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Cultural tourism in Central and Eastern Europe: the views of 'induced image formation agents'

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Abstract

Countries of Central and Eastern Europe that have emerged from experiences of communist government have had to re-adjust to consequent shifts in tourism flows. Cultural tourism has been seen to have particular importance not only as a new growth market but also, for political reasons, as a means of producing favourable images of these countries. Tourist board representatives in tourist-generating countries are key agents in the image formation process. The views of such agents in the UK were ascertained in this paper in order to determine their perceptions of cultural tourism as part of their country's product offer, the rationale behind the promotion of this tourism and their awareness of the consequences. This was done by interview with representatives of a number of countries. It was concluded that cultural tourism was seen very positively and it was of importance to all but it was seen in market rather than in political terms. Tourist board interviewees had a particular 'heritage' view of cultural tourism and recognised few problems associated with the use of culture for tourism purposes.
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1. Introduction

Since the late 1980s and early 1990s a number of countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) have emerged from an environment of one-party communist governments and centralised planning to models closer to Western European ones. This process of transformation occurred at a time when tourism has been characterised by flexibility and segmentation in contrast to the mass standardised market of the mid-20th century (Jansen-Verbeke, 1996). If CEE countries now set out to attract tourists from the main generating countries it would therefore seem fitting to identify and target niche markets. The countries of CEE are not a uniform entity but are diverse in terms of location, topography, climate, history, culture and economic development; each will identify its own comparative advantage in respect of tourism (Hall, 1998a). For some, such as Croatia (ex-Yugoslavia) and to a lesser extent Bulgaria, beach tourism from Western European markets had been a significant aspect of tourism even during the communist era and is likely to remain so for some time. Nonetheless much pre-1989 tourism was 'internal' in that most tourist flows were between the communist countries themselves. With the disruptions post-1989, there has been, in several instances, a realignment of flows with some countries experiencing fewer tourist arrivals from their old (communist) markets and having an opportunity to target western European markets. Despite this, the mass tourist product cycle has been largely rejuvenated from within the region (Hall, 1998b).

There does remain a mass tourism market associated with sun and sea at largely undifferentiated destinations. There is an opportunity for some CEE countries to target and exploit this especially with opening-up as 'new' destinations. Not all countries of CEE have coastlines and some have coastlines that would be unsuitable for such mass tourism, though they may be utilised for more niche recreational tourism such as sailing or windsurfing. All however would appear to be targeting the niche markets of rural and city tourism,

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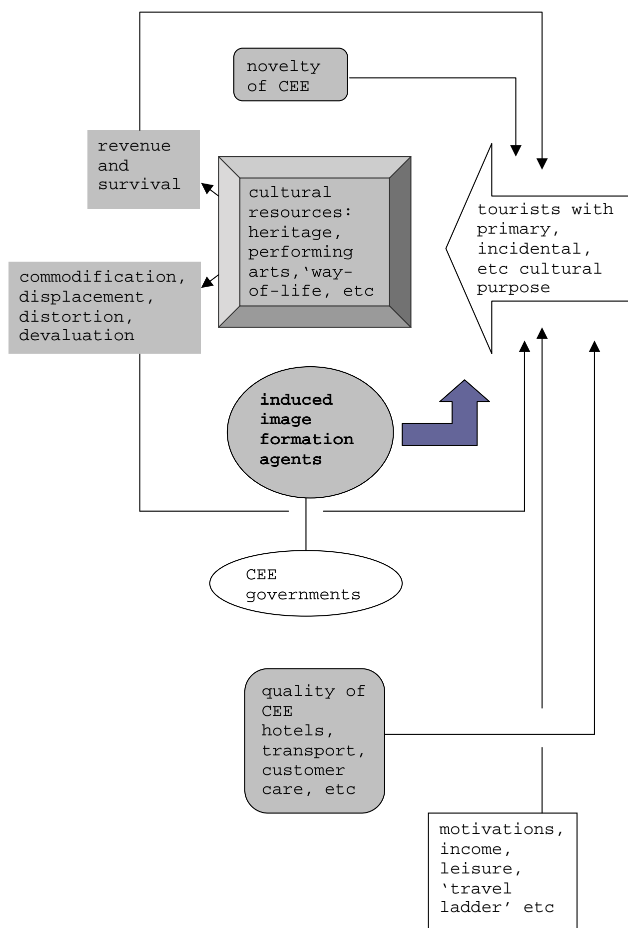

Fig. 1. Some key issues in the development of cultural tourism in ex-communist countries of CEE.

sport and activity tourism, health tourism and cultural tourism.

This paper focuses on the cultural tourism aspect of CEE tourism developments; the purpose of the study reported here was to determine the opinions of CEE tourist board managers about this aspect of tourism and to relate these opinions to certain key issues identified in academic literature. In particular the focus was the view that cultural tourism was favoured by CEE countries for its political ends in generating positive images and good relationships (see below). This study sought to explore this issue further by determining the views of tourist board managers as representing 'official' perspectives on tourism and as having a role in developing and implementing image.

