NATIONAL AND TOURIST IDENTITY OF CITIES

THE CASE STUDY OF BELGRADE

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Abstract: The paper explores some key aspects of postmodern urban theory, empirical aspects of the common identity of European cities, their importance for the development of intra-continental tourism, acculturation and process of integration. In the context of the theory of consumer society and the concept of "experience society", the cities are treated as producers of touristic experiences. Based on the accepted explanatory framework and criteria, the focus of research is on the particular case of Belgrade, which simultaneously possesses the national and European identity. The results of the research related to important events, attractions, associations and symbols, based on the opinion of foreign tourists, are presented using previously established methodology and empirical data. Then the Top 10 ranking tourist attractions of the Tourist Organization of Belgrade, and a list of ten most visited attractions by tourists, are critically analyzed. The mutual comparative analysis of Top 10 list of attractions in Belgrade by two foreign sites, and their comparative analysis with the previous list of TOB is also presented. In this way, by identifying the touristic focal points which stand out as key markers of hybrid - local and European identity of the capital of Serbia. Finally, based on the analysis of successful experiences of European cities, one can determine the main directions for the reconstruction of the identity of Belgrade, as well as the creation of its new brand and touristic image.
Key words: Europe, cities, identities, tourism, Belgrade

Introduction

Modern consumer society is the "experience society" in which the meaning of life is seen in the constant succession of experiences, and in that context, almost all goods and services are promoted as generators of pleasant experiences. Today we can talk about a whole postmodern "phenomenology of consumer experience." The success of human existence is increasingly measured by the number and intensity of pleasant experiences that occur from the moment of birth until death. Analogously, tourism is a "hunt for experiences" too, and traveling itself is important event in human life and contributes to its enrichment. Experience is the main objective of tourist

travel, its psychological essence, as tourists embark on a journey constantly seeking new and different experiences that can't be realized at home. In this context, the tourism product - the city, can also be defined as a generator of various experiences. The city produces, organizes and provides experiences to meet the identified needs of target market segments. The experience begins with a visual perception of tourist attractions and is linked to the aesthetic experience of the given built environment. Here is an inseparable blend of urban architecture, the attractiveness of the immediate environment in which it is located, as well as human activities that take place on site.

Cities are emerging as an important origin and destination of tourist flows, well integrated into the transportation network in the international and transcontinental levels.

They are the kind of space where it is very difficult to identify the tourist function. Namely, given the large number of urban functions, there is a methodological problem of precise separation of the tourists from other categories of visitors. For the tourist the cities are attractive not only because of cultural and architectural monuments, entertainment, shopping and nightlife, but for overall socio-cultural environment. The original tourism, promoted by Stendhal in France and Italy, was mainly an urban type, while the beaches, mountains and deserts came later. Today, cities make a significant share of the total tourist traffic of individual countries. The symbolic power of the cities for tourists is so strong that a large number of countries are mixed or equalized, with its capital and largest city. There are few tourists who will go to England and not to get around London, to France without seeing Paris, to Germany and not visit Berlin.

Hybrid urban identity and tourism

The city is geographically specific phenomenon materialized and localized in space. City is the subject of appropriation, has its limits and carries a name. It is a product of culture, a spatial unit in which a certain group of people lives, those people are inseparable from a given space (symbolism, history, language, identity). Today, in an era of global tourism, cities are increasingly internationally branded and are in competition with each other. They are in fact mutually differentiated on the basis of diversity of urban landscapes, geographical location, climate, culture, language, cuisine, etc. The city is a concept that encompasses the whole understanding of reality at a specific location (*topos*). Featuring localized characteristics, the city is a temporary result of a transformation of space, because it is always developing.

