

Destination Competitiveness, Culture and Heritage Tourism, and Regional Clusters: Case of Macedonia

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent decades, research on cultural identity, state dynamics, and destination competitiveness has gained significant importance in the field of Cultural and Heritage Tourism. Specifically, in Macedonia, a region shared between two states—North Macedonia and Greece—tourism development occurs within a unique political and economic context. Does dissonant heritage hinder or promote destination development? This chapter aims to assess the destination competitiveness of Culture and (dissonant) Heritage tourism, focusing on the development of regional clusters. Perspectives from various stakeholders—academics, state officials, and tourism strategy developers—are essential. Bridging the gap in service provision and policy-making processes within this demand-led industry requires a shared doctrine. Notably, this introduces an additional perspective to the existing Competitiveness theory. While Culture and Heritage are recognized as core attractors, the dissonant aspect remains unexplored. Balkan states offer opportunities for further research in culture and heritage clusters.

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CULTURE AND INTERPRETATION, STATE PERSPECTIVE AND CLUSTER DEVELOPMENT

Since not all heritage necessarily bears developmental potential, cultural values with developmental potential have been defined as follows to facilitate a better understanding of the terms: “*Cultural values are various tangible and intangible elements and individual natural elements of cultural significance and local origin that are identified by the stakeholders and have economic, social, ecological, or cultural developmental potential*” (Hribar et al, 2012). The importance of the development of a “*specific cultural value co-depends on the utility, compatibility, and the scope of developmental potential*” (Hribar et al., 2012, p.19). 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). With the image of the Balkan countries rather discordant to the markets outside of the region and with a rich heritage dissonance, what are the existing and preferred clusters that the tourism authorities create, co-create, and join in the current context?

Culture and Heritage Tourism in Balkan States

In research presented by Armenski, Gomezelj, Djurdjev, Djeri and Dragin (2011), Serbia received high ratings for Inherited resources (historic sites, heritage, traditional arts) however the lowest-rated indicator was for 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, as exemplified by the Agency for Promotion and Support of Tourism of Macedonia (it will be further referred to as Macedonia, North Macedonia or FYROM (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)). These bodies have developed official websites and perform the function of promoting the tourism potential of a given country at the international level. (Metodijeski and Temelkov (2014))

Undoubtedly, the most important tourism destination of North Macedonia is Ohrid. The first written findings of the name Ohrid (previously Lichnidos) date from 879. In the 10th and 11th centuries, it was the capital and an important center of the medieval Macedonian state under the emperor Samoil, as well as the Patriarchate chair. With its early orthodox churches and basilicas, the unique beauty of nature and art, it still unites the mix of many civilizations with more than 100 square meters of fresco memoirs, a rich gallery of icons, manuscripts, and other rarities.

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