Issues examined in the study are represented in Fig. 1. At the core are the cultural resources, the 'attractiveness' of which are influenced by the new opportunities to visit CEE countries, the quality of the supporting infrastructure (physical and human) as well as marketing efforts of the tourist boards and similar image formation agents (IFAs) which themselves may be subject, however subtly, to political influence. In addition to these 'internal' or 'pull' factors, tourist flows will be influenced by push of motivations and facilitators such as income and leisure. Though the impact of tourists may well be favourable for the cultural resources, if it were to be adverse it could have an undesirable feedback effect on tourists flows.

2. Image formation agents

The image of any destination arises from many and diverse sources (Jenkins, 1999). Gunn's identification of induced and organic agents in the process of image-formation has been extended by Gartner (1993) to the identification of eight 'image formation agents'. Organic images are associated with 'indirect' agents such as films, books and personal advice and recommendations. Other images are induced and are the outcome of agents such as those with a direct association with the destination including tourist boards and hotel associations (overt induced I) and also those with a vested interest but without a direct association with the destination such as tour operators (overt induced II). This paper focuses on a sub-set of overt induced I, namely the tourist board office located in a generating country. Tourist boards typically devote much of their activity to destination-promotion (Hall, 1994; Pearce, 1992; Ashworth & Voogd, 1994) and particularly to product-positioning and the development of favourable images (Alford, 1998; Buhalis, 2000). They are one of the markers (Leiper, 1990) that contribute to the success of a destination as a tourist attraction. Although not usually within the direct distribution channel between supplier and consumer, tourist boards have a role to play in co-ordinating channel activities of hotels, tour operators and transport operators and developing an integrated approach to the marketing of destinations done by them (Pearce, 2002).

Many agents generate image and the nature of image-formation is complex. As a consequence the actual influence of tourist boards will be difficult to isolate and determine and may conceivably be negligible. Nonetheless, given the view that there is an interest of CEE governments in the generation of national image through tourism (see below), the role of the tourist board is significant as it usually has some degree of government involvement. Tourist boards may be perceived as agents (however far removed) of government and the image generated by the tourist board might be expected to reflect, to greater or lesser extent, the views of government.

Tourist board organisations that are located elsewhere than the destination itself are, however, rarely responsible for directly formulating image. Strategic decisions relating to positioning and image are usually undertaken by a central tourist board in the destination

itself. The 'foreign' arm of the central board will have the function of ensuring the image received by potential tourists is consistent with that generated, distributing information to interested parties (including the general public), promoting good relations with the travel trade, facilitating contact between principals in the generating country and suppliers in the destination and generally facilitating a positive image reception within generating countries. They contribute to several other components of image formation including familiarisation tours and travel articles in the media (covert induced II). Their views on tourism might be expected to be a reflection of those of the central tourist board though, given human nature, their interpretation of image may not be entirely consistent.

3. Cultural tourism: the political issue

The relationship between politics and tourism is one that is relatively unexplored but there is a consensus that there is an interaction which is sometimes fostered by governments (Hall, 1994; Elliott, 1997). Ex-communist CEE countries might welcome cultural tourism in the furtherance of political ends that arise through its image-generation potential. There is a continuing dialectic about the role of culture, the significance of tourism and the relationship between these two in CEE societies in transformation. Both culture and tourism have been utilised to display a break with the past, to promote particular national identities and to demonstrate a new openness and willingness and eagerness to embrace a wider European identity. In CEE, emergent post-communist governments have been keen to establish (and re-establish) national identities that are free from any connection with communism (Hall, 1999). The debate about identity finds some expression in countries of CEE in tourism images that are promoted (Hall, 2000). There has been a particular desire in tourism development to affirm an affinity with and reintegrate with 'European' cultural heritage and to demonstrate a new openness (Fox, 1997).

Culture and the heritage element in particular of cultural tourism have been used to promote positive images. Inevitably this image-projection has been selective with the promotion of some aspects at the expense of others (Light, 2000). This may give rise to discontent within a country that the culture and heritage of some (especially majority ethnic groups) have been emphasised and utilised in order to enhance external image. Despite this, even the majority of local residents may not be comfortable with the image generated to attract tourists or for other external purposes, as it may conflict with their own concepts of self-identity. It may also diverge from the image desired to represent national identity and to consolidate an internal sense of national identity.

This relates to the wider issue of the use of history for commercial purposes. There has been a focus in most cultural tourism on the heritage element and this is frequently identified as beneficial in that it can, for instance, sustain 'heritage for future generations' (Prohaska, 1995, p. 33). Others, however, see the relationships as more problematic: 'the processes by which tourists experience culture and the way culture is utilised by the tourism industry and host communities, are increasingly characterised by conflict' (Robinson, 1999a, p. 1). This conflict arises from, for instance, the process of commodifying culture—the transformation of aspects of culture into saleable products. History has been turned into a commodity of 'heritage' to satisfy contemporary consumption (Ashworth, 1992). Selling history to tourists necessitates generalisation and simplicity and a version of the past that harmonises with expectations of tourists (Palmer, 1999); history is distorted and devalued. This, in turn, may feedback and have an adverse effect on tourist flows if tourists are seeking authenticity (see Fig. 1).