The identity of the city is its uniqueness, originality, inherent characteristics (*differentia specifica*). All that makes up its inner being or essential identity (*genius loci*), and relies on the size, shape, geographical coordinates, social life, people, atmosphere, rhythm of life, symbolic value, material and spiritual heritage, present and future. However, the core identity is inseparable from relations with other cities, because the process of comparison comes to what makes it different from other cities in the narrower or wider environment and the world. The "comparative analysis of the city identity" can be done in two ways: 1) From within - by the very people living in the city who have traveled the world as tourists and compared their own city with all other cities that they have seen; 2) From outside - by visitors and tourists from many countries coming to a city and comparing it with the city from which they came, and with all the other cities that they have previously visited. From comparative analysis and cross data obtained in this way one can get an objective view of the city's identity or identify the degree of its similarities and differences compared to other cities, its strengths and weaknesses as a tourist attraction. Analyzing the complexity of the notion of identity Stojković (1993:17) argues that: "The dialectical nature of identity is reflected in the fact that it identifies and distinguishes, because one individual (human or group) is identical to other individuals (groups) only if different from other individuals (groups)". So each identity, collective or individual, including the identity of cities and tourist destinations, is based on the existence of the opposite, antipodes, different others.

Although the identity is often based on "constant" elements (Šešić, 2002:21): material heritage, institutions, stable traditional forms of human behavior, the new cultural policy at the same time have to take care of the most valuable cultural achievements - they are in a constant process of transformation and make the city alive and active organism, interesting for the settlement or frequent visits. According to the Foot (2001), in contemporary cultural life, myths and legends, memories that were formed for centuries in European cities, are not only used as part of a cultural policy for the preservation of cultural heritage or "cultural tourism" in various forms, but even more in the process of "branding" that is developed in order to qualify the city as a product. In this context, programs are created with the aim to encourage "European identity", for example the program "European Capital of Culture" is often used to promote a positive image as well as new urban myths, to restore the identity of individual cities.

Cities are the basis and reference for creation of individual and collective identity, or religious (Rome, Jerusalem, Mecca), national (Dublin,

Barcelona, Bilbao) and trans-national cultural identity (Brussels, London, New York, Toronto). They use the collective memory and media, including cultural references: political symbols, events, monuments, churches, institutions, etc. Cities are strong source of local and national identity, and because of this, they are very attractive for tourism (tourists are commonly found in the role of outside observers, and rarely accept active participation and immersion in local identity and interaction with the culture of the population).

Observation of cities in a different way, as pointed out by Radošević (2009: 220), becomes apparent in late 80's, when the European Union had taken a series of studies on European cities. These studies located the cities in the regional context and analyzed the specific urban factors that accounted for some of them to be more successful than others. Urban and regional analysis, over the next decade, pulled the discourse of globalization which made a great impact. The literature on the world system "pulls" the cities from the previous national and local context and places them in the new global network. The special character of European urban regions becomes apparent through the interpretation of globalization.

A growing number of cities in the world seek to differentiate their own brand and image to enhance their unique identity, in order to leave a better impression of their own citizens, but also to attract and impress visitors by providing a wide range of visual, aesthetic and other experience. With that in mind, tourism has a growing impact on urban aesthetics, urban design and architectural features of the built environment. In this context, the visual approach to planning, places an emphasis on impressive monumental buildings and capital structures as a major pole of attraction (touristic "focal point" or "spatial nuclei") to visitors.

Monumental architecture with broad axes, vistas and boulevards, large squares (Place de la Concorde in Paris, Unter den Linden in Berlin), with strong symbolic meaning, grouped historical, religious and iconic building (Sagrada Familia in Barcelona, Opera in Paris, the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, the Reichstag in Berlin), museums (the Louvre in Paris, the Prado in Madrid) street scenes (socio-cultural appeal of the space), are all the favorite tourist attractions. Finally, tourists are very attracted by historic centers and the core of some cities (Florence, Venice, Prague), modern cities and parts of cities (Brasilia, Defense) or some post-modern cities that are created as a tourist attraction and a spectacle in itself (Las Vegas).

Tourism emerges as one of the many complementary functions of each city, particularly global cities and large towns that have a high tourist attraction in themselves, but also a great symbolic significance, as incarnated

and represent the spirit, history and culture of the entire nation (Rome, Paris, London, Berlin, Prague etc.). Big cities are also the great generators of demand, as well as very important tourist destination (receptive centers), whose appeal is based not only on the architecture and the cultural and historical monuments, but also on many other aspects such as cultural environment, events, business tourism, night life, entertainment, shopping, etc. Here, tourism is in complementary and synergistic relationship with other economic sectors and functions of the city.

