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**CULTURE AND HERITAGE TOURISM –
DESTINATION COMPETITIVENESS AND
REGIONAL CLUSTERS REVIEW⁵**

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – The research on cultural identity and state on one side and the destination competitiveness on the other, have gained in importance in the research on Cultural and Heritage Tourism. Is the preferred image of the Balkan countries discordant with its actual image and is there a space for the regional cluster development in the current context. This paper is a review of the literature in Destination competitiveness studies and models as well as the Culture and Heritage tourism research and development of the regional clusters.

Findings – The findings demonstrate the success in other areas (Motor Valley cluster in Italy) and highlight the importance of the competitive advantage that is innovation driven. Perspective of both the historic site managers and the state officials and tourism strategy developers is necessary in order to have a common doctrine and avoid the gap in the service provision and policy making processes. There is a lot of scope for further culture and heritage cluster research and development in Balkan states.

Originality of the research – The author is currently working on a doctoral thesis in this particular subject. Cases of Serbia and Macedonia will be further researched, including the interviews with the key opinion leaders in both countries.

⁵ Review article

Keywords: destination competitiveness, culture and heritage tourism, regional clusters

INTRODUCTION

As Light (2007) stated in his research on cultural identity and state, the latter has an important role in defining cultural meanings, interpretations and identities. It is essential to select the forms of tourism that the country wishes to develop and that correspond to the cultural and political identities. However, these go beyond control at certain points (Dracula tourism in Romania). Is the image of the Balkan countries discordant and what would be the preferred clusters that the tourism authorities wish to create and join in the current context? According to Micic (2010), starting from the specialization aspect and the geographical one, the clusters can be classified into export-import orientated, local industry and not competing with other locations and the local affiliates of competitors whose mother companies are situated at other locations and who cover the needs of the local market. Some examples of the successful clusters are the virtual or internet clusters, comprising direct and indirect participants. The advantages over geographical clusters are wider and faster regional and international development, a more efficient communication. Industrial district refers to the sum of many clusters in a region, interconnected into specific sectors. In EU, almost 40% of the employees work for a company that is a part of a cluster. The most successful ones are in Italy, Spain, Germany, Switzerland and Belgium although the tourism clusters are not very much represented. In USA, the cluster development consists of a tight collaboration between the entrepreneurs, regional and local government as well as the universities and research and service centers. In England, the initiative starts off in the regional development agencies whereas in Austria between the research centers and the private sector.

DISCUSSION

Culture and Heritage Tourism in Balkan states – Serbia and Macedonia In researches presented by Armenski, Gomezelj, Djurdjev, Djeri and Dragin (2011), Serbia was highly rated in Inherited resources (historic sites, heritage, traditional arts) however the lowest indicator rated was for the destination management and policy. According to Metodijeski and Temelkov (2014), all the Balkan countries have established national tourism organizations; for example the Tourist Organization of Serbia or government

agencies for tourism, or as exemplified by the Agency for Promotion and Support of Tourism of Macedonia. These bodies have prepared official websites and also perform the function of promoting the tourism potential of a given country at international level. The key campaigns for Serbia and Macedonia are presented in the Table 1 (Appendix).

Given the turbulent historical and political context, hostility and tension between the countries of the Balkan region, the recognition of the potential to develop cultural and historical heritage tourism has been limited. Nowadays, this potential is more recognized as a source for the cultural tourism development - important in this scope is the role of UNESCO by the means of the Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage (the World Heritage Convention), adopted in 1973 (Georgiev and Vasileva, 2012). Among the acknowledged world heritage sites, there are 18 that are situated in the Western Balkans territory. Out of them 14 are of cultural and historical importance, two of them are included for their natural characteristics, one has a mixed character and another one is in the list of endangered heritage.

Cultural Heritage Management – tangible and intangible assets

According to McKercher, Ho and du Cross (2004), cultural heritage assets form the building blocks for cultural tourism and their management is vested under the broadly defined Cultural Heritage Management sector. As such, the perspective of the asset manager forms one of the important perspective and not necessarily common with the views of other instances involved (government, tourism strategy planners or Destination managers). Heritage is defined as a broad concept that includes tangible assets, such as natural and cultural environments, encompassing of landscapes, historic places, sites and built environments as well as intangible assets such as collections, past and continuing cultural practices knowledge and living experiences.

In order to determine the competitiveness of the tourism sector in a particular country, (Krstic, Jovanic & Stanistic, 2015) the widely accepted method is the one used by the World Economic Forum (WEF). It measures both national and international competitiveness and uses 12 factors to define the level of the competitiveness and rankings for countries. In this Composite Global Competitiveness Index (GCI), the affinity for Travel and Tourism measures the levels of openness and readiness of the country to receive tourism and inbound visitors. It also measures the hospitality as a part of the culture, how would the business travelers recommend the destination for leisure purposes and the customer satisfaction. The important aspect is the environment (natural and attractiveness) but also the number of the UNESCO World Heritage sites and the cultural resources.