4. Cultural tourism: positive issues

Given an intent to promote cultural tourism, for whatever reason, the obvious starting-point is having cultural resources (however defined) that have the potential to attract tourists. Many of the countries of CEE may be conceptualised as ideal cultural tourism products. 'Central Europe has the potential to capitalise on the shift from standardised mass tourism holidays to the more individualised forms of culture- and environment-based tourism' (Williams & Balaz, 2000, p. 8). The rich heritage of most of these countries epitomised, in particular, by spectacular built heritage as well as the diversity and legacy of many performing arts has been familiar to Western Europe despite communist rule and consequent isolation. The breakdown of the communist bloc has permitted a significant latent demand to emerge. These countries have the resources to capitalise on the demand for urban and cultural tourism in particular. In addition, they have been able to exploit a novelty value of tourism to countries that were previously 'closed' and to do so at relatively low prices. The CEE tourist boards apparently have some unique selling points on which to base their promotion and image formation and to influence tourist flows (see Fig. 1).

The potential for attracting tourists is believed to be good. There is increased interest in this culture-tourism relationship as exemplified by the comprehensive Europe-wide surveys undertaken by ATLAS since 1991 (Richards, 1996). Cultural tourism has been

identified as a new market that reflects changed needs and tastes though it is a form of tourism that has always existed (Richards, 2001). An increased number of niche markets (Jansen-Verbeke 1996), sometimes characterised as special-interest tourism (Weiler & Hall, 1992; Douglas, Douglas, & Derrett, 2001), are believed to have emerged in the latter part of the 20th century. This may be at the expense of the mass standardised market or may be an addition to that market. The market fragmentation is usually attributed to factors such as increased incomes and leisure and a shift in the needs to be satisfied by a holiday (see Fig. 1). This latter, in turn, arises from existing holiday-makers seeking new experiences other than sun and sand (which may be explained by Pearce's Travel Career Ladder: see Ryan, 1998) as well as new generations of holidaymaker having taste preferences that differ from those of their parents. In addition to being a new market demand, it has been part of the conventional wisdom of tourism and leisure studies that 'cultural tourism is one of the growth sectors of the West European tourism industry' (Bywater, 1993, p. 30).

Apart from the fact that it is a new emerging and growing market, a further advantage is that the relationship between culture and tourism is widely regarded as mutually beneficial. It is claimed, for instance, that it creates extra revenue streams for both and, as a consequence, sustains and enhances cultural resources that otherwise might disappear (Hughes, 2000). Similarly cultural tourists have themselves been regarded favourably as, for instance, being 'typically well educated, affluent and broadly travelled, (and) they generally represent a highly desirable type of upscale visitor' (Holcomb, 1999, p. 64). Cultural tourism and cultural tourists are often referred to in terms that suggest a superiority over other forms of tourism—a new, growing and premium market (Gilbert & Lizotte, 1998).

5. Cultural tourism: some reservations

Despite the optimism about cultural tourism, a strategy that pursues its development and promotion needs to be aware of and accommodate a number of less optimistic issues. First, there is only limited knowledge about its nature and 'the literature on the cultural tourism market is still largely in its infancy' (McKercher, 2002, p. 37). In addition, it is not always clear what is meant by the term 'cultural tourism' (Hughes, 2002). 'Cultural tourism' is applied to a wide range of activities; it covers heritage and also attendance at performances of music, dance and theatre (see Fig. 1). It is applied, too, regardless of whether the cultural facility or event is the primary reason for the visit or whether incidental to some other and 'visitors to cultural attractions are often labelled as cultural tourists, regardless of their motivations' (Richards, 1999, p. 16). What is clear is that many of those who visit some form of cultural attraction whilst they are visitors to a city or country are attracted chiefly by factors other than the culture. Strategies of tourist boards to encourage the development of and to promote cultural tourism may be based on relatively limited data and more on guesswork than fact. The market size is not certain: who is or is not a cultural tourist is 'fuzzy' largely because the motivations of tourists who visit cultural resources are not certain. The significance of cultural resources as tourist attractions—as having the ability to draw visitors—is therefore not unequivocal (Richards, 2002). Cultural resources are diverse and the different types of culture satisfy different needs and will have different abilities to attract. To reflect both the diversity of resources and tourists, a range of marketing campaigns is likely to be necessary.