Tourism reconstructs, restores and "resurrects" places that are in the economic and demographic decline (Venice, Bruges). It, in fact, brought "new life" to the neglected, or abandoned places and objects, replacing the old industries (failed due to the exhaustion of natural resources on which they are based or the occurrence of new technologies that have done them obsolete and unnecessary) with tourism as a new dominant or unifying activity that encourages the development of numerous complementary economic sectors. In this context, it is particularly important to point out that tourism is an "environmentally clean" activity, alternative to "dirty industries" which left a certain vacuum and discontinuity in the process of economic and social development.

Finally, tourism leads to the gradual removal of borders and differences between tourist places in receptive countries and non-tourist places in the emitting countries. This occurs due to the simultaneous action of two convergent processes. The first is related to the transfer of culture and civilization standards from generating to receptive countries and places in the context of globalization and international tourism. The second relates to the tourists, who travel abroad more and more often, and each time return to the place of residence from which they started, bringing back new experiences and knowledge eager to apply at home. The imported "aesthetics of vacation" change the urban environment of generating countries - return homogenization ("boomerang effect" of tourism). This feedback effect operates within Europe as a result of intense intra-continental tourist movement between cities, which often leads to a mutual takeover and to imitation (benchmarking), leading to the homogenization of urban space.

However, each city strives to maintain its original identity and to differentiate its own tourism product and image in relation to other competing cities. With that in mind, the case study of Belgrade will be analyzed.

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has a negative global image and the search for a new identity and different image is necessary.

Belgrade's identity between Balkan and Europe

Belgrade is in the "crisis of identity" as a former capital of communist Yugoslavia and now as the capital of post-communist Serbia. The city still has a negative global image and the search for a new identity and different, better image is necessary. Serbia, often condemned by the International community as the "main culprit" regional state (the breakup of former Yugoslavia, civil wars in Croatia and Bosnia, the criminalization of society, the assassination of Prime Minister Đinđić, (non)cooperation with War Crime Tribunal in Hague, conflict and the unresolved status of Kosovo etc.), still bears the geopolitical "stigma" within Europe and beyond, on a planetary scale. Belgrade, the capital of the globally "notorious country", represents its synonym, symbol and quintessence of everything that Serbia is, both in positive and negative sense. As Serbia is still not completely free of the negative political and tourist image, Belgrade bears the consequences of that in amplified form, because the capital city is for most foreigners the "head" of Serbia, as is the case with other major cities (Paris - France, Berlin - Germany, Moscow - Russia etc.).

When it comes to tourist attractions of Belgrade *per se*, it is evident that it does not have significant number of material remains of the past like cultural-historical monuments, monumental buildings, squares, ambient units, and other strong focal points that would be attractive to tourists. The destruction of the city throughout history has led to its "de-materialization", so it lost much of the material remains of the past, and the tourist offer of this kind is quite scarce. At the same time, there is neither impressive examples of the contemporary architecture with aesthetic and artistic value attractive for tourists. Unfortunately, some of the most attractive tourist nuclei in the urban fabric are a couple of monumental buildings destroyed during the NATO bombing, which have not yet been restored. They represent the paradigm of aforementioned dematerialization of the city.

From the comparative analysis with other capital cities in Europe, it can be concluded that these cities are more attractive than capital of Serbia. Belgrade, of course, can't possibly compete with Paris, Rome, Berlin or Prague, it can't be measured even with Budapest or Bucharest, but it may be more equal in the market race with some cities in the region which are in "the same competitive league," as Zagreb, Sarajevo, Skopje, Sofia and Tirana. Belgrade must, above all, keep the realistic approach in search for possible options, and in this context try to achieve ultimate goals. The

prerequisite for this is a critical insight into current state and comparative analysis between Belgrade and other major cities of Europe, as well as access to case studies of cities that have found a successful formula for identity reconstruction, as well as building a positive image and new brand.

There are many dilemmas and concerns about the current identity of Belgrade and its tourist image. So it is necessary to study all relevant research that can contribute to the better understanding of its identity. In this context, a very interesting study of Belgrade's identity is conducted by Bojana Bursać (2002:273-291). The author explores the perception of identity through different dimensions (collective memory, the physical environment, the relation between the past and present, symbols etc.) and from different angles (the inhabitants of Belgrade, city's representatives in the field of art, culture, education, media and marketing and domestic and foreign tourists). For purposes of this paper only the perception of the identity of Belgrade by the foreign tourists is taken from her research, as it is the only relevant angle when it comes to the tourist image of the city in Europe and the world (all results shown below are expressed in percent).

