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GRADUALLY EUROPEAN AND DIMINISHINGLY BALKAN: COMMUNICATING ABOUT CROATIA IN INTERNATIONAL GUIDEBOOKS DURING EU-ACCESSION

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the cultural representation of Croatia in international guidebooks published during the process of the country's EU-accession (2003–2013). Using a qualitative textual analysis of how the introductions' narratives in the guidebooks depicted Croatia, this study recognises the dynamic interplay of aspects from European and Balkan identity. The country was constructed as a mobile destination, moving from the Balkans into "Europe". Croatia's developing tourist infrastructure was highlighted to describe the country as gradually becoming "European". Simultaneously, there was a reduction in the explicit reference to the country's Balkan identity, its peripheral location and transitional culture. I describe this representational strategy of ongoing and incomplete movement as "controlled proximity".

Keywords: guidebook, cultural representation, communication, Croatia, Europe, the Balkans

GRADUALMENTE EUROPEA E PROGRESSIVAMENTE MENO BALCANICA: COME VIENE DESCRITTA LA CROAZIA NELLE GUIDE TURISTICHE INTERNAZIONALI DURANTE IL PROCESSO DI ADESIONE ALL'UNIONE EUROPEA

SINTESI

Questo articolo affronta la rappresentazione culturale della Croazia nelle guide internazionali pubblicate durante il processo di adesione del Paese all'UE (2003–2013). Utilizzando un'analisi testuale qualitativa di come le introduzioni delle guide descrivevano la Croazia, questa ricerca riconosce l'interazione dinamica degli aspetti dell'identità europea e balcanica. Il Paese è stato presentato come una destinazione fluida, in movimento dai Balcani all'"Europa". Lo sviluppo delle infrastrutture turistiche della Croazia è stato esaltato per descrivere la sua trasformazione in un Paese "europeo". Allo stesso tempo, si è ridotto il riferimento esplicito all'identità balcanica del Paese, alla sua posizione periferica e alla cultura di transizione. Descrivo questa strategia rappresentativa del movimento continuo e incompleto come "prossimità controllata".

Parole chiave: guida, rappresentazione culturale, comunicazione, Croazia, Europa, Balcani

INTRODUCTION

Croatia receives most of its international tourists from Europe. It is a country with a history of international mass tourism going back to socialist Yugoslavia (Tchoukarine, 2010, 131). Economic activity in the sector makes up around 20% of the country's annual GDP (Stojčić & Vizek, 2022, 1). It can hardly be overstated how much its national identity, which informs its tourism marketing strategies, has been observed through the lenses of location and culture. Since gaining independence in 1991, Croatia has made it a pronounced political goal to achieve a multifaceted "return" to Europe (Razsa & Lindstrom, 2004). Croatia professed a commitment to leaving the heritage of a nonaligned, socialist Yugoslavia, which allegedly had kept the country culturally in the publicly unloved Balkans (Razsa & Lindstrom, 2004, 642). Instead, the country sought to adopt market relations and democratic procedures and gain the long-desired foreign recognition of its European belonging. More specifically, its elites have laboured to have Croatia recognised as part of "Central Europe" (Razsa & Lindstrom, 2004, 642). This geopolitical positioning of the country has become widely shared across various international organisations, alongside that of "Southeastern Europe" and partly "Western Balkans". At the same time, the famous National tourist board's 2001 slogan "The Mediterranean as it once was", kept in circulation for more than a decade, continues to reflect a parallel cultural location.

Responding to a relative lack of research into the intersecting issues of tourism, representation, and European identity, I explore whether Croatia's desired European image during its EU-accession process was shared in international guidebooks. I argue that these texts played a significant role in setting the scene for encounter and contact between visitors and hosts on the country's coast stretching alongside the eastern part of the Adriatic Sea. I show that, in defining Croatia for the international consumer in the early post-Yugoslav period, guidebooks in English too have couched its profile in terms of its European belonging but have not been as straightforward about the country's exact location. Croatia was predominantly represented through an underlying uncertainty about the extent to which it belongs in Europe and specifically through a strategic contrast between the European and Balkan dimensions of its perceived identity. The former served to reassure tourists they could rely on a familiar consumerist infrastructure and the latter sought to promise tourists unparalleled natural beauties and an enduring sense of cultural difference.