This diversity will also be seen in the evaluation of the merits of cultural tourism; not all forms will be equally beneficial. The role of heritage has been referred to earlier in this paper but there is concern also for aspects of culture other than heritage (Hughes, 1998). Creativity in the performing arts and the emergence or survival of new and experimental works may be inhibited as lacking tourist appeal. The targeting of the performing arts at tourists can lead to displacement of some art forms and the distortion and devaluation of others as seen, for instance, in the case of Krakow's (Poland) experience as designated European Capital of Culture in 2000 (Hughes, Allen, & Wasik, 2003). These effects have been identified most in the case of less-industrialised societies though the issues are evident, if less acute or obvious, in more industrialised parts of the world (Robinson, 1999b).

Finally, it has to recognised that there are a number of issues that could inhibit the development of any form of tourism in CEE ex-communist countries (Williams & Balaz, 2002). They include a limited experience of offering products appropriate for the 'western European' and US markets and, in particular, of meeting the standard of accommodation and customer service expected and unsatisfactory standards of hotels and transport. In addition, violent conflict in the countries that comprised the state of Yugoslavia started in 1991 through until 1995 and later, in some parts. This conflict and subsequent conflict (1999) in Kosovo in the rump state of Yugoslavia had dramatically adverse effects on tourist arrivals (for Croatia, for instance, see Radnic & Ivandic, 1999).

The adverse effects on culture and the infrastructural issues may both feedback in an unfavourable influence on the number and/or quality of tourists despite the best efforts of the tourist boards (see Fig. 1).

6. The study

The aim of this study was to determine the views about cultural tourism of representatives of CEE national tourist boards (or equivalent), within the context of the apparent desire of governments to encourage it for political ends. Particular objectives were to determine their views about the significance of and rationale for cultural tourism in individual country's marketing strategies, the nature of the 'cultural tourism' promoted and awareness of some of the consequences of promoting this form of tourism.

Four countries were selected: Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary and Poland. The choice was partly arbitrary but it did also represent a cross-section and diversity of development, tourist resources and experiences. Two (Hungary and Poland) may be categorised by Hall (1998b) as more advanced, relatively stable societies of central Europe and the other two as less developed societies of south-eastern Europe. Bulgaria and Croatia have both had significant sun and sea tourism on Adriatic Sea and Black Sea coastlines, respectively, which may be considered as being in direct competition with each other. Poland has a Baltic Sea coastline which also has tourism though average temperatures are significantly lower than the Adriatic and Black Sea coastlines. Hungary is land-locked. Of the four countries, Hungary and Poland are likely to join the European Union in 2004 with a possibility of Bulgaria entering in 2007. There is no immediate prospect of Croatia entering.

The study was undertaken in the UK by means of interviews with tourism officials in London (see below); this was justified solely on grounds of convenience. CEE countries are not currently particularly dependent upon the UK market for tourists but most have a tourist board (or equivalent) presence in the UK. It was assumed that the views expressed by these individuals were similar to those of comparable interviewees in tourism offices elsewhere. Tourist flows from the UK to each of these five countries is not high in absolute terms or in respect of relative importance of total tourist arrivals in each. In 1998, tourist arrivals from UK were 77,000 in Bulgaria, 68,000 in Croatia, 213,00 in Hungary and 250,000 in Poland (Richardson, 1999). These numbers were relatively insignificant in terms of total international arrivals which were 2.3 and 4.1 m, respectively, in Bulgaria and Croatia and 15.6 and 17.4 m, respectively, in Hungary and Poland (in 2000).

A semi-structured interview was held with a senior executive of the tourist office, or equivalent, (see below) in the UK for each of the four countries. These interviews in London were conducted as a convenience sample; representatives of national tourist boards may be considered as a proxy for the respective 'central' tourist boards and governments. The interviews were undertaken with the full realisation that the views expressed were influenced by the position held and its role in ensuring positive views of the destination country and of the activities of principals in that destination. Nonetheless, it was considered that such views would represent the 'filtered' image offered to the travel trade and general public in the generating country of the UK.

The issues identified in the earlier part of this paper were viewed as a basic 'code-book' (King, 1998; Crabtree & Miller, 1999) which influenced the nature of the interviews. Interviewees were not aware of the specific aim of the study, only that it was about recent tourism developments. In order to examine the rationale for promotion of cultural tourism, general tourism was discussed initially and the development of cultural tourism introduced later. Other questions related to general issues such as target markets and methods of promotion. The consequences for culture of tourism were addressed in general terms and issues relating to political ends were addressed indirectly. The outcomes of academic studies were not put directly to the interviewees for comment but these issues were raised in such a way as to seek opinions to open questions and to provide opportunities to voice such views.

Interview schedules were deliberately presented in as neutral a way as possible so as to invite interviewees to interpret issues in the ways that they themselves considered most appropriate. Some probing and prompting did take place during interviews to attempt to determine views on the more contentious issues in the senses (though not necessarily in the terms) identified in academic literature. Interviewees were not, however, unduly pressed as the concern was to determine the initial interpretation of these concepts without leading or prompting interviewees to interpretations that they had not immediately considered. Such a pro-active technique may well have persuaded interviewees to give responses that are ill-considered or which reinforce interviewer pre-conceptions.

