DMO) have a quasi-official status and their activities are usually linked to the broader policies of the governments. Thus the DMOs try to promote the image that could be attractive for visitors and would influence their choices but at the same time they are often tacitly involved in actions with some political aims. That is especially true as a country image is at stake, and the creation of such is the task of the national tourism organizations (NTO). Despite the fact that effectiveness of the induced image formation may be limited, such campaigns can play an important role as a method for creating a unique selling proposition and thus funneling efforts of the tourism trade in the country.

The issues of formation of the destination image is especially relevant for the Central European countries that entered the international tourism market after the fall of the communist regime. They lacked both the distinct tourism offer and expertise how to operate in the competitive environment.³ In such situation culture seemed to be an obvious option as the basic input into their induced image because it allows unique positioning supported by genuine tourism resources in those countries.⁴ It seems interesting to find out if and how that solution has

¹ Ch. J. White, *Destination image: to see or not to see?*, “International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management” 2005, No. 5/2004, pp. 309–314; Ch. White, *Destination image: to see or not to see? Part II*, “International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management” 2005, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 191–196.

² W. Gartner, *Image formation process*, “Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing” 1993, No. 2, pp. 191–215.

³ H. Hughes, D. Allen, *Cultural tourism in Central and Eastern Europe: the views of “induction image formation agents”*, “Tourism Management” 2005, No. 26, pp. 173–183.

⁴ Ibidem.

been adopted. The purpose of the paper is to examine the role of culture in the induced image of three neighbouring countries in the Central Europe: Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. It addresses the following issues:

- a) what is the role of culture in the induced image of those countries?
- b) how they position themselves using cultural themes to create unique selling proposition?

The research has been founded on the content analysis of the official websites operated by NTOs in the countries and was carried out in February/March of 2014 . The choice of the medium examined has been motivated by the popularity of internet as a source of information for travel planning, although obviously it is not the only means for dissemination of the destination image.

1. Culture as an ingredient of induced image

As it has been mentioned above, the term “image” is to some extent ambiguous both as its meaning and practical applications are concerned. The review of the “image” conceptualization in the literature was done by Ch. J. White.⁵ His findings show that there is no distinct border between conceptualization of “image” as an amalgam of beliefs about the features of a destination and as a general imaginary and attitude towards the particular place. If the concept is to be operationalized to allow image measurement and formation, the former approach is more viable. It allows to focus on visitors’ perceptions, feelings and intentions to travel. In other words image embraces cognitive, affective and behavioral dimensions.

As perceptions and feelings are concerned, there is a body of research in which the knowledge and attitudes towards the place attributes have been examined. Some of them have been reviewed by K. Byon and J. Zhang.⁶ Most of the scales that attempt to measure the image of a particular destination take into account qualities that embrace the basic elements of the tourism supply, such

⁵ Ch. J. White, *Destination image...*, Part I, op. cit.

⁶ K. Byon, J. Zhang, *Development of a scale measuring destination image*, “Marketing Intelligence & Planning” 2010, No. 4, pp. 508–532; S. Baloglu, K. McCleary, *A model of image formation*, “Annals of Tourism Research” 1999, Vol. 26, No. 4, pp. 868–897.

as natural and cultural amenities and accommodation, transportation and infrastructure. Those basic elements are supplemented by other factors such as:

- a) social opportunities and attractions,
- b) friendly people,
- c) safety,
- d) novelty, etc.

Most of the research applied factor analysis and originally included tens of items⁷. Because the mentioned above cognitive factors include tangible and intangible elements, it seems reasonable to distinguish functional qualities of a destination (scenery, facilities, accommodation, etc.) and psychological ones (friendliness, feeling and atmosphere). In fact the latter can be attributed to the affective aspects of the image. Some of the research reviewed by K. Byron and J. Zhang adopted a slightly different approach identifying three cognitive factors (quality of experience, attractions, value/entertainment) and two bipolar affective factors (such as arousing-sleepy and pleasant-unpleasant; and exciting-gloomy and relaxing-distressing).⁸

The conceptualization of the destination image is important not only for its measurement and prediction of travel choices, it can be also used as a guideline for actions aimed at creation of the induced image. R. Groves and F. Go developed the tourism destination image formation model that shows the context of the induced image development.⁹ The model shows the process of image formation as an encounter between forces shaping visitor's attitude and beliefs about the destination, and factors behind the image projected by the host community or in fact by the body with the mandate for doing that. The latter directly affects the induced destination image in minds of the potential visitors.

At the centre of the projected image there are two building blocks: tourism product offering and identity which play a role of an anchor for the projected image. The concept of identity itself is both complex and sensitive. Originally it has been developed in psychology and then adapted for explaining the intergroup

⁷ Ibidem; B. Pan, R. Li, *The long tail of destination image and on line marketing*, "Annals of Tourism Research" 2011, Vol. 34, No. 1, pp. 132–152.