My interpretative study explores guidebooks belonging to popular series and published after the 1990s war, when tourism recovered, and formative assumptions were formed about contemporary Croatia as an independent republic that seeks to renew its status of an international tourism destination. From 15 editions collected in my convenience sample, I performed a textual analysis of 11 unique editions of Lonely Planet (LP), Rough Guide (RG) and Footprint (FP), all listed at the end of the article. The sample includes the first, 1999, guidebook on Croatia from the series, and then guidebooks published during the period of the country's accession to the European Union (EU), that is, from when Croatia applied for EU membership in 2003, up to 2013, when it became an EU member. My close reading of semiotic and discursive properties (language, visuals), and specific textual strategies (comparisons, emphases, omissions) looked at relatively brief (several pages long) but particularly suggestive, narrated introductions that precede the arguably more technical information that makes up the rest of the guidebooks.

My interpretive approach allowed me to discern that the country has curiously been "moving" during the observed period, paralleling post-war recovery and EU negotiations. After having been found in a dangerous periphery, signalled as a "Balkan warzone" in earlier guidebooks, it was subsequently gradually relocated towards an imagined centre, implied by reference to a generalised "Europe" in later editions. Simultaneously, Croatia has also been found, though diminishingly, in the Balkans, through allusion to features, such as a rugged demeanour, historical complexity, unspoilt nature, hybrid culture, ongoing transition, and reliance on outside assistance. These traits have historically been used in a variety of fiction and nonfiction since the late nineteenth century to encode lands and societies in Europe's southeastern region as Balkan (Todorova, 1997). By consequence, the country was made to seem underdeveloped in both uncomfortable and attractive ways, with an overarching sense of consistent "incompleteness" that resonates with Balkanist representation (Todorova, 1997).

If guidebooks are "not written for 'the tourist' in general" but instead focus on certain groups of consumers (van Gorp, 2012, 8), as is the case with any media forms, their necessarily reductive rhetoric seeks accessible cultural assumptions (inherited knowledge). By doing so, it renders spaces comprehensible to target readers along the axis of proximity/distance to their imagined home ("Europe" or the English-speaking markets). Whether in conventional media or travel writing, there is no "escape from prior literature nor from

literary traditions and genres that shape (these authors) as writers" (Simmons, 2004, 44). Below, I first consider guidebooks generally as cultural texts and specifically in the context of their important, if underexplored, communicative role in the negotiation of identity and belonging. I will then proceed to a methodological consideration of my analysis. Finally, I present the results by moving chronologically and thus showing that Croatia was at the same time getting closer to "Europe" (matching the progress of EU-accession) and subtly, but incompletely, leaving the Balkans, resulting in what I'll term "controlled proximity". This contradictory construction of identity rests on the country's emphasised "complexity" (Robins, 2014) that may be said to characterise all societies but is usually deemed distinctive and problematic for some more than others.

REPRESENTING EUROPE'S SOUTHEASTERN PERIPHERY

Initiated with the industrialisation of package tourism in the mid-nineteenth century (Franklin, 2003, 84), guidebooks present mini, task-oriented encyclopaedias on a particular place. They are specific in that they must claim comprehensiveness and advertise reliability, but due to their narrow motivation to aid leisurely travel, cannot accept historical commitment and promise lasting relevance. Constantly updated and restyled, guidebooks offer practical information on what to experience and how to do this in a "safe and easy way" (Robinson, 2004, 303). They also make available cultural orientations on the Other's ground, offering to alleviate discomfort and the "uncertainties of travel" (Koshar, 1998, 326). If tourism assumes "learned competences" (Crang, 2004, 78), guidebooks support a scripted, pacified, and consumerist experience of travel rather than an open, serendipitous encounter with difference among equals (or "admiring wonder"; Robins, 2014). A form of communicative luggage to be taken along, guidebooks lure us to potential memories of the coming travel: an anticipated experience.

Informing what Urry (2002) has famously called the culturally determined "tourist gaze", guidebooks provide access to "mental maps" of the space depicted as it exists in their culture (Thompson, 2011, 136). They mobilise, among other frames, typicality ("the typical English village, the typical American skyscraper, the typical German beergarden"; Urry, 2002, 12) thus making "tourists" into "semioticians" who decipher "the landscape for signifiers of certain pre-established notions" (Urry, 2002, 12–13). Guidebooks are above all *spatial* texts in so far as "tourist cultures are a complex of relationships that occur with, though, and in space – both real and imagined" (Wearing et al., 2010, 2).

I focus on guidebook introductions, which mark "a shift to more playful and elaborate textual infilling" (Robinson, 2004, 305). Guidebooks differ from another popular form, travel writing, in that guidebook's contributor "usually dispenses with any direct account of the research trips required to produce the text" (Thompson, 2011, 14). Nonetheless, it can be argued for guidebook introductions, as Bracewell says of travel writing, that the "tendency to generalize from isolated experiences or events" is particularly inclined to (re)producing stereotypes: content is framed as "independently derived knowledge grounded in personal observation" (Bracewell, 2009, 9). As guidebooks seek a "cohesive" representation of a variety of facts and impressions, and sometimes recommend conventional travelogues for further reading, "tourists not only enter a mediated relationship with place, but also a relationship with previous travellers" (Simmons, 2004, 45).