Historical events by which Belgrade is known to tourists from abroad: 1) NATO bombing in 1999. 29.4; 2) Fifth October 2000, 14.7; 3) Period of Communism 11.8, 4) The wars in Belgrade, 8.8, 5) Turks in Belgrade 5,9; 6) No answer 29.4.

Major tourist attractions in the opinion of foreign tourists: 1) *Ambient of Belgrade - Belgrade Fortress* 24,5; 2) *Entertainment in Belgrade - Skadarlija with bars* 18,4; 3) *Culture and Museums*, 14.3, *Museum of Contemporary Art 10,2 , Belgrade and foreign cultural centers 6.1;* 4) The parts outside the city center of Belgrade - Zemun with the Danube 8.1; 5) Buildings destroyed during bombing in 1999. 6.1; 6) The natural surroundings of Belgrade - Ada 4.1; 7) Other 8.2.

The first association in connection with Belgrade for tourists from abroad: 1) *City of fun and enjoyment (including enjoyment in food)* 33.3; 2) The bombing of Belgrade in 1999. 22.2%; 3) The former Yugoslavia 22.2; 4) *Sava confluence into the Danube* 22.2; 6) Other 0.1.

Belgrade is famous, according to foreign tourists, by: 1) *Night life and bars* 20,6; 2) Danube, 7.7; 3) Slobodan Milošević and the wars of 7.7; 4) Josip Broz Tito 14.7; 5) *Citizens of Belgrade* 11.7; 6) *Belgrade fortress* 8.8; 7) No answer 8.8.

The symbols of Belgrade in the opinion of foreign tourists: 1) *Belgrade Fortress* 27,4; 2) *Skadarlija and bars* 13,6; 3) *Church of St. Sava*

13.6; 4) *Monument to Prince Mihajilo on Republic Square* 13,6; 5) Cyrillic 9.1; 6) Destroyed buildings 9.1; 7) No answer 13.6.

The results of presented research indicate some positive and negative aspects of identity and tourist image of Belgrade in the eyes of foreign tourists. On the positive side (*italics*) are: fun and pleasure of the city nightlife (bars, clubs, floating restaurants, Skadarlija), Belgrade Fortress (Kalemegdan), Saint Sava Temple, the monument to Prince Mihajilo on Republic Square, a convenient location at the confluence of the Sava and Danube, city residents and institutions of culture (museums, galleries, cultural centers). On the negative side (underlined) are: NATO bombing and destroyed buildings, Slobodan Milosevic and the civil wars that are associated with him, the period of communism and the Turks in Belgrade. However, just to list the positive and negative elements of identity and image of the city in the eyes of foreign tourists is not sufficient to estimate the tourist value of Belgrade. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to conduct a research related to "the intensity of each tourist attraction" (using the scale of 1 to 5, for example), whether it has positive or negative connotations. For example, the remaining buildings destroyed by bombing in 1999. have a negative connotation, but they may have a greater intensity of attraction for foreign tourists than any other attraction in the city that has a positive connotation. Using this approach we can obtain, not only quantitative evaluations of individual attractions, but the overall tourist attractiveness of the city. In this context, of course, data on the number of visitors who visit each of the touristic focal points in the city are also very important.

The issues of Belgrade identity and its main tourist attractions are the subject of research of other tourism organizations in the country and abroad. For example, according to research completed by TOB (Tourist Organization of Belgrade, 2011/2012) the most popular *Top 10* tourist attractions in the city are:

Top 10 attractions of Belgrade by the choice of TOB: 1) Belgrade Fortress; 2) Republic Square; 3) Topčider park; 4) Temple of Saint Sava; 5) Royal Palace - White Palace; 6) Skadarlija; 7) Ada Ciganlija; 8) Zemun - Gardoš; 9) Mount Avala and 10) Rivers Sava and Danube.