Interviewees included the Directors of two tourist offices, the Market Research Manager of another and the First Secretary (Economic and Cultural Affairs) at an embassy. All were interviewed in their own offices in London in the summer of 2002. Interviewees were asked about the same topics. The interviews were conducted in English which is not the first language of the interviewees and where direct quotations are recorded they are done so verbatim. In addition no attempt was made to second-guess the meaning or intent of the interviewees where views expressed were not clear.

7. Analysis of interviews

7.1. General markets and products

In nearly all cases there was a desire to attract the older, wealthier and more highly educated tourist.

Croatia had been a successful coastal destination and now, after violent conflict in the region had ceased, the focus was to be 'more quality than on mass market and volume' and 'the clients are more upmarket, more Telegraph, Guardian readers rather than Mirror and Sun'. This re-positioning was felt to be necessary as 'a lot of new destinations, long haul destinations, have come on the market… . The classical and traditional Mediterranean destinations have had to re-think' and niche markets had to be exploited in order to compete.

In the case of Poland, which had never been a mass coastal destination for the UK market, there was a recognition that it was 'not yet equipped for family holidays' and that others such as 'empty-nesters' were the main targets partly because of their high-spend potential. It was acknowledged that it would be necessary to raise awareness within the UK market of the tourist assets of Poland and the opportunities for a wide range of holidays. Hungary had not experienced coastal tourism though Lake Balaton performed a similar function in domestic tourism and for other European tourists to the country. There was a recognition that the most productive strategy with respect to the UK market was to appeal to those who were most likely to visit the country, i.e. those who already have 'a general knowledge of the country'. These too were identified as older and high-income tourists.

All interviewees claimed that their countries offered a wide range though particular aspects were more appropriate than others for the UK market. In the case of Bulgaria the country offered 'the whole year-round cycle… skiing in winter and, in the summer, the beach resorts on the Black Sea'. There was also mention of cultural tourism and health and spa tourism. Croatia differentiated itself from other sun and sea destinations by emphasising its shift towards a product that offered both beach and culture. Poland acknowledged that 'city breaks… that is the best selling product… Krakow is certainly the natural magnet'. Hungary's product was focused on Budapest as 'that's where they've heard of and also it's quite convenient because they can do a lot of sight trips and excursions' but 'we would like to educate the general public that there's more to Hungary than Budapest'.

7.2. Cultural tourism and its rationale

Interviewees were also asked specifically about 'cultural tourism' in their country's marketing. This was interpreted widely but invariably included heritage: 'we promote things which are unique to Bulgarian culture which means the Bulgarian history'. Most Bulgarian cultural tourism is concentrated in Sofia with its concentration of museums and art galleries and historic sites though 'we are trying to promote the country in general'. Folk culture was used in Bulgarian marketing strategies as 'it is something unique on which we can build interest… . More tourists are moving away from beach and sand to something which is more culturally and historically based'. Packages of cultural tours currently offered in Croatia usually focused on cultural sites, art galleries and museums; performing arts were offered as options rather than being the focus of these tours.

For Hungary the view was expressed that 'what does spring to mind when you think of Hungary? A lot of people, educated people, think of music'. This was specifically referring to the 'high arts' of opera and classical music and the importance of packages constructed around these. 'We have the Spring Festival, the opera festivals in Budapest. They do attract a lot of visitors'. The Polish interpretation was wide-ranging, as 'part of the city break… to do with shopping, just to savour the atmosphere of street cafes or because Poland has plenty of heritage sites… we understand culture as the tradition of the country, history and the offer that is associated with the arts as well, so both museums and the opera, for instance'. It was also felt that there was a great deal of cultural activity in place in the sphere of the performing arts, music festivals and competitions in particular and 'these are recognised events that attract an international public'.

National cultural resources and international market forces were regarded as being responsible for the interest in cultural tourism and there was a reluctance to acknowledge, when suggested, that it might have been encouraged in order to enhance image in furtherance of some political aims such as altering and enhancing perceptions of the country and improving relations with other countries. One interviewee commented that 'that is a very cynical view and pushing any type of tourism to do that would never do well. The point is that holidaymakers' wants have changed'. A similar view expressed by another interviewee was that cultural tourism may well have the effect of re-establishing perceptions of CEE countries but 'politicians don't know what will attract visitors'. It was recognised that tourists' interest in the culture of a country would probably help to enhance the overall image of that destination, though this was regarded more as a desirable spin-off than as a deciding factor in the strategy of promoting cultural tourism. In the words of the Croatian interviewee, 'we can revel in the warmth of knowing that the outside world sees us as 'cultured' rather than as uncivilised barbarians or well-known only for cheap, mass sun and sea holidays'.

