

THE ROLE OF TOURISM IN PERCEPTION OF THE CROATIAN COUNTRY BRAND IN HUNGARY AND CROATIA¹

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Abstract

Today it is not easy to find the best choice as a tourist. There are not only countless opportunities but the competitive advantages of tourist destinations have to be also identified within the endless bunch of information. Obviously, in a reverse interpretation, neither the supplier countries have an easy job in gaining the tourists. Among others this is one reason to consciously develop a good country brand. A specific historical element of Croatia is its secession from Yugoslavia in 1991 by which it had to develop an independent country image. For this tourism being a decisive part of its economy seemed to be an adequate tool. The survey shown in present study is the continuation of a last year investigation on the Croatian country image carried out in Hungary – this paper shows the results of a Croatian survey as well. Based on Hungarian and Croatian questionnaire surveys it analyses the role of tourism in Croatian country brand by the time of the country's EU-accession.

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1. Introduction

In our globalized world changes of the modern society have resulted intense development of communication and fast flow of information has opened endless

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doors for people – in this world nation branding as a tool of enhancing competitiveness is a must. This is especially true for a country development of which is traditionally focusing on tourism and whose visual picture originally connects it to sea. It could simply be said that Croatia is a touristic country. However, the one who knows the country better could see the things “behind the highway” and could describe it in a more complicated way. Croatia’s 20th century-history was glorious and sad at the same time while it recently has become the new member of the European Union, twenty-two years after its secession from Yugoslavia. The paper focuses on the touristic dimension of the Croatian country image; is Croatia primarily a touristic country?

2. The country image

Country image is one of the most significant marketing concepts today. According to Kotler et al. (1993) it is the sum of different views, beliefs and opinions that people have about a country. The country image has been present in the professional literature since the 1960’s, primarily from the aspects of the so called country of origin effect, but the latest papers investigate the country image as a brand value. (Jenes; 2010) Simon Anholt was the first to write the concept of country branding down in 1996 (Papp-Váry; 2009). Every country has a continuously changing image, varying spontaneously or in a managed way (Papadopoulos&Heslop; 2002), and as all image types, it is a multidimensional concept; it can be inside and outside image, or even current and wished image. (Sándor; 2003) In the paper both the inside (Croatian survey) and outside (Hungarian survey) image is analysed, and the one called “thought outside image” i.e. what could other think about Croatia in opinion of the Croatians. However, there are some spectacular examples for country brands also from the times before the appearance of the definition of nation branding. The French nation brand was developed consciously in the early 18th century but England, the nazi Germany, the fascist Italy or the communist Russia could be also highlighted as examples. By the broke-up of great colonial empires new nations appeared after the 2nd WW and this re-happened in the ‘90s by the collapse of the Soviet Empire and Yugoslavia. The successor states are intensely revealing their national consciousness, own personality, their cultural, linguistic, ethnic, religious and economic status to the world. (Olins; 2004) According to Anholt (2005) a good nation brand means “soft power” in this process. Opinion of Kotler & Gertner (2002) is that a good country brand means competitiveness, first of all, while it is called competitive identity by Anholt (2007).

Papp-Váry (2009) says that the primary goals of nation branding are economic; enhancing tourism, strengthening investments and development of export. Nevertheless, the country's international judgement also has to be taken into consideration in connection with the international relations and especially the process of "europeanization". (Skoko; 2009) These motivations has interlocked since 1991 in case of the independent Croatia – the country had to develop its own country image after separation from Yugoslavia, had to vivify its economy weakened by the Yugoslavian war and had to eliminate the negative stereotypes and people's "bad feelings" coming with it, while it wished to become part of the European Union, shoving off everything connecting it to "the dark Balkans".

3. Tourism as the tool of image development

Croatia thanks to its favourable geographic position has always been a significant commerce centre during its history. In the early 6th century BC Illyrians dealt with Greeks here while the presence of the Romans on the seaside is proven by several buildings. By the time of the Slavs Dubrovnik played an important commercial and cultural role. With the development of the infrastructure the first commercial accommodation facilities occurred, first modern hotels were built in Opatija, Crikvenica and Dubrovnik in the end of the 19th century. (Hitrec; 2002) Opatija celebrates the 170th anniversary of its tourism in 2014.

Croatia used to be the second most developed member state of the former Yugoslavia after Slovenia. However, the Yugoslavian war had enormous consequences, the direct devastation of the war resulted high decrease of the Croatian's most important branch of economy, the tourism. (Reményi; 2006) By the collapse of Yugoslavia most of the Adriatic seaside remained within the Croatian borders where there had been several nations during the centuries, thus besides the natural beauties historical places compose the tourism potential showing the weird shared life of the European, Byzantine and Mediterranean world.