This paper addresses broader debates about how tourism communication translates space into culture in the specific historical/political context, thus informing the future encounter between the visitor and the visited. I assume that, in this process, any representation is always necessarily partial, dependant on points of view taken, but also unavoidable in terms of making physical and social reality comprehensible at all (Hall, 2013). Thus, I adopt a "constructionist" approach which assumes that "things don't mean" by themselves (Hall, 2013, 11). Rather than having any "obvious" or "ready-made" meanings, the world must be "made" to mean through "signifying practice" that draws on available and dominant concepts (Hall, 2013, 10–11). My analysis seeks to understand ways in which "a guidebook's arrangement is not only a consequence of its content" but "a discursive practice, or an argument on how space should be conceived" (Michalski, 2004, 189).

Despite their prevalent factuality, guidebooks are characterised by considerable visuality. Guidebooks abound with images which are not always distributed thematically. It is rather that images tend to assume an aesthetic function, at times covering entire pages, thus suggesting the preferred interpretation of the more factual texts (Robinson, 2004, 305). The guidebook imagery positions the reader as a voyeur, who can meander through the foreign terrain without much limitation or moral obligation, as the camera moves and zooms more freely than the pedestrian, who becomes part of the spectated scene. Combining images with texts,

the guidebook suggests it knows better (than other sources) also because it *sees* better.

Guidebooks' informative texts, on the other hand, contrast the imaginative appeal of the visual component. Information is factual and independent (writers receive no compensation for positive feedback). The guidebooks studied for this article were typically written by native English speakers who had spent some time in the country for the purpose, and who also acknowledged the assistance of locals. Some were written by locals from the country or the region who had migrated to the UK or USA, where their publishers are situated. As I pointed out earlier (Krajina, 2016), representation is not linear (the English-speaking world speaking for a powerless Balkan country) but circular; countries also actively seek international recognition of their European belonging and take pride in receiving positive international interest such as through tourism. A relatively small country like Croatia, formerly a periphery of various empires and part of Yugoslavia, now a periphery in the EU, seeks foreign attention by advertising its towns and landscapes as landmarks of European tourism. Following Said's (2003) argument that, to some extent, Othering is difficult to avoid entirely in an intercultural encounter, it is necessary to acknowledge that historical representation of Europe in the Balkans too (a reverse perspective) rested on "East-West polarization", thus potentially "perpetuating" prejudice about the Balkans (Bracewell, 2009, 2, 5). Nonetheless, the traditional cultural West-Rest divide continues to generate dominant conceptions of Europe and its Others (Said, 2003).

Presenting a pioneering account on Balkanism, Todorova has shown that, unlike the Orient, a space entirely invented, and encoded as Islamic, irrational, and exotic, and the opposite of rational and Christian Europe (Said, 2003), the Balkans have been constructed as an "inner other": a concrete peninsula with a history of both Byzantine and Ottoman presence, and a transit path towards the Middle East (Todorova, 1997). Prejudice about the Balkans' cultural "hybridity", across a variety of fiction and non-fiction, have kept the region lingering in "an intermediary state somewhere between barbarity and civilization" (Todorova, 1997, 130). Crucially, the Balkans were turned from being an "open-air Volksmueum" of pre-modern Europe, into a synonym for lawlessness and violence from the early twentieth century onward, when nationalism was brought in from Western Europe into this space of multi-ethnic "mosaics" (Todorova, 1997, 111). Currently, the Balkan "mosaic", referring to centuries-long incessant cultural mixing, may further be dissolving, through the imposition of predominantly one-sided adaptation of legal norms and procedures during the EU-accession of its countries, but the well-known negative prejudice about the southeast European peninsula persists (Todorova, 2015).

Europe is a continent specific in that it commits to debating about where it begins and ends (Bauman, 2004), erecting a variety of political, physical, mental, digital, and other, borders to that end (Morley, 2000; in the Bakan context cf. Ilieş & Grama, 2011). Through a dynamic system of centres and peripheries, reflecting the idea of the "West" as the source of progress and various Others as its inferior recipients, Europe's identity remains at once spatial and communicative (Krajina, 2022). In this context, guidebooks are important sources of cultural framing, which address specific audiences about specific places drawing on available, that is, dominant "frameworks and value systems" (Hall, 2013, 24).