7.3. Importance of cultural tourism

Countries without Mediterranean coastlines claimed that cultural tourism was more important to them than did the other countries. Nonetheless, Bulgaria believed

that it accounted for up to 40% of visits. This was more an estimate of visitors who engaged in some sort of cultural visit whilst on holiday than it was of those solely or largely motivated by culture as 'the majority would be coming for the skiing or the beach'. There was an attempt to stimulate interest in the wider aspects of the Bulgarian offer amongst first-time visitors and 'once they are interested they usually come back themselves and ask for a special programme'.

In the case of Croatia it was estimated that 50% of UK visitors came for cultural reasons and visit early and late season. Both Bulgaria and Croatia considered that culture was not promoted in isolation but formed part of the promotion of the country as a whole. The countries were promoted as entities with the opportunity to engage in a variety of activities including both beach and cultural tourism. 'Tour operators market Dubrovnik primarily as a cultural old city of great cultural treasures and then secondary, the beach aspect'; the city is 'Mediterranean, it's like Venice'. An asset of Croatia was believed to be the fact that many beach resorts are or are close to old historic towns; cultural assets and activities were promoted to the beach tourists. The diversity of Croatian culture was also considered to be a tourist asset. More northern and inland parts of the country have a cultural identity that is closer to that of Central Europe and therefore offer a different cultural tourism experience. There was an aspiration for the capital city of Zagreb to emulate the perceived success in cultural tourism of other central European cities such as Prague and Budapest.

For Hungary 'cultural tourism is inseparable from tourism in general' but 'predominantly it's still city breaks'. It was felt that many British people have a narrow view of Hungarian culture and that it should be expanded to the whole cultural experience and appreciation of wider aspects including cuisine and wines. For Poland, cultural tourism 'has been pinpointed as one of the most important factors for attracting tourists from Europe and North America'; the other being activity holidays. Requests to the London office for city breaks and cultural visits were just over half of the total.

7.4. Markets and promotion

The market segments targeted for cultural tourism were similar to those identified for tourism generally. In the case of Bulgaria, 'we would target middle age… . The early pensioners would also be a good age to target because they are very interested in exploring other cultures'. For Hungary the focus was on 'over 40 and 45 and affluent people, not really families but married couples who share cultural interests'. Poland identified the target market in socio-economic terms as the ABC1 groups; 'if we advertise it would be in the broadsheet papers and special interest magazines, for instance, the practical magazines for music lovers'.

Most promotional material, both general and cultural, was produced centrally in the home country by the tourist board. Brochures were usually distributed to tour operators or to travel agents and at trade fairs. In most cases there were also calendars of cultural events and specialist brochures aimed at encouraging cultural tourism or at least identifying cultural attractions. The growing significance of the internet was recognised but, as articulated by the Bulgarian interviewee, 'a lot of our customers are at retirement age and not many of them are PC-literate so from that point of view we still have to rely on brochures'. There was some publicity directed at the public as 'the main reason why we are here (is) to raise awareness and facilitate the public to travel to Poland'. This took a variety of forms including supporting cultural exhibitions and hosting cultural events. In the case of Hungary it took a more direct form of a 'Hungary welcomes Britain' promotion and 'a series of marketing campaigns like a giant poster campaign at Underground stations in London' and posters on buses. The Bulgarian office had a very limited budget for promotion and acknowledged that the tour operator 'Balkan Holidays… do most of the promotion themselves'.

It was not usual for the tourist offices in London to have any direct contact with the suppliers of the cultural product in the home country. The organisation of cultural events was left to the professional cultural organisations with the tourist boards and offices supporting with publicity when appropriate. A key function was identified as facilitating contact between UK-based tour operators (over 200 in the case of Hungary) and the suppliers in the destination and also making recommendations in response to enquiries from the general public. In at least one instance, the tourist office passed on advice to museums, theatres, etc. about how to present their product for the tourist market though this function was left largely to the tourist board in the home country.

7.5. Issues

The quality of the cultural tourism product was generally regarded as 'good'. There was a conviction that the cultural resources were such as to be worthy of international visitation. In Bulgaria exploring aspects of culture was 'not difficult to do because everything is in easy reach'. The transport system was also considered to be 'quite adequate… . There is a very good road and rail network to even some of the remote mountain villages'. A particular asset of Croatia was believed to be the fact that 'we've never overbuilt the coastline… . The rationale and balance of the local way of life, culture of the people… has been preserved'.

Some factors however, were believed to hinder development, for instance, the standard and capacity of hotels in Croatia exacerbated by the violent conflict and neglect of maintenance and investment during the 1990s. In Hungary 'we have had some criticism… about some museums that did not have English inscriptions'. There had also been a problem associated with limited knowledge of English within the tourism industry of Bulgaria that arose because of previous targeting at eastern European tourists. Limited UK direct flights to Budapest were identified as a constraint. On the positive side, Budapest was considered to have 'one of the best public transport systems in the world' and, in the case of Poland, Krakow was 'well equipped to receive tourism. Perhaps now it is becoming slightly a victim of its own success'. The further development of cultural tourism in Bulgaria was restricted by a lack of infrastructure; some villages, for instance, lack reasonable tourist accommodation though transport systems were considered to be adequate. Accessibility to local attractions was also an inhibiting factor in Poland.