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ R. Groves, F. Go, *Cultural identities constructed, imagined and experienced: A 3-gap tourism destination model*, "Tourism" 2004, No. 2, pp. 165–182.

discrimination.¹⁰ The authors of the concept posit that persons tend to enhance their self-esteem by increasing the status of the group with which they identify themselves. The identity may be constructed around natural environment, culture and religion, history and authenticity.¹¹ As the identity of destinations is concerned, it may cause conflicts when different groups are interested in presentation of the qualities they consider as the most valuable. It is especially relevant to the case of multi-national destinations or destinations with turbulent past when they were populated by different ethnic groups or were incorporated into other states.

The factors influencing the projected image embrace tourism development strategy, service delivery and supply. They form the foundation for the content of the projected image and activities aimed at its deployment. The activities themselves involve communication and other marketing tools, narratives and expressed meaning, produced imagination (art and literature) and media as an enabler.¹²

Even the cursory overview of the described model of an induced image formation allows assumption that culture can play important, even crucial, role in almost all elements of the process. The closer scrutiny of that role requires analysis of the notion of culture so that the possibilities it offers could be better understood. As D. Throsby remarks, the scope of the term “culture” has been recently significantly expanded from the arts and heritage to interpretation of culture as a way of life, i.e. the expression of the shared values and experiences.¹³ The new understanding of the term resulted in broadening of the range of activities that are considered as “cultural”. They embrace arts and heritage, film, print and broadcast media, and also fashion, design and architecture. In some countries the scope of culture is even broader and covers also gastronomy and agricultural products, agriculture, wine and handicraft.¹⁴

¹⁰ H. Tajfel, J. Turner, *The social identity theory of inter-group behavior*, in: *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, S. Worchel, L.W. Austin (eds.), Chicago 1986, Nelson-Hall.

¹¹ R. Groves, F. Go, op. cit.

¹² According to R. Groves, F. Go, op. cit., p. 167.

¹³ D. Throsby, *The Economics of Cultural Policy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2010, p. 2.

¹⁴ *The Impact of Culture on Tourism*, OECD, Paris 2009, p. 26; City Tourism and Culture, ETC/UNWTO, Brussels 2005, p. 3.

The usual link between culture and tourism in the context of destination image focuses on cultural tourism.¹⁵ It may be defined from the demand side with interest in culture and cultural experience as the main criterion of classification.¹⁶ The supply side approach defines cultural tourism according to a core offer. It may embrace:

- **Heritage:** the predominant cultural product is the cultural heritage (artefacts relating to the past) of the place;
- **The Arts:** the predominant cultural product is the contemporary performing and visual arts of the place;
- **Creative Industries:** the predominant cultural product is the creative industries (i.e. design, fashion, contemporary architecture, advertising, etc.).¹⁷

The model of destination image formation that has been discussed above offers the possibility of additional insights. The input of culture can have more dimensions than just offer of attractions. Firstly, for many destinations cultural values form their identity. As it has been mentioned above the choice of the particular cultural heritage may be politically motivated and has implications concerning the choice of the heritage or performing arts that will form the projected image. The potential of culture is so strong that it is often used to create the unique selling proposition.¹⁸ Such selling proposition will stress those elements of the culture that are perceived as especially important by the host community and believed to be interesting for potential visitors. Secondly, creative communication of the cultural values will improve chances of the destination in the market. In fact, skillful development of the identity themes may create the new intangible value attracting visitors.

The choice of cultural themes the destination wants to offer creates the cognitive but also affective dimension of the image. The cultural input embracing heritage, performing arts and creative industries offers almost infinite opportunities for positioning destination but also for rejuvenation of its image. The unique and changing culture based offer may also create a sense of immediate action on the part of visitors adding the behavioral dimension to destination image.

¹⁵ *City Tourism and Culture*, op. cit., pp. 5–7; H. Hughes, D. Allen, op. cit.

¹⁶ *City Tourism and Culture*, op. cit.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 5–6.

¹⁸ H. Hughes, D. Allen, op. cit.

2. Culture in promotion of Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia

Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia may still be considered newcomers in the international tourism market. The research on the countries' image as tourism destinations reveal their weakness in this respect.¹⁹ It is posited that culture is the best way to overcome that problem, especially because the countries enjoy some distinctive qualities in this respect.²⁰ But it is an open question what cultural traits will be chosen to form the projected image and how they will be used.