METHODOLOGY

As a record of people and places, any guidebook is a sliding archive, whereby new editions present new sets of truth (with further feedback and updates to be found online) and older editions consequently difficult to trace. I read guidebooks that were available to me from archives and libraries of tourism professionals and institutions in Croatia. The cohort includes LP editions from 1999, 2002, 2005, 2009, and 2013; FP from 2004 and 2010, and RG from 2000, 2005, 2010, and 2013. These were not the only available guidebook brands at the time but came out in series that enabled comparison as well as figuring in the public space as highly popular at the time (cf. Mesquita, 2012). My retrospective reading of the guidebooks goes against the grain of their intended use. Instead of relying on the latest issue, I go back to the outdated ones and read closely for any change of emphasis in narration as a valuable indicator of the dynamic mapping of Croatia. I particularly focus on spatial references ("Europe", "Balkans") and invited inferences (implications, associations, omissions), as textual strategies of what I previously discussed as "mapping the Other" in the media (Krajina, 2009; for similar spatial and cultural inferences in media reporting on Slovenia's EU-accession cf. Rožac, 2011).

As indicated earlier, the introduction is possibly the only guidebook narrative that resembles the impressionistic tone of travel writing. Presented in a distinctive layout and offered as the first set of insights that meet the eye when the guidebook is grasped, this text belongs to the section "designed to give you a feel for Croatia" (RG, 2005, cover) and to "enrich the travel experience and allow

travellers to understand and respond appropriately to cultural and environmental issues" (LP, 1999, 9). These preambles set the tone for the more technical information that follows and are thus important for any attempt at deciphering the cultural significance of guidebooks.

At the same time, I acknowledge genuine efforts by guidebook authors to deliver fair summaries, collaborate with locals, foster a positive travel experience, and prevent misunderstanding between visitors and locals. This study is not intended as a criticism or evaluation of truthfulness but a polemical consideration of wider frameworks over which these astute writers, often part-time labourers, have little mastery, as any other communication professionals, like reporters. Against essentialism, I follow Bracewell's suggestion to study not what the Balkans are but how "the image of the Balkans" is constructed and used (Bracewell, 2009, 8). Furthermore, these introductions may not be equally relevant to all travellers as they are to analysts, not least because travellers may judge these texts against their first-hand experience and other sources. However, a close and critical reading can afford us valuable insight into broader assumptions that get reproduced as the industry seeks the most relatable terms to address customers and motivate them for commercial travel.

To this end, I draw from assumptions in the interpretive textual analysis of media, including semiotic, discourse and narrative analysis (Gillespie & Toynbee, 2006), and embark on "open coding" as commanded by the analysed text (Rivas, 2018). As opposed to the more conventional quantitative content analysis, which is more about a prefigured counting of denotative meanings, qualitative content analysis, for which I opt, rests on "identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, 1278). After an initial period of preparatory/pilot reading of different sections of 21 guidebooks from different publishers, to obtain a sense of structure, I established the sample and identified general patterns of representation (Balkanism, exoticism). I then studied how these patterns play out across the sample, focusing on spatial names and indicators, as well as paying attention to their place in the narrative and connotative/denotative relationship with other signs.

REPRESENTING CROATIA

Locating the destination: from the Balkans to Europe and back

In negotiating the most appropriate place for Croatia on a cultural map of Europe, in the first part of the observed period, the guidebooks seek to challenge the image of the "well-publicised" (LP, 2002, 9; cf. RG, 2000, x) 1990s war and "Croatia's reputation as a war zone" (LP, 1999, 11). They establish, in the opening line, that Croatia "is a peaceful country" (LP, 1999, 11), even "the epitome of peace and tranquillity" (FP, 2004, 10). Ascertaining an image of a peaceful country becomes, however, a recurring leitmotif. As we shall also see below, as in the Balkanist discourse, the war remains at least a passing reference across the sample as a contrast against which Croatia is defined as "relaxed and easy-going country" (LP, 1999, 12) or "once again an optimistic, welcoming and safe destination" (RG, 2005, 6).

Also from the outset, Croatia is portrayed as moving. The country "is no Balkan backwater locked in a time warp" (LP, 1999, 12); it "has moved rapidly from war-torn Balkan backwater to holiday playground" (FP, 2004, 10). Having moved not into "Europe" but into its vacation market, Croatia's European identification is more about *claiming* than *being*: "whether or not it bears any resemblance to the reality of modern Europe, Croatians model themselves after the idea of European values – good food and wine, nice clothes, vacations at the seashore, attention to the environment, preservation of historical treasures and a calm, polite demeanour" (LP, 1999, 12).