At a more general level, development faced an image issue with respect to CEE countries as exemplified by the comment that 'people still ask if it is safe to walk on the streets (of Hungary) and do I have to register with the police?' Croatia has subsidised flights in order to encourage tour operators to feature the country. This country, in particular, has been driven to counteract an image of insecurity and destruction and the authorities put 'as much money as we could afford into changing image that Croatia is safe and Croatia has not been completely destroyed'.

7.6. Culture and commercialisation

Interviewees considered that most cultural organisations were not very tourist-oriented. In the case of Bulgaria 'they are not very proactive because… all of them are on a subsidy from the state'. Even where this was no longer the case and attractions were now dependent on other sources, a reliance on state subsidies in the past had influenced attitudes: 'Croatia hasn't got this commercial sense to make a buck'. Persuading cultural suppliers to change their outlook to more market-oriented one was recognised as being difficult. In the case of Hungary it was felt that 'you can't change things overnight' and the limited commercial outlook meant that museums and art galleries 'underestimate the treasures they have got' and needed to be convinced of the tourist potential. There was a general view, expressed in the case of Croatia, that 'cultural tourists are prepared to pay for something they are interested in' and that cultural institutions should take advantage of this. The souvenir potential was identified as one which was particularly under-exploited in Hungary.

It was claimed that there was no pressure brought by the tourist boards to commercialise the cultural products though, in Hungary, tourist board subsidies were given to support some performances and ensembles. In Poland, 'you don't see a lot of development in folk arts being presented to raise the number of tourists. They tend to be part of the broader fabric of local attractions'. Despite this they were, in some instances, utilised as tourist attractions; one weekly 'genuine' folk dance event was quoted which attracted 'morning excursion from hotels and clients come and see this'.

It was believed by all that the influence of tourism was beneficial for culture and there was no indication that culture had become displaced, distorted or devalued in order to meet the perceived needs of the tourist. All interviewees claimed to be aware of many of these sorts of criticisms about cultural tourism but, in the words of one, 'the truth is that it is quite different; culture and tourism work together and benefit each other'. All believed that their own country's cultural activities and resources had remained unchanged in form, content and 'quantity'. Tourism posed no threat to any cultural form, for instance, in the sense of it being lost in favour of some more attractive or lucrative cultural activity. For Bulgaria, 'this is the reason why tourists come here so we don't need to be concerned about them (i.e. *cultural resources*) disappearing'. The positive aspects often referred specifically to more local folk arts. Major high arts festivals were seen as having rationales that included tourism; this was in the intrinsic nature of such festivals and was not regarded as being distorting. For Hungary, there was a suggestion that locals were being squeezed out: 'its very sad that recently prices have gone up. They are still reasonable for British and foreign visitors but to Hungarians they are quite expensive'. In addition to the belief that culture had remained unchanged there was also a feeling that the meaning of cultural activities had not been devalued as a consequence of tourism; if anything, it served to add pride to the activity or in the facility. In Croatia, 'the music tourists come and listen to is what we would do anyway; we are honoured that they want to come and listen'.

In the case of Bulgaria and Poland, folk festivals and performances remained genuine though, in part, because visitors to these were usually 'enthusiasts' and only small in number. In Poland, 'local festivals have a following but no appeal to the general public but attract target groups such as connoisseurs'. Similarly in Bulgaria, a 'folk festival in the north… they invite specialists… . They come specifically for that but they are not such large volumes'. It was acknowledged that, although Polish folk arts had not been affected by commercialisation, this might soon change.

8. Conclusions

It is difficult to generalise about the role of and rationale for cultural tourism in ex-communist countries of CEE because of the diversity of natural resources, of the built environment, of heritage and the performing arts (whether high arts or folk art) and of past tourism characteristics. This study focused on four countries which, though not claimed to be representative of CEE countries, are dissimilar enough to offer a range of experience. The research material presented above has been the outcome of interviews with officials of organisations whose purpose it is to promote tourism to their countries. Not surprisingly, interviewees were generally up-beat about developments, prospects and impacts and the views were not always internally consistent or easily verifiable. Nonetheless, these are the messages and images generated and transmitted by key agents (overt induced I) in the tourism distribution system.

Interviewees shared the widely held view, long-held by many tourist boards since the 1980s including the British Tourist Authority (1983) and English Tourist Board (1993) and evident in many academic studies such as Bywater (1993) and Gilbert and Lizotte (1998) that the cultural tourism market was a new, growing and desirable market to develop. Change of government and the opening of frontiers to other generating countries had resulted in a loss of old markets and a need to target new ones. They saw cultural tourism as a natural evolution within the tourist destination life cycle and as the outcome of an inevitable increasingly sophisticated tourist demand.

