

IMAGINED GEOGRAPHIES IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

Abstract: The paper deals with an applicable and modern concept in the geographic science, applied mostly in cultural geography. It examines the possibility of “translating” this concept into the tourism industry. That concept is known as “imagined (imaginative) geographies”. It could serve to better understand the tourist sites, destinations or areas - their proper and sustainable management in terms of tourism resources available. The findings confirm the applicability of those considerations.

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In today's modern world we observe an increasing number of manifestations of interdisciplinarity and mutual applicability of visions, concepts and methods between the different branches of seemingly different scientific or practical-applied spheres of social life. The same applies to scientific disciplines such as geography and tourism. The study of some of the theoretical problems of tourism through the prism of related (or not so close) sciences, provides a new perception and new possibilities for solving those problems. The range of ideas and practical solutions is expanding to what appear to be mere sectoral problems. This increases the efficiency and the sustainability of management in tourism industry. The aim of this paper is to reveal a similar correlation between geography and tourism (in particular, imagined geographies and tourism).

The “imagined (imaginative) geographies” - terminological explanations

Regarding the concept of “imagined geographies”, some clarification should be made both for the concept of “image” and that of “imagined geographies”. This subject has been studied in a number of publications mostly by Russian authors (Zamyatin, 2013, Mitin, 2013, Kalutzkov, 2016, etc.).

The image. This is the most distant and indirect representation of reality (Zamyatin, 2013). The image is dynamic, often changing with a change of the reality itself. Typically it is strictly individual, rethought through the personal prism of one's perceptions.

When this image is “stitched” to a particular geographic space, we are talking about imagined geographies. Methodological prerequisites for studying the imagined geographies emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century. That coincided with the establishment of the horological concept in geography, and was most evident in the works of the German geographer Karl Ritter.

The geographic image. It is a system of signs, symbols, stereotypes and myths that characterize a given territory. The study of space in cultural geography takes place on different hierarchical levels: psychological, conscious, subconscious, etc. On the subconscious level, modern studies exist in various Russian publications related to the so-called “imagined geographies” or “geographic images”. In general, the term refers to the personal subconscious ideas which people have about particular geographic spaces. For example, with regard to alcoholic beverages, behind the geographic space of Southern Europe, we subconsciously imagine different wines and cocktails, and behind that of Northern Europe - mainly spirits (vodka, etc.). When culinary specialties are concerned, we

subconsciously tend to think about pasta and pizza when thinking of Italy, or goulash in the case of Hungary, etc. These are the images by which we identify a particular geographic space or touristic area. Those images are real because they are a fact and are formed as a result of the cultural and historical identity of the nations.

Both the image as a category and the geographic image are dynamic, variable in time and under the influence of various factors (political, humanitarian, mass catastrophes and other unfavourable phenomena, etc.). The geographic image of Saint Martin Island in the Caribbean is that of a paradise as far as the tourism business is concerned. After Hurricane "Irma" in early September 2017, however, for most tourists their subconscious geographic image of that same place will be related to disaster, destruction and scare. The geographic image, according to Zamyatin, cannot be sustainable over time - an important finding regarding the tourism industry.

The relationship between imagined geographies and the tourism industry

The tourist image. The tourist image is a function of the geographic image. Built on a wide range of details and sources of information, the tourist image is a symbol of the tourist potential of the place (location, settlement, region, country) (Krastev, 2014). Contemporary scientific publications on the topic of tourist image are rare. This is because the "image" is a geographically inherent category, and in this sense is an object of study of the geographical science.

By analyzing the terminological features of imagined geographies, we define notions such as "image" and "identity". These are categories which are common for the tourism industry just as well. In this paper we're attempting to look at both concepts in definition terms.

In fact, in the concept of imagined geographies the geographic image is equally important as "the image of the territory" is. The latter is a system of basic concepts for a given geographic space. Through the media, this image is shaped, modeled and retransmitted to certain groups of "users".

Functional links. There is certain coexistence between the two categories. It is often considered that the image of the territory is part of the general geographic image. The geographic image of a given space is more stable and objective on the mental level, and the image of that same space is more dynamic depending on the influence of external "suggestions". Therefore, the image can often change in a positive or a negative direction. The main difference between the two concepts is revealed by the fact that the image can be manipulable and inconsistent. As part of the geographic image, however, the tourist image is "controlled" by the geographic one and by our notions of the territory. This means that personal impressions about the formation of the geographic image are very important. Moreover, it is the geographic image of distant territories (including tourist destinations), which we have not visited, which actually forms the image of this territory in our consciousness. It is based on literary sources, promotional materials, social networks and contacts, etc.