According to McKercher, Ho and du Cross (2004) the odd relationship between tourism sector and cultural heritage management of the assets has

been raised and discussed from the perspective of the tourism and cultural heritage management (CHM). They argue that CHM has historically been in charge of the conservation and protection of the cultural heritage assets and that the tourism sector has had the promotional role and the developmental one. The two were often in an opposition, with different views and conflicts in understanding and cooperation.

On the one hand, a number of authors have suggested that tourism and CHM are incompatible (Berry, 1994; Boniface, 1998; Jacobs & Gale, 1994; Jansen-Verbeke, 1998 as cited in McKercher et al. (2004)), and that because of this incompatibility, a conflict relationship is inevitable. The culture and heritage asset managers argue that the original values should not be standardized or commercialized. The tourism developers find that the negative attitude towards “tourismification” increases the conflict and needs an alternative. The positive sides of the tourism development are that the local find the cultural roots, or rather rediscover them due to the interest shown by the visitors. It increases local pride and interest in cultural and historical values. Tourism can also play a vital role in conservation and raising awareness and funds for the restoration or preservation of the past.

The competitiveness of the Destination and modeling The competitive advantage is not a natural phenomenon rather a sum of competitive strategies that are innovation driven and combined with visitors’ aspirations (Fernando, 2015). As per Crouch’s (2007) study on modelling Destination competitiveness that identifies 36 attributes of competitiveness grouped into five main factors, *Culture and History* was found to be the second most determinant attribute. Whereas *Physiography and Climate* represents the ‘natural’ qualities of a destination, *Culture and History*, represents the primary touristic attractiveness of a destination that is the product of ‘human’ rather than ‘natural’ processes.

Crouch (2007) argues that competitiveness must be associated with sustainability. With regards to the definition of sustainability concept from Bruntlandt’s report, it provides 4 separate pillars (human, physical, environmental and socio-cultural) but a holistic approach with an emphasis on economic and social development, especially in places with a low standard of living. These pillars have to be mutually supportive and not exclusive – they can’t improve at the expense of another. Intergenerational solidarity is also crucial: all development has to take into account its impact on the opportunities for future generations.

The competitive success of a tourism destination thus depends on its ability to bring to market a package of functional, psycho-social, experiential and value-based benefits (Walls & Wang, 2011 as cited in Iazzi, Rosato, Gravili, 2012). It must guarantee the potential user a level of satisfaction at least equal to what other rival destinations are able to provide and it needs to

be sustainable over time, taking account of economic, social and cultural aspects (Caroli, 2006 as cited in Iazi, Rosato, Gravili, 2012).

Regional clusters – Motor Valley cluster, Italy Alberti and Giusti (2012) claim that clusters can improve the regional competitiveness, bring innovation, efficiently recognize customer needs and contribute to the relations with other organisations and institutions. According to Micic (2010), strict definition of clusters can be fatal from the aspect of competitiveness. The borders of clusters hardly ever correspond to the standard systems of the market and industrial classifications. As a growing tendency and after a very long rejection and neglect (Florida, 2002; Hesmonhalgh, 2002; Scott, 2002 as cited in Alberti and Giusti, 2012) it has been recognized (Sasaki 2004 as cited in Alberti and Giusti 2012) that the heritage and culture can directly influence the regional competitiveness. The destination competitiveness, however, cannot be simply qualified by the rigid set of determinants (man-made, natural, cultural) but rather with an “overall appeal” (Cracolici, Nijkamp (2009) as cited in Armenski et al. (2011)). Additionally, tourism is being used by government agencies to justify the conservation of tangible heritage, but it has been done so without a demonstrated market demand for these assets by tourists. Likewise, the local Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) promotes all listed heritage structures as potential cultural tourism attractions, again without demonstrating market interest in visiting these places (McKercher, Ho and du Cross (2005)).

Whilst the Motor Valley in Italy is a unique inter-regional cluster where history, culture and heritage are mixed with a rich industrial tradition (Alberti and Giusti, 2012), these are still at an embryonic phase in Serbia (Micic, 2010). The creation and development of clusters, growth of the innovation, a more significant number of start-ups would definitely have an impact on the overall productivity, promotion of the region and its competitiveness as well as an effect on the corporate organisations, educational and governmental institutions.

The critical issues in proposed theoretical framework and empirical studies According to Armenski et al. (2011) the Dwyer’s Integrated model has added the element of the mutual dependence between the various attributes of the destination since the Destination competitiveness model (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003) lacked this connection and was more linear and unidirectional. Integrated model also distinguishes natural from cultural and historical sources whereas in Ritchie and Crouch model it was placed in one core attribute group.