In turn, these positive images describe less Croatia itself and more souvenirs of "Europe" that tourists may find in Croatia. Additionally, Croatia at that time "lacks ... the kind of clearly defined image that has turned more modest European destinations into international hot spots", such as the presence of a celebrity or a landmark film scenery (LP, 1999, 12). To be more recognisable, it needs a global place in popular culture.

Local specificity is found in Croatians' commitment to the impossible (and self-defeating) project of fighting geography as destiny, a never-ending quest to leave the Balkan peninsula. Where for Europe it may be settled, "the Balkan question", for Croatians, is "delicate" (FP, 2004, 9). The Balkans represent "a region they would cheerfully snip off and mail to another part of the globe if they could" (LP, 2002, 10). Though Croatians are "determined to become acknowledged as part of Western Europe" (FP, 2004, 9), to leave the Balkans, Croatians would "have to overcome almost an entire millennium of political and cultural development influenced by four great cities—Venice, Vienna, Budapest and Istanbul" (FP, 2004, 9). Past cultural mingling is cast as a sign of the Balkan, rather than European, culture (famously defined as "united in diversity"). As Todorova explains, it is the prevalence of Eurocentrism that makes many Balkan countries like Croatia prefer

to be recognised as periphery of Europe than the "centre" of the Balkans (Todorova, 1997, 54).

In the second part of the observed period, as part of the symbolic movement of Croatia into Europe, the Balkans gradually become less a location and more a floating signifier, underpinning the country's hybrid identity. Though Croatia is less named Balkan explicitly, whether it *is* European, continues to be questioned. Furthermore, as repeated in all editions of RG: "many of the hallmarks of Balkan culture – patriarchal families, hospitality toward strangers and a fondness for grilled food – are as common as ... in any other part of southeastern Europe" (RG, 2000, x; 2005, 7; 2013, 5). Though investment in tourism and GDP rise are mentioned, some editions from the period up to 2010 dedicated considerable space to Croatia's political difficulties (RG, 2000; LP, 2009). The country "continues to suffer many of the ills experienced by post-communist societies" (e.g. unemployment, poverty, corruption and disintegration of industry) (2000, xi; RG, 2005, 9; LP, 2009, 16). A "dispute with the EU over its fishing laws" complicated the EU-accession, while "controversial elements" of the war were to possibly surface public debate as the membership talks depended on the arrest of its highly regarded general (LP, 2009, 16). Croatia had a "love-hate-love affair with the EU and its neighbours" (LP, 2009, 16) with the latter particularly accentuated when it comes to Orthodox Serbs (RG, 2000; FP, 2004; RG, 2005). Readers are alerted they "will be struck by the tangible sense of pride", following the new nationhood and wartime solidarity (RG, 2000, x). There is also a pronounced conviction about European belonging, given that "Croats traditionally see themselves as a Western people, distinct from the other South Slavs" (RG, 2013, 5). Reminding us of necessary relativism in such accounts, Urry argued that "bizarre and idiosyncratic social practices ... happen to be defined as deviant in some societies but not necessarily in others. ... (T)o consider how social groups construct their tourist gaze is a good way of getting at just what is happening in the 'normal society" (Urry, 2002, 2). As in travel writing about the Balkans specifically, the region "revels in difference and the exotic, and particularly in violence or the primitive" casting "the West as modern, progressive and rational" (Bracewell, 2009, 2).

Such generalisations continued in guidebooks published during Croatia's EU-accession. As long as the EU is colloquially equated with Europe, which is strategically equated with the West, EU-enlargement processes will continue to promise recognition and equal treatment (Krajina, 2016). Thus, Croatia's European belonging is represented less as immanent and more as circumstantial. It rests on migratory pathways maintained during Yugoslavia both by the Croatian labouring diaspora in "Western Europe", and European citizens that took holidays in Croatia (LP, 1999, 12). These particular mobility routes also include the presence of Croatian labourers on European ships and in football teams (FP, 2004, 9). Croatia's ties with Europe also result from outside sponsorship. After Croatia "removed a nationalist, anti-Western government from office" and started to "receive aid and investment from the West", it "has regained its place in the wider European family" (RG, 2005, 9).