The image of a tourist destination is a major terminological category in tourism marketing. In Bulgarian scientific literature there are a number of definitions of that image. Here we present a popular view of the image of the tourist destination (Lopes, 2011). The author distinguishes two categories of image:

- Primary (the so-called "organic") image - knowledge obtained for a given tourist destination from various literary sources - historical, geographical, fiction, newspapers, magazines, television or people's stories; this kind of image is terminologically closer to the image of the territory.
- Creative image - created as a result of promotional activities carried out by different tourist organizations or other institutions. The perception of a tourist destination is most often formed through these activities.

The aforementioned definitions of "the image of a tourist destination" actually cover the notions of the "image of the territory" in the concept of imagined geographies. The tourist destination, whose image is "modeled" by external suggestions, is actually the specific geographic space where that tourist destination is located. As we can see, both the object and the definitions coincide.

The main conclusion here is that we are analyzing the same phenomenon, but looking at it from a different angle. This is the first cross point between the imagined geographies and the tourism industry.

Identity in imagined geographies and tourism. Identity is one of the inherent characteristics of cultural geography (in particular – in imagined geographies) and its major category. It is through this category that people identify themselves and differ from one another. The concept of identity contains generalizing characteristics, allowing us to describe both the personal notion and the manifestation of individuality, as well as the processes of group unification on the basis of some similarity (Koprinarov, 2013). Preserving the identity is a major task for the society. The preservation of tourist sites (especially from a cultural and historical point of view) is also subjected to this paradigm. Moreover, the first use of the term "cultural identity" is precisely in a UNESCO document (in the Final Report of the 1982 International Conference in Mexico).

In imagined geographies, "identity" allows the efficient study of the interaction between the geographic image of the region and the political culture of societies. Regional identity "shrinks" the area of expansion of the geographic image. Most often, this is true for the ethno-demographic structure of the population, but also for specific, geographical "point locations" or such of limited spatial manifestations in the geography of civilizations (e.g. the image and regional identity of the Maya Indians in Central America), for localized socio-cultural and economic manifestations (e.g. the La Tomatina festival in Spain, the fire-dancers in the village of Bulgari in Bulgaria, etc.). Here we do not even mark the "theoretical disagreement" regarding the notion of "identity" in tourism and in imagined geographies. Generally, identity is the product of human society and an important factor for modeling the cultural landscape (a major category in cultural geography). Identity actually marks indirectly the main areas suitable for cultural or other types of cognitive tourism (scientific, adventure, educational, etc.).

A solidifying element which also establishes the consistency of the images, the relations and the perceptions of a given territory (respectively - of a tourist destination) is its name; this also applies to the tourist destination or the geographic location and is studied by toponymy. Toponymy (Penerliev, Petkov, 2017) is a science dealing with the meaning of the names of the geographical objects. In this sense, the names of the tourist locations show our perception (image) about them, for example - Cote d'Azur, Venice of the North, Little Paris, etc. People tend to give similar names to tourist sites (destinations, cities) resembling others, which already have a certain constant image created in our minds. This comes to show that the geographic image is time-resistant and disproves its definition of being dynamic and unstable. In fact, this displays good governance, a positive image of the territory, as well as the image of a certain geographic area as a tourist destination.

When naming objects (including tourist sites) with names of already existing ones, we give them certain predictable qualities. This is yet another approach used in imagined geographies. According to Zamyatina (2008), this is the "geographical translation of information". When already having the image of a given object, we "stitch" its specifics to another one. For example, "the Bulgarian Stonehenge" (a cromlech in the Rhodopes, in the vicinity of Studen Kladenets Reservoir). With this concept, however, the tourist destination gains popularity on the basis of the popularity of the original destination, but in the same time loses the identity of the territory: we do not speak of Stonehenge as of "the Bulgarian cromlech", nor of Paris as of the "Romanian Bucharest"!

Imagined geographies in service of tourism

Actually, the discussed terminological analogies are identical both in spatial (regarding the object of research) and functional terms (regarding the mechanism of manifestation of the driving forces). This fact gives certain advantages in the management of the tourist sites and destinations, with the use of knowledge, concepts and methods of geography (in particular - of imagined geographies), which is in fact the aim of the current study.