Targeting the cultural tourism market was probably more inevitable in the case of Hungary and Poland than it was for Bulgaria and Croatia but all acknowledged a role for cultural tourism. It might be expected that Croatia and Bulgaria would continue to target the market for sun and sand, a market which undoubtedly continues to exist. The problem, especially for Bulgaria, has been to re-position as a destination for western European tourists. Croatia's tourism industry faced the added difficulties associated with the violent conflict that engulfed Yugoslavia during the 1990s. It has been recognised, however, that there has been a fragmentation of the tourist market with numerous niche markets emerging. As competition for the mass sun and sea market is intense, these two countries have endeavoured to diversify into cultural tourism, winter sports and activity holidays. Hungary was obviously never in the market for coastal tourism and Poland could not hope to compete with warm-water destinations further south and both have focused on those aspects in which they have a comparative advantage. All have inevitably focused on particular niche markets such as cultural tourism but also others such as adventure tourism, sport tourism and health tourism.

The understanding of what was meant by cultural tourism was a reflection of a common blurring of concepts identified by, for instance, Hughes (2002). It was interpreted as an all-embracing term though there was a particular focus on heritage as evident in most academic studies such as Ashworth and Tunbridge (2000). The performing arts were less likely to be mentioned as part of the cultural tourism product (Hughes, 2000). This may have been due to a failure to perceive this as 'culture' but it also reflected a view that it was of relatively limited significance in drawing tourists compared with heritage. It was also recognised that visitors to cultural attractions and events were not always motivated to visit a destination by those attractions and events; this reflects common findings in academic studies such as Richards (2001, 2002). There was, too, some unwillingness to distinguish between tourists whose prime purpose was to experience culture and those whose trips were undertaken for other reasons but which may include cultural experience.

None of the interviewees believed that tourism had, as yet, resulted in an undue commercialisation of culture that was a feature of much literature such as Ashworth (1992). Discussion about 'commercialisation of culture' was, however, interpreted by interviewees largely in terms of pricing of existing events and facilities rather than as commodifying activity which originated as expressions of indigenous, 'folk' ways of life. Discussion about 'tourist orientation' was interpreted in terms of promoting to tourists rather than as adapting culture to tourist needs. Issues such as distortion in order to attract tourists and devaluation of meaning identified in academic studies, such as Hughes (1998), were not supported by the interviewees. Further the interviews in this area generated responses related narrowly to museums and to folk arts and festivals and not to the use of plays, musical theatre, symphony orchestra concerts, operas, ballet or contemporary dance as cultural tourist resources. Evidence of Krakow 2000 and elsewhere (Richards, 2000) suggests that these are spheres where the perceived requirements of tourism may encourage increased 'westernisation' and uniformity causing pressure on the more indigenous cultural activity. The implications of tourism for the integrity and existence of culture are not necessarily recognised or acknowledged by tourist boards nor perceived to be their direct concern or responsibility.

Interviewees did not, either, support the views expressed in much of the academic literature such as Hall (1999, 2000) and Fox (1997) about the 'use' of cultural tourism in image-generation, let alone acknowledge the implications of this. No interviewee agreed that cultural tourism was 'used' for political purposes though there was support, when prompted, for the role of cultural tourism in promoting a positive, more up-scale image of the country though as a by-product rather than

as a deliberate policy. The target interviewees could perhaps not be expected to be aware of underlying political pressures and all saw cultural tourism purely in market opportunity terms. In free-discussion they did not refer to the political role commonly mentioned in academic literature. This is an issue that could usefully be explored further with politicians and strategy-makers in the CEE countries concerned. Further study could examine the aspirations of politicians in this respect and the inter-relationships with and influences on respective tourist boards.

Although the interviewees' responses did not 'match' with some of these key issues identified in the literature this is not necessarily a reflection on either the literature or the validity of the interviews. Responses may well have arisen from a genuine well-balanced evaluation and subsequent belief in the positive and politics-neutral aspects. There was some evidence that interviewees were aware of these views about the political ends of tourism promotion and of the possible adverse consequences though it appeared to be a fairly limited awareness. Interviewees were dismissive of them as being 'un-real' views of uninvolved observers eager to impose their own perspectives for whatever reason and as not being the more realistic views of practitioners. It is, nonetheless, a possibility that with greater awareness of or further reflection on such issues, other views might have emerged. It has to be recognised, also, that the views of the interviewees were expressed from a particularly partisan and operational perspective and it is unlikely, even if they shared these views, that they would have expressed them. The attempt in this study to establish whether political ends were being served through the promotion of cultural tourism has been inconclusive though, for reasons expressed above, this is not altogether unexpected. Despite this, the study does demonstrate, that in the views of those who operationalise tourist strategies, there is a fuzziness relating to the nature of cultural tourism and a reluctance to acknowledge some of the adverse consequences of such tourism. The implication is that marketing strategies and strategies for sustaining future flows of tourists (neither of which was the main concern of this paper) would need to accommodate these issues regardless of the rationale behind the desire to develop and promote cultural tourism.

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