As it has been outlined in the previous section, cultural themes may permeate all aspects of the projected image formation. It may be deployed by a range of media but at present internet is one of the most popular sources of information used by people planning trips and also one of the most flexible as content presentation is considered. Due to that fact the analysis of websites allows some conclusions on the role of culture in the projected image. The research presented below uses the method of content analysis²¹ in which two coders took part.²² The findings described in the paper are the reconciled version but there were not major differences between data provided by the coders. Interpretation of the data and conclusions have been added by the author. Content analysis has been applied to text and photographs presented on the official websites operated by NTOs responsible for promotion of Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia: www.poland.travel/en, www.czechtourism.com, www.slovakia.travel/en. The analysis was carried out in February/March 2014. It covered home page of the website and first screen of the landing page for particular items. The limitation of the number of screens examined was based on the observations concerning internet viewers behaviour.

The basic research questions presented in the introduction have been developed into a set of more detailed topics following the assumptions on the role of culture in induced destination image formation:

- a) the significance of culture as an ingredient of the image: it has been assessed as an exposure of cultural themes on the home page;

¹⁹ For example survey carried out in 2008 and 2009 by S. Anholt; www.simonanholt.com/Research/research-introduction.aspx.

²⁰ H. Hughes, D. Allen, op. cit.

²¹ S.J. Smith, *Practical Tourism Research*, CABI, Wallingford 2010, pp. 201–220; D. Silverman, *Methods of Analysing Talk, Text and Interactions*, 2nd ed., Sage, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi 2001.

²² The author would like to acknowledge the role of Hanna Zawistowska as the second coder.

- b) the input of culture into cognitive dimension of the image: attractions promoted on the website;
- c) how cultural ingredients are presented as the affective aspect of the image is concerned;
- d) the occurrence of elements that can be classified as prompting visitors to come;
- e) the way of the presentation of culture as creative input into marketing communication is considered.

The findings on the exposure of culture in the projected image are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Exposure of culture on the website

	Poland	Czech Republic	Slovakia
First screen content	No direct indication	Prague, cultural heritage	UNESCO heritage
Visual content	Fairytale stylization	Photographs, access to video, Architectural monuments	Photographs, architectural monuments
Display	None, occasional information on news, bottom of the page	The top and bottom of the page	Bottom of the page
% of the first screen	20%	Up to 90% if changing anchor picture shows culture; 100% of the static visual content	10%
Lead on culture	No direct lead on home page – what to see?, what to do? on the bar, after clicking heritage, UNESCO sites, cities & towns, arts & culture	Cultural heritage on the bar; direct links to particular photographs	No direct indication – places to go, events on the bar; after clicking TOP 10 in Slovakia UNESCO; Special routes; Towns; Event calendar; Regular event
Length of the text on culture	605 words	1272 words	2 584 words

Source: own elaboration.

The analysis of the cognitive aspect of the projected image has embraced several layers of meaning. The cultural offer has been attributed to heritage (tangible and intangible), arts and creative industries. The attribution has been done according to the use of particular phrases related to the type of the activity. The second layer of the analysis has been focused on classification of types of cultural attractions. The following classification has been applied: architecture (includes words: architecture, monuments, castle, manor houses, burgher house, chateaux, villa, church, monastery, cathedral), park and gardens, theatre, opera, music and concert, dance, museum, gallery, painting, fashion, cuisine. The phrases: tradition, traditional, past, historical (additionally historical period has been distinguished like Gothic, medieval, Baroque etc.), modern, contemporary have been used as the additional criterion of classification. The third layer has been aimed at tracing the identity projected via cultural offers. It focuses of the utilization of phrases indicating religious, national, folk and political affiliation of culture promoted.

The affective aspect of the projected image has been linked to the use of phrases like: romance, romantic, spiritual, magic, aroma, flavor, fairytale. The sense of urgency has been attributed to the use of phrases like: unique, splendid. The findings are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

The cultural content of the website projected image
(traced phrases as % of words in the text)

	Poland	Czech Republic	Slovakia
Heritage	32.9	18.9	3.0
Intangible heritage	0	0.2	0.1
Arts	5.5	1.1	1.4
Creative industries	0	0.2	0.2
Architecture	22.0	14.9	2.6
Park	1.3	0.5	0.1
Theatre	0.7	0.2	0.1
Music	2.6	0	0.7
Opera	0.8	0	0.1
Dance	0	0.3	0.1
Museum	10.4	3.1	0.7
Gallery	0	0.4	0

	Poland	Czech Republic	Slovakia
Open air museum/ skansen	0	0.3	0.2
Past	1.2	0	0.8
Modern	0.3	0	0
Tradition	0.7	0.2	0.1
Religion	0.7	0	0.9
National	0.2	0.6	0
Multicultural	0.2	0	0.2
Folk	0	0	0.2
Europe	0.3	0.2	0.2
Romance	0	0.9	0.1
Spiritual	0	0.6	0
Magic, fairytale	1.3	0.9	0.1
Aroma, flavour	0	0.2	0
Unique	2.1	0.7	0.5
Splendid	0.7	0.6	0

Source: own elaboration.