Despite the country's orientation ("they dress up like Italians and aspire to doing business like Austrians ... (and) look to Rome for spiritual guidance"; FP, 2004, 9), there is no escape from geography: "their country sits perched precariously on the edge of the Balkan peninsula" (FP, 2004, 9). So constructed, the contradictory lineage of belonging (taking inspiration from "Europe" whilst situated at the "edge" of the Balkans) taps well into ever-demanding economies of taste. In terms of consumption, the perceived cultural hybridity is couched in terms of abundancy of choice. The reader is offered a bird's eye view, from where space is observed as a catalogue or menu, and where towns are "generously sprinkled with historical remains from Roman times onwards" (RG, 2005, 6). The culinary metaphor suggests there is a place "for every taste" (LP, 1999, 12). While the guidebook features a "taste of the county's highlights" (RG, 2005, 16), what makes "a particular flavour" (RG, 2005, 7) of the terrain are the country's links to past empires; it "endured Roman, Venetian, Italian and Austro-Hungarian rule" (LP, 2005, 3).

Croatia is "sitting on a see-saw between the Balkans and Central Europe" (LP, 2009, 16) and "on the brink between Mitteleuropa and Mediterranean" (LP, 2013, 2). As we saw above, this diversity can imply a range of consumer choice but can also serve to reflect a need for what we might call "controlled proximity": culturally situating the country neither too far nor too near "Europe". The country is located at "one of the great fault lines of European civilization – the point at which the Catholicism of central Europe meets the Islam and Orthodox Christianity of the East" (RG, 2000, x; 2005, 7; 2013, 5). The Balkanist evocation of the importance of religion ("essential to the Croatian identity"; LP, 1999, 12) is played out also through lengthy descriptions (taking up to a quarter of the introduction; cf. FP, 2002, 9) of different religious rules in the region. Typically emphasised as a source of incompatibility among European cultures (Todorova, 1997), religious difference parallels perceived issues of mentality.

According to all editions of RG, this is where "the sober central European virtues of hard work and order collide with the spontaneity, vivacity and taste for the good things in life that characterizes the countries of southern Europe – a cultural blend of Mitteleuropa and Mediterranean" (RG, 2000, x; 2005, 6–7; 2013, 5; cf. FP, 2010, 9). Country's culture is "divided" (LP, 1999, 12), "complex and unique" (LP, 2005, 3), but described metonymically, singling out a certain feature to indicate the whole. The capital, "Zagreb is culturally and geographically closer to Vienna and Budapest than to the Venetian-influenced coastal regions" (FP, 2010, 10). Furthermore, "Croatia's most developed region for tourism' is Istria, whose success is also to do with "its proximity to Central Europe" (FP, 2010, 11) while the northern seaside town Opatija is "made up of elegant Vienna Secession-style hotels and villas" (FP, 2010, 11). As we move further south along the coast, we encounter Split as "the monumental Roman city" while Dubrovnik is "the glorious medieval walled city" (in each of the cities referring to a single neighbourhood, the Old Town) (FP, 2010, 12–13).

As Croatia finds itself, "moving rapidly" into the EU (FP, 2010, 9), when many central and eastern European countries have joined the EU (in 2004), the "strong central European flavour" of inlands and "Italian devotion" on the coast, are also paired with Croatia's "Slavic soul" (LP, 2005, 3). It is also "a bonus" to natural beauties that the country's "coastal towns and cities are living museums of Mediterranean culture" (RG, 2005, 6). Along the way, we encounter as many as six geographic appellations (most diversely in RG issues): central/Mitteleuropa, Mediterranean, Southeastern Europe, the Balkans, Eastern Europe, and "Europe", each serving a strategic representational function in profiling the destination commercially and culturally.

In the second part of the period encompassed by the sample (2005–2013), however, there is a more palpable European reference: "Croatia boasts one of the most dramatic stretches of coastline that Europe has to offer" (RG, 2005, 6), it is "Europe's hottest new destination" (LP, 2005). There is "urbane glamour" (RG, 2010, 6), "rare blend of glamour and old-fashioned authenticity" (LP, 2013, 3), and, with art and festivals, "a cool and contemporary sheen" (RG, 2013, 4; cf. LP, 2013, 3). We learn that "Croatian tourism has spun off" (RG, 2010, 6); it took "a big leap forward" (RG, 2013, 4). As is known in the Balkans, it still offers pockets of "Europe at its most unspoiled" (RG, 2013, 4). This is also because Croatia was not overbuilt and "exploitation of the coastal settlements has been kept in check" (RG, 2005, 6).