Based on Meler & Ružić (1999) the Croatian tourism began to be recognized since the 1960's, it showed upward development until the 1980's when it began to stagnate. Based on this it can be concluded that the Croatian tourism was already at a cross-road that time – either makes steps toward its development or gets lost. Discovery of the Croatian seaside was not a result of conscious mechanisms as well as the enlargement of the number of accommodation facilities did not go hand in hand with quality increase and there was no conscious positioning either. Jordan

(2000) states similar as he says that tourism of the socialist Yugoslavia was ‘still water’, most of the accommodation potential was state-owned having no competitors, thus resulting bad quality in long-term. The usual social and economic life of the country was broken between 1991 and 1995, thus the touristic development as well, part of the accommodation potential became victim of the war. Besides, there was a state on the map named “Croatia” again having several tasks – as a solution for these tourism seemed to be an obvious tool.

Tourism had a significant role in the life of the new country since the beginning, the law about the foundation, operation and financing the Croatian National Tourist Board was enacted as early as in 1991. (Vukonić; 2005) According to Goluža (2001) everything can be shown and advertised through tourism; history, culture, gastronomy, people etc. Thus it seemed to be obvious to reshape the country’s reputation through tourism, moreover, it was the easiest opportunity for economic proliferation as well. Croatian National Tourist Board began its operation in 1992 and one of its tasks is to develop the three elements of Croatian image as well; the country name, the slogan and the logotype. (Papp-Váry & Gyémánt; 2009)

Country name means the brand name in the process of nation branding as there is always a picture coming into one’s mind when hearing the name of a country. The country names as geographical phenomena usually have old historical roots, however, there can be situations when these have to be changed – in case of colonies when becoming independent, countries after the collapse of the Soviet block or “new-borns” after the end of Yugoslavia. Thus Croatia is one of them as it had quiet rarely been “Croatia” during its history until 1991.

The today known concept of country slogan had been used since the 18th century as the textual message of the brand, actually containing the promise of the product. In 1993 the already cited Goluža’s touristic slogan won the tender: “Mala zemlja za veliki odmor” or “Small country for a great holiday”. This slogan was considered to be the best as the attribute “small” is sympathetic and “great holiday” does not only mean big in English but it is also a synonym for good. In 1997 a new one was introduced coming from George Bernard Shaw – “Raj na zemlji” – but it was not successful as its focus is “heaven” that had been already used in many countries. The third slogan “Mediterran, kakav je nekad bio” or “The Mediterranean as it once was” had been used since 2005. (Skoko; 2005)

Third image element is the visual part of the brand, the logotype. (Papp-Váry & Gyémánt; 2009) The blue colour of the logotype created by Boris Ljubičić is refer-

ring to the sea and islands of Croatia, the yellow to the golden wheat fields and green to the forests of inland Croatia. The most important elements of the logotype are the two cubes (red and blue) that show the visual code of Croatia, the colours of the flag. (Figure 1)

Figure 1: The elements of country image



Source: http://www.novacom.hr/korcula-velaluka/kako_do_nas.html

Croatian tourism began to develop after the war. 10.6 million tourist arrivals were realized in Croatia in 2010 while in 2011 this increased to 11.46 million. (Croatian Bureau of Statistics; 2012)

4. Appearance of tourism in the Croatian country image

Besides the literature base two researches are presented in the study carried out a few months before the Croatian accession. The role of tourism in perception of the Croatian country brand is investigated by the results shown in the paper.

The Hungarian investigation was executed with online questionnaire and the answers were collected by snowball sampling, which means that it cannot be representative neither for the European Union, nor for Hungary. Neither the Croatian survey could show representative answers as its aim was to see the opinion of the future Croatian EU-citizens, thus the sample consists of students studying business economics in Osijek and Zapešić. Although as both survey are done on quiet big samples, they are both worth to consider.

During the survey done in Hungary, 681 valid questionnaires were collected in almost two weeks. 59% of the Hungarian sample were women, average age was 29 (between 20 and 30), nearly 70% holding BSc or MSc diploma, 56% working and 43% living in Baranya Country, while 23.5% in Budapest or Pest County.