Top 10 attractions of Belgrade by the choice of tourists: 1) Shopping Center "Ušće"; 2) House of Flowers; 3) Ruined buildings in the NATO bombing; 4) Strahinjića Bana Street;
5) Stadiums of FC "Crvena Zvezda" and "Partizan"; 6) Floating restaurants; 7) Saint Sava Temple; 8) Rivers Sava and Danube; 9) Avala and 10) Ada Ciganlija.

Comparative analysis of the ten most important tourist attractions of Belgrade recommended by TOB, and those most visited by tourists, shows certain gap between the image that relevant tourist institutions want to project to the public and most visited attractions by tourists. In fact, only four attractions recommended by TOB are on the preferred list by tourists (indicated in *italics*). In contrast, some very important attractions such as the Belgrade Fortress (Kalemegdan), Republic Square, the White Palace and Skadarlija are not on the list of attractions that most tourists visit, but there are other attractions that are objectively less valuable, such as: Shopping Centre "Ušće", House of Flowers, buildings destroyed in NATO bombing, stadiums of FC "Crvena Zvezda" and "Partizan" and Floating restaurants. From the comparative evaluation of these two *Top 10* lists, it can be concluded that TOB advised important historical, cultural and artistic attractions worth much more than those which are visited by tourists. Consequently, the "superiority" of the first list, and the "inferiority" of second one is evident: Belgrade Fortress - Shopping center "Confluence"; Republic Square - Buildings destroyed in NATO bombing; White Palace - Stadiums of FC "Crvena Zvezda" and "Partizan"; Skadarlija - Floating restaurants, etc. It is apparent that TOB seeks to promote and recommend the most valuable cultural, artistic and ambient nuclei that will best represent the idea of the city. In contrast, it seems that the tourists in Belgrade are not interested in high culture and history, but they are much more interested in "more practical and hedonistic" aspects of tourism such as shopping, sports, entertainment, pleasure and nightlife.

In recent years, the local media in Belgrade, often with undisguised "pride", quoted the writing of the London "Guardian" that Belgrade is on the radar of Western European music fans, while the best known site for backpackers offtrackplanet.com included Serbian capital on the list of *Top10* destinations in the category of best entertainment. Many pepole speculate, as Letričin (2011:88-90) believes, that the popularity of Belgrade "as the top place to party" is due to well-known festivals, but the fact is that there are 2500 taverns in town too. The only thing that Belgrade does not lag behind in comparison to other European capitals are places to go out, night life stops and places to party, because of the enormous choice of cafes, clubs, bars, pubs, discotheques, floating restaurants, concerts and festival. However, the night life and shopping attracts mostly tourists from the countries of former Yugoslavia (Bosnia, Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia) and Bulgaria and Romania, but not the tourists from Western Europe.

The choice of *Top 10* tourist attractions of Belgrade is made also by some well-known specialized international tourist sites.

Top 10 attractions of Belgrade (**www.tripadvisor.uk**): 1) Belgrade Fortress;

2) Belgrade Zoo; 3) Bicycle paths; 4) Skadarlija; 5) Temple of Saint Sava; 6) Ada Ciganlija;

7) Church of St.Petka; 8) The National Theatre; 9) St.Mark's Church and 10) The river Danube.

Top 10 attractions of Belgrade (**www.igougo.com**): 1) Kalemegdan; 2) National Museum; 3) Belgrade Fortress; 4) Ethnographic Museum; 5) Tesla Museum; 6) Princess Ljubica Palace; 7) Avala; 8) Old Belgrade and its attractions; 9) Knez Mihailova Street, and 10) City tour.

From the parallel survey of the above two sites, it can be seen that the selection and hierarchy of attractions are not the same. The lists overlap only in terms of the Belgrade Fortress, while all other attractions are different. When each of these two lists is compared with the choice of *Top 10* attractions by TOS, we get divergent results too. List www.tripadvisor.uk site overlaps with a list of TOB in terms of five attractions, namely in 50% (Belgrade Fortress, Skadarlija, the Temple of Saint Sava, Danube and Ada Ciganlija) while the other 5 attractions are not on the list (completely different attractions are recommended).