In addition to the data provided in Table 2 it is worthwhile to mention that the Czech Republic strongly stresses the broad array of styles in architecture that can be enjoyed in the country: from Romanesque to Functionalism, with stress on Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque/Rococo. Gothic is also strongly present in the offer of Poland and Slovakia, while in both countries modern styles are completely omitted. Generally, all websites describe mainly tangible heritage that can be associated with traditional approach to national heritage and culture. The only exception can be found in the Czech Republic promotion in which comments on traditional beverages, i.e. beer and Becherovka, are placed.

In Slovakia and Poland the tradition of numerous ethnic groups are mentioned, with special focus on Jewish heritage in Poland. As religious themes are considered they are prominent in Poland's and Slovakia's promotion, especially as Roman Catholic religion is considered, in Poland churches are among the most often mentioned monuments. In the Czech Republic there are only neutral comments on spirituality, meditation and contemplation in the context of religious buildings.

As the last of the mentioned above topics on the input of culture into destination image projection is concerned the analysis has shown that the application

of innovative methods of expression are limited. Only in the content provided by the Czech Republic, and to some extent by Poland, there are attempts to set some places within narration related to famous personalities or fairytale ambience. The use of innovative technical solutions is also rather limited, the Czech Republic website is the most advanced in respect of IT solutions.

The analysis of the content of official websites run by the national NTOs of Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia reveals how they perceive and use culture as an ingredient of the projected image. It shows that only the Czech Republic consequently builds its image on culture, mainly material heritage but also on intangible one. Its website is also most advanced as exposure and expression are considered. In the case of Poland and Slovakia, culture plays an important role in tourism offer but it is not directly addressed as such. Especially Slovakia seems to place more stress on natural attractions which are listed together with cultural ones under the same titles. In all cases prevails rather traditional approach as use of culture is considered. It is strongly present as tourism offering and dominated by traditional themes linked to heritage, and it is mainly heritage of nobles or rich cities and towns. Only Slovakia stresses its folk heritage and contemporary culture. The presence of themes linked to arts is limited and creative industries are practically absent. The traces of them can be found only in the projected image of the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

In all countries the projected image stresses rather than cultural traits that can be considered as common European heritage, i.e. historical heritage. Generally the theme of universality is stressed, the exposure of UNESCO heritage list may be considered as a proof.

The answer to the second research question concerning the role of culture as a base of unique selling proposition is more complex. It seems that only in the case of the Czech Republic it is possible to argue that point. Poland and Slovakia treat culture more conventionally as one of country's attraction, shown under leads "what to see" or "what to do".

Conclusion

The presented analysis gives some insight into the use of culture as an ingredient of creation of the induced image. Its findings cannot give the complete picture of the issue but reveal some similarities and differences in the countries

examined, as well as deficiencies that can be traced. It gives the impression that maybe with an exception of the Czech Republic culture is a underutilized resource as induced destination image is considered. The outcome of the content analysis shows that the themes presented favour the traditional passive encounter with built heritage and universal values. It is obvious that the research findings need more elaboration so that the actual role of culture could be better defined. But it seems also worthwhile to undertake research that could shed some light on processes that influence that role and possibly could help better utilize possibilities it offers.

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**KULTURA JAKO TWORZYWO KREOWANEGO WIZERUNKU KRAJU:
PRZYPADEK POLSKI, REPUBLIKI CZESKIEJ I SŁOWACJI.****Streszczenie**

W artykule podjęto temat wykorzystania kultury jako tworzywa kreowanego przez narodowe organizacje turystyczne wizerunku kraju. Przedstawiono różne wymiary tworzenia wizerunku, w których kultura może być mieć istotny wkład, tj. ofertę turystyczną, tożsamość i kreatywną komunikację wizerunku. Wszystkie wymienione wymiary zostały szerzej scharakteryzowane, a wynikające z tej analizy ustalenia wykorzystane w analizie treści oficjalnych stron internetowych organizacji turystycznych Polski, Republiki Czeskiej i Słowacji. Wyniki tej analizy ujawniają że promowane jest głównie tradycyjne dziedzictwo architektoniczne, tylko okazjonalnie można znaleźć przykłady odwołań do sztuk wykonawczych lub branż kreatywnych. Także sposób prezentacji wizerunku jest konwencjonalny. Jedynie Republika Czeska może być postrzegana jako kraj, który pozycjonuje swój wizerunek za pomocą motywów kulturowych, w tym za pomocą elementów dziedzictwa niematerialnego.

Słowa kluczowe: Kultura, obszar recepcji turystycznej, NOT