The survey in Croatia was executed by paper based questionnaire where the aim was to see the own image-sensation and the outside image thought by them. 434 fully completed questionnaires were collected, apart from a few exceptions. 68% of the Croatian students were women, average age was 23, 80% study in Osijek while 20% in Zaprëšić near to Zagreb. As it could be seen, to achieve a recognizable country brand different image elements could be used as marketing tools thus it would be interesting to investigate what colours, words, symbols are connected to a given country, and we could get useful basis in designing the marketing tools by knowing whether our country is regarded to possess a male or a female character. Both surveys shown in the study included these issues – regarding the outside image in case of the Hungarian one, while the Croatian research aimed to study the inside and thought outside image.

84% of the Hungarian respondents associate on some word in connection with the sea, seaside, the Adriatic, holiday or the tourism itself regarding Croatia. The same category appeared only in 34% in the inside image part of the Croatian research and the answers are much more colourful. (Figure 2)

Figure 2. Please write down the first word that comes in to your mind in connection with Croatia! (results of the Croatian survey)



Source: own editing

Following the touristic words Croatian respondents mentioned such negative concepts as corruption (11%), recession (8%) and unemployment (4%), but in a

relatively higher percentage patriotism (3.5%) was also marked which latter – despite the other previously mentioned negative ones – appeared also in the Hungarian answers (1.5%). It can be concluded that tourism has a prominent role in the Croatian image; highly in the outside image according to the Hungarians but it is also important in the inside one although Croatians think more about their country than this, often even negative words. The Croatian respondents were asked to write down what could foreigners associate on in their opinion; they think 67% would say something in connection with seaside tourism that is quiet close to the percentage mentioned by the Hungarians. Besides, often associated words could be the Balkans (3%), the war (5%), Yugoslavia (1.5%), corruption (2.5%) and the Croatian football but neither of them reached 1% in the Hungarian answers.

According to the literature, Croatians think they have three strong symbols: the Croatian coat of arms with red and white chessboard, the tie and the Dalmatian dog getting its name after the Croatian region Dalmatia. (Skoko, 2005) However, results of the survey show something else. For the question about the Croatian symbol the answer was in 42% something with sea or tourism according to Hungarians (similarly to the previously shown issue of the first association). Significant percentage mentioned the red and white chessboard (18.5%), familiar from the coat of arms but also from the football dresses or the several Croatian souvenirs, and obvious symbol was also the flag (10%) and the coat of arms itself (5%). According to 31% of the Croatians their symbol is given by the sea and the seaside tourism but the red and white chessboard (17%), coat of arms (19%) and the flag (6%) was also marked. It can be interesting that out of the 681 Hungarian respondents only two and seventeen Croatian ones mentioned the tie, thus this symbol seems not to be so well-known in Hungary. The Dalmatian dog did not appear in any of the surveys.

List of colours joining the country is lead by blue and red; 70% Hungarians and 40% Croatians said blue, while 13% Hungarians and 25% Croatians said the red colour. Nevertheless, there is a greater difference in the answers in case of the question regarding brand personality. 60% Hungarians think Croatia would be a male if being a person and only 28% voted for female character, while 47% Croatians said that Croatia would be a female and 30% voted for male. There can be several psychological explanations behind this difference and also a linguistic phenomenon may have some role as the Croatian word “Hrvatska” (Croatia) is even as feminine as “domovina”, meaning home.

5. Conclusion

Features and the constantly changing elements of the Croatian country image could be analysed through long pages. Although one element can be considered to be standard – the tourism. Not just because the Croatian economy is highly determined by seaside tourism but also because Croatia being independent since 1991 based its independent country image on tourism and the touristic image. This was probably a good decision as the peculiarity of tourism marketing is that emphasizes generally accepted positive values, moreover, these pictures are usually connected to our holidays calling negative feelings only in a few cases. Present study focuses on these positive values and investigates whether Croatia is primarily a touristic country besides is analyses how successful its touristic image creation was.

Based on the relatively new research findings shown above, Croatia's touristic image creation was absolutely successful in Hungary, moreover, even Croatians know that abroad they are considered to be a touristic country. Results show that Hungarians explicitly interpret Croatia from touristic aspects while the most interesting thing coming from the surveys is that opinion of the Croatians is not so positive about themselves. In the Croatian survey more often appear negative words as more than 36% listed some negative feature as the first association while this rarely happen among the Hungarian answers. Obviously this can be explained by the fact that residents of a country are more clear with own weaknesses and everyday problems than the "outsider eyes", e.g. tourists. However, findings of outside image not showing negative stereotypes regarding Croatia may only tell us that if there could be one word said, this would be seaside tourism.

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