For the practical-applied aspect of this study, it is important to mention the benefits of applying a geographical (modern) concept in the tourism industry. The described similarities enhance the use of a single scientific "toolbox". For example, for studying the geographic image we most often use the

genetic approach, while for delineating the identity – we use the regional approach. Thus, when exploring the tourist destination of Sunny Beach (“Slanchev bryag”), we will see that in historical terms this is an elite, highly developed "emblematic" resort. A symbol of quality (for the then standards), a resort of the then “ruling power”. Today, on the other hand, in support of the idea for the dynamism of the geographic image, we will say that the same resort has transformed itself into a resort which has the image of a low-budget, raffish and noisy resort. If we follow the toponymy as a determinant of the geographic (tourist) image, today we would rather call this resort "Night Beach" - because it is mostly known for its nightlife. This means that there has been a "replacement" of the geographic image. This fact should lead us to certain findings and conclusions. As an antipode to the latter example we could mention the Cote d'Azur, which has remained "azure" for decades. By identifying the cause-and-effect relationships in shaping the image of a tourist destination, we will have clear positions on managing and maintaining stability in terms of quality and safety. This can be done through the methodology of the geographical science applicable to the study of the images in geography. And another example: what is the first major initiation that arises in our minds when mentioning the Pirin National Park? These are large natural areas affected only but little by human activity. The preservation of this "image" that promotes that National Park, or is the basis for its functioning, is fundamental to its future development as a biosystem. This completely excludes its persistent urbanization and landscape modeling in a negative direction. The classical cultural landscape here enters into a moral and conceptual contradiction with the vision (the "image"), the philosophy and the principles of managing this protected area. It is important for the tourist industry to keep the geographic image stable for a long time.

Speaking about the image of the territory as part of the geographical image, we mentioned that it is dynamic and variable. Today, the image of Dubrovnik is that of being one of the three safest tourist destinations in the world (Penerliev, Petkov, 2017). This will attract tourists due to the increased insecurity of the modern world. This is a result of targeted actions of the entire local community, not just of those employed in tourism. And all that just over a decade after the bloodshed which took place in that part of the world. Changing the image in this case is qualitative, in a positive direction, and not merely under the influence of the mass media.

Using the media for misleading advertising creates an unrealistic image of the territory, the tourist destination or site. Such cases are frequent in Bulgaria regarding the hotel business. This certainly has a negative effect. Negative effects will also occur when creating an artificial image. For example, after the mass advertising of the Belogradchik Rocks as part of the "New Wonders of the World", in a short period of time the destination was flocked by a large tourist contingent, while the destination itself was caught unprepared in terms of infrastructure (roads, parking places, accommodations, etc.). The imagined geographies analyzes the image as inherent to the territory and not as an image which was artificially created. The tourism industry should follow the example of geography so as to perceive the deep “organic” link between tourism and the territory (the cultural landscape) in the process of building the image of a given tourist destination.

An understanding of identity in its geographical sense helps to preserve the unique customs and traditions in different geographical (tourist areas). As an example of this, it could be mentioned that in addition to the proclamation of the "Chiprovtsi carpet" as an item under UNESCO protection, its preservation as a value and a tourist attraction should include activities such as training, presentation and preservation – not just as a one-time activity but over a long period of time. The identity of Old Nessebar is preserved not only by investment in the renovation of the specific architecture, but also in the training of appropriate personnel for this purpose. Conservation of the old architectural assets not only includes "package" but also "content". The preservation of the identity of the village of Brashlyan does not involve the demolition of authentic houses and the construction of their – although modern - imitations. Identity as part of preserving the geographical image of destinations will help their proper management. For example, understanding that the "nestinarstvo" (fire-dancing) custom or offering a "patatnik" meal only belong to certain geographic locations will eliminate the comic cases of their occurrence in non-typical areas, locations and tourist destinations. Conversely, the fact that Bulgaria is

one of the world's leading producers of rose oil gives grounds for its ubiquitous offering throughout the whole country.

In conclusion, we can say that imagined geographies is the theoretical "lever" of tourism which should be used in order to change the notions of image and identity. Toponymy only helps to reinforce the image. The use of typical geographical methods, approaches and practices (in particular – those of cultural geography) by the tourism industry gives more ground for success in the planning, management and projecting of the tourist destinations. The analytical understanding of the main categories studied by imagined geographies enhances their more static and descriptive characterization by the tourism industry.

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