In the findings of Iazi, Rosato and Gravili study, one of the key sections referred to the development of networks in the implementation of projects in the Destination Cities. The concept of culture integration as the community

developmental sources that has been recognized by other studies. The level of frequency of contacts between the culture asset managers and those of the DMO is still on a lower level than the one with the entrepreneurs, institutions, professional associations or trade unions. The technical definition of cultural values in this context would be that of a developmental or territorial capital. The critical issue with the destination and the culture is that it is both owned and consumed by the local and by the visitors and its essential to contribute to the positive impacts from the socio-cultural perspective (encounters) and from the aspect of economy and the environment.

CONCLUSION

Due to the similarities of the countries situated on the Balkan Peninsula, as presented in Metodijeski and Temelkov (2014), the creation of common regional - Balkan tourist product is of crucial importance. After the formation of this product, next step should be joint presence on the international tourism market as well as mutual promotion. In Motor Valley Cluster case, the initiatives of the industrial cluster and its entrepreneurs helped in creating new tourism themes. These themes, packages and activities for the tourists are created under the umbrella of Motor Valley brand and it contributes both to the volume and the value of tourism (Alberti & Giusti, 2012).

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APPENDIX A

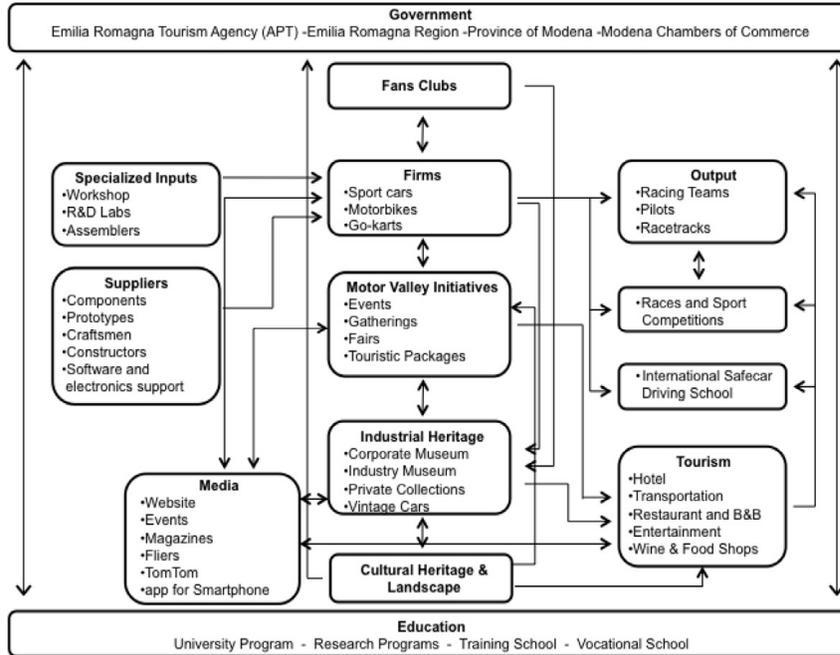


Figure 1 Motor valley cluster map (adapted from Alberti and Giusti, 2012)

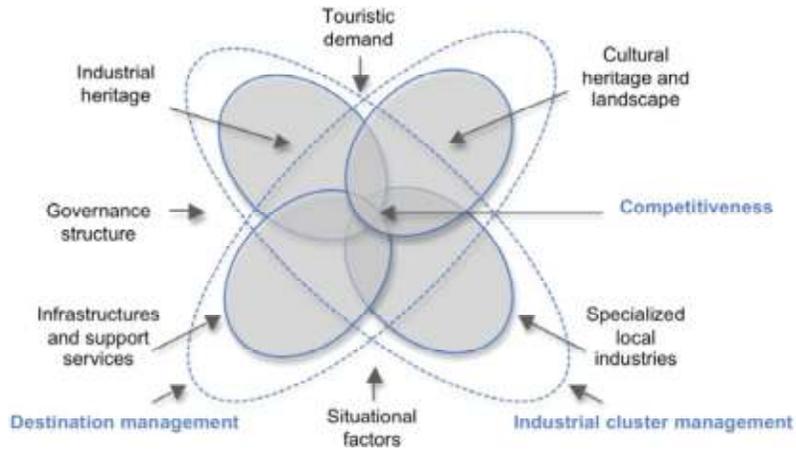


Figure 2 Framework for culture and tourism cluster competitiveness
(adapted from Alberti and Giusti, 2012)

Table 1 Key tourism campaigns for Macedonia and Serbia (adapted from
Metodijeski & Temelkov (2014))

<u>Serbia Tourism development strategy in Serbia until 2015</u> City Breaks; Touring; Cruise tourism; Business tourism; Health tourism; Mountain and lake tourism; Event tourism; Rural tourism; Special interests tourism
<u>Macedonia Tourism development strategy in Republic of Macedonia 2009–2013</u> Lake tourism; National parks; Wine tourism; Rural tourism; Cultural tourism; Spa tourism; Hunting tourism; Conference and meetings