The selection of the ten most important attractions of the site www.igougo.com is overlapping even less with the list TOB, only 20% or 2 attractions (Belgrade Fortress and Avala), while all other recommended attractions are completely different. Bearing this in mind, we can conclude that the choice of the most important attractions in Belgrade is very different depending on the criteria, which means that we should always bear in mind the relative, changing and dynamic nature of these lists. In that sense Belgrade (TOS) must constantly monitor the variations of taste of tourists, as well as the foreign websites and their perception of Belgrade, and make a new Top 10 list every year, adapted to tourist demand.

Finally, the question is what about some of the most important streets in Belgrade, through which many tourists pass, those streets are tourist attractions themselves? As an illustrative example, we can take two streets in Belgrade. On the one hand, we have Skadarlija, as a typical form of organized, pseudo-authentic space that is intended for tourists, where everything is subordinated to their needs in the retro style of the old bohemian life that no longer exists. Skadarlija is actually kitschy, romanticized nostalgic attempt to "freeze the time" or reconstruct the past.

Bearing in mind that it does not maintain the spirit of the past times, nor the spirit of contemporary Belgrade, we can say that it is just "empty shell" from which the true bohemian life is totally sucked out and dead. This

is an artificial and inauthentic tourist area, bad imitation with very weak links with the past, which is gradually transformed into Baudrillard's "simulacrum". In contrast, Knez Mihajlova Street is the main pedestrian zone of the city, with foreign branded apparel shops, book stores, perfumeries and fashionable cafes, reflecting the actual aspirations of the city towards Europeanization. However, in recent years degradation of the epicenter of the city occurred, because of the numerous shops, department stores, cafes and restaurants closed their doors (the former Department stores "Beograd" - "NAMA" and "Mitić", restaurant "Queen of Greece," and numerous other smaller shops). The causes of this degradation, depletion, and re-Balkanization of Knez Mihajlova Street, are multiple: excessive rents for commercial space, reduced purchasing power and demand, competition from major shopping centers "Ušće", "Delta City" and others outside the city center and with large parking area. They attract a growing number of customers and influence the change in consumer habits. Finally, in addition to the growing number of dilapidated, abandoned and derelict shops in Knez Mihajlova Street still exist various legal and illegal vendors offering fake French perfumes, umbrellas, ice cream, postcards, jewelry, souvenirs and various knick-knack. This is an authentic, semi-organized tourist area that reflects the local socio-cultural and economic realities and specific *genius loci*. If a tourist leaves the pedestrian zone and continue towards Sremska Street, subway passage Zeleni Venac and the green market, he will find heaps of illegal dealers of textile and other goods, thus reinforcing the impression of disorganization, chaos, vibrancy and authenticity. From this example, it appears that the city authorities do not always have to "embellish" city streets to make them more attractive for tourists, because the authentic, unedited parts of the city are often more attractive to them. Grooming street by the western model should be a consequence and a reflection of the needs of local people too, and not tourists only. If Belgrade residents have a genuine need to regulate the city and the streets for themselves, not for tourists, then they will experience the streets as authentic reflection of local culture, not as a backdrop, "Potemkin village" or bad provincial imitation of the European cities.

Conclusion

Thus, the brand and tourist image of each city must be based on its authentic identity. Identity, however, is not a given and immutable category, it can be corrected, improved and radically changed in accordance with the spirit of the time, the population's needs and demands of the tourist market. In the process of (re)construction of identity, it is necessary to critically

examine the past and present, so that they are adequately integrated into the vision of the desired identity which is to be constructed in the future. European cities are very different (Lisbon - Salzburg, Madrid - Berlin, Athens - Copenhagen, etc.) so in a way, what connects them is the diversity, which is a significant competitive advantage when it comes to tourism because the "difference" is its main resource. In this context, some cities are "inert", because their efforts are concentrated towards maintaining the existing unique identity on which they built a high-ranking tourist image (Venice, Florence, Prague), while other cities are "dynamic" because they seek to transform and radically change their existing identity like Berlin, Barcelona or Bilbao. As Belgrade also falls into the category of cities with "problematic identity", it is necessary that it builds its own vision and branding strategy for construction of future identity and image by using the successful experiences of other cities. To achieve this goal all national and local potentials must be engaged. Their creative ideas should be incorporated into long-term strategy to meet the aspiration of local people and expectations of tourists.

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