Tourism in Croatia has become a "brand", which at the beginning of the period the country was crucially lacking, but again "this country" is, still at the end of the period, "in transition" (LP, 2013, 2; cf. FP, 2013, 5). Its destinations are "chic and trendy" and allow us to completely "forget that a civil war raged" there (LP, 2013, 2) even though a recursive reference to "forgetting" of something means repeating it, that is, keeping it relevant. Zagreb is a "second fiddle" to "nearby Vienna" (LP, 2013, 3); the capital is "a typical central European metropolis" (RG, 2013, 5). Here, scarce images of cities, particularly young urbanites in Zagreb's city centre, were given the function of emphasising Croatia's reassuring European face, which is in keeping with the orientalist assumption that only the urban landscapes resembling western European cities merit the European adjective. For this image to function, omitted is any reference to the regionally specific urban heritage that is also about socialist aspirations of a utopian humanistic living (Krajina, 2021). A destination is European either through resemblance of learnt western urban types or through its complete opposite: natural isolation.

Pristine nature and Croatia as "newborn"

So far, I have shown that the key dynamic across different editions had to do with "locating" Croatia at the edge of "Europe". The second pattern, exoticisation, to which I now turn, serves to make the above, uncomfortable position, commercially attractive. According to Urry (2002), the rise of tourism makes unexploited space increasingly rare to find. In that context, Croatia's permanent "development" gained commercial value of a semi-charted territory, an image that has taken a life on its own. Though there is some recognition of the rising prices and presence of tourists, the destination promises "the increasingly rare sense of wonder that transforms mere tourism into travel" (LP, 1999, 12). The reader is (jokingly) asked to "please, try to keep it a secret" (LP, 2005, 3). The adjective "unspoilt", however, remains throughout the sample.

The commercial production of space harnesses aestheticized (mythologised) images such as the truncated one below:

> *Picture this: the colours and scent of pine trees, sea air and sun cream mingling to create that late-afternoon fjaka ... unique to Dalmatia. The water is crystal clear and turquoise blue. ... yachts sail across the horizon as the sun begins to sink into the sea. Back in the village, stone houses with green window*

shutters huddle round a harbour filled with wooden fishing boats'. (FP, 2010, 9)

The particular natural sites are mentioned across the guidebooks as: "awesome", "crystal water", "golden pebbles", "stunning", "paradise", "as pretty as a picture", "pristine", "magic", "raw beauty that's intoxicating", "mesmerising", "astonishing", "breathtaking". Social conduct matches the perfect scenery. The local "genuine hospitality … [is] for most of Europe a generation past" (FP, 2010, 9) that is "the kind of easy-going hospitality that's in a short supply elsewhere in the Mediterranean" (RG, 2010, 6). This ready-made space of fantasy, characteristic of the guidebook genre generally (Barthes, 1957), draws from images of natural beauty to also evoke a utopian society.

The accompanying images typically feature carefully framed and colourful sites of any emblematic place: beach, town, bay, coffee place. Names of places are stated at times only in small print or, more rarely, images are presented without any caption, in which case they function primarily as decorations. Very few individuals are seen scattered around, always in sunshine, mingling in peace and quiet, always white, and middle aged, rarely *en face*, behind sunglasses, out of contact with the reader, harmless. This simplified elsewhere is a desired projection of the safe yet converse version of what (in an equally essentialising way) defines "real" spaces inhabited by the readers: busy and orderly Western European urban areas. Both spectacular (one displayed, the other implied), these two worlds are presented as the complementary, inter-dependent opposites. As Urry reminds us, "what makes a particular tourist gaze depends upon what it is contrasted with; what the forms of non-tourist experience happen to be" (Urry, 2002, 1) and the guidebook is indeed "presented to appeal to popular travel themes and pursuits" (RG, 2010, 1). Here, it is a pursuit of escape from the drudgery of (post)modern, technological, and depersonalised daily life (which also exists in coastal towns). Avoided is also the potential difficulty of encounter with difference; the aim is less to interact and more to move and observe.

Escapism pervades the guidebook discourse, inviting an agreed pretense of "the tourist being someone else, to occupy and see somewhere else, and to escape from some other place" (Simmons, 2004, 48; Crouch, 2007, 54). Thus, while in Croatia "many smaller islands … exude a[n] … end-of-the-world appeal" (RG, 2005, 8), "the historic centres, surrounded by defensive walls, take you back through the centuries" (FP, 2004, 14). The Balkans, like other regions such as the Middle East, writes Thompson similarly of travel writing, "are routinely regarded as somehow not inhabiting the same period as the traveller and his/her culture", which is usually the West occupying exclusively the future (Thompson, 2011, 158). The Other remains "authentic, pristine and unspoiled", or in short "as aesthetic spectacles" offered to the tourist "for their personal enjoyment and edification" (Thompson, 2011, 161).

CONCLUSION

In the analysed introductions to international guidebooks about Croatia, we see the Balkanist imagination conversed with tourism cultures during the country's political travel into Europe (EU-accession) and Europe's tourist trips into Croatia. Balkanism and tourism formed a twin point of contact between the two imagined worlds, whereby reference to the Balkans (tradition, nation, transition) served to appeal to tourists in search of exotic, yet accessible destinations and to differentiate the country from "Europe" culturally.

The double pattern that emerged from the interpretive analysis of the sample – cultural complexity and natural beauty, which may be said to characterize any place in the world – is a familiar frame of encounter between the "Western" travelers and the Balkans since long before organised tourism. Crusaders dubbed the coastline of today's Croatia as attractively "untainted by modern society" (Mønnesland, 2011, 14), while modernist, mainly twentieth century, travel writing about Croatia, observed the country's history as difficult to define and its location in Europe as complex (Frankopan, 2006). In effect, we see a long continuation of Balkanism as a discourse which is "both of sameness and of difference", suggesting a sense of "simultaneous proximity and distance" in Europe (Fleming, 2000, 1219–1220).

Portraying the country through a parallel lure and danger of semi-development, that is, exhibiting pre-modern natural sites with modernist conceptions of group identity (ethnicity, religion) and catch-up infrastructure, activated Balkanist assumptions about "incompleteness" as essence (Todorova, 1997). At the same time, Europe was occidentalised as an unchanging urban consumerist paradise to be mimicked or entirely negated in the Balkans. Though all cultures are assumed to display some degree of hybridity as a result of historical encounters with other cultures (Morley, 2000, 6, 265), the Balkans are represented strategically as occupying the space that provides Europe what Bhabha (1989) called the "strangeness of the familiar". I termed the ambivalent and mobile positioning of a concrete and immobile

geographical entity in the studied guidebooks "controlled proximity", whereby a country was mapped as moving towards Europe and from the Balkans. This mode of cultural mapping combines a degree of professed nearness to the assumed vantage point, which serves specific goals like that of touristic branding, and sustained distance, which upholds inherited cultural differences. In the examined guidebooks, controlled proximity kept in play a strategic emphasis on Croatia's resemblance with certain emblems of "European" culture, while remarking that these images of Europe were found in displaced context and incomplete form.

Given that land is inconceivable without certain frameworks of knowledge or assumption, cultural texts such as guidebooks encourage travel by elasticising physical distance and lubricating geographic crudites with shared cultural assumptions. Places are shown as accessible while pre-established cultural difference is reproduced in different guises to keep the destination specific and at a distance. If explicit reference to the Balkans as a historical region gradually diminishes, "incomplete" European-ness remains a key sense-making framework for Europe's "inner" (Balkan) others' (Todorova, 1997) service-oriented futures.

VSE BOLJ EVROPSKA, VSE MANJ BALKANSKA: HRVAŠKA V MEDNARODNIH TURISTIČNIH VODIČIH MED VSTOPANJEM V EVROPSKO UNIJO

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POVZETEK

Prispevek obravnava kulturne reprezentacije Hrvaške v široko dostopnih in v angleškem jeziku izdanih mednarodnih turističnih vodičih v obdobju njenega pridruževanja Evropski uniji, to je od vloge za članstvo leta 2003, do vstopa v Unijo leta 2013. V tem obdobju je Hrvaška ponovno postala mednarodno priljubljena turistična destinacija. Izhajajoč iz konstruktivističnega pristopa, ki obravnava vodiče kot kultura besedila, so v prispevku analizirane njihove reprezentacijske strategije iz perspektive medijskih in kulturnih študij ter naslovljena vprašanja evropskih in balkanskih identitet. Kvalitativna analiza besedil pripovednih uvodnikov vodičev kaže, da je bila Hrvaška predstavljena kot destinacija katere identitetna pripadnost se spreminja. Skozi vse večje poudarjanje vsebin, ki naj bi krepile zaupanje mednarodnih obiskovalcev (kot denimo razvoj turistične infrastrukture), analizirani vodiči Hrvaško prikazujejo kot destinacijo, ki postopoma postaja vse bolj »evropska«. Istočasno pa analiza zazna upad obravnave Hrvaške kot balkanske države, ki bi izhajala iz referiranja na geopolitično obrobnost, kulturno ambivalentnost in tranzicijsko kulturo. To reprezentacijsko strategijo še nedorečene evropske in balkanske identitete, ki temelji na pripovedi še trajajočega in nedokončanega identitetnega premika, opisujem skozi koncept »nadzorovane bližine«.

Ključne besede: turistični vodič, kulturna reprezentacija, komunikacija, Hrvaška, Evropa, Balkan

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