

Cross-border Cultural Tourism in Europe: Drivers for Cross-border Travels for the Performing Arts¹

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the drivers for cross-border tourist exchanges between the two closest capitals in Europe – Bratislava (Slovakia) and Vienna (Austria). We focus on the field of cultural tourism in view of the cross-border visits to two major performing arts institutions – the Slovak National Theatre in Bratislava and the Staatsoper in Vienna. The basic question raised by the study is: What makes tourists travel for the performing arts? The paper presents partial results of a bigger research analyzing intercultural differences in perception of cultural products among different audiences.

Key words

Cultural tourism, cross-border visitors, performing arts, consumer behaviour.

JEL Classification: L83

Introduction

Tourism is generally considered to be one of the world's largest industries. Within its huge structure cultural tourism appears to be a particularly advancing sector (Bywater, 1993; Bendixen, 1997; Richards, 2005). The relationship between culture and tourism is also seen to be mutually beneficial. Tourism serves culture in taking visitors to sites and venues of culture and arts, while culture serves tourism in offering attractive opportunities for cultural experiences and challenges to tourists for cultural discoveries (Bendixen, 1997). Yet, travelling to attend performing arts events already makes up a relevant share of today's cultural tourism activities in Europe. In addition, such movements are being strongly encouraged within the regional policy of the European Union, cross-border tourist exchanges in particular.

The new economic focus of cultural and tourism development at local level is also reflected at national and European levels. Moreover, in the increasingly competitive 'Europe of the Regions', culture has become a major tool for city marketing (Richards,

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2005). Many historic buildings, heritage sites and performing arts venues have become identified with particular places and have become 'must see' sights and the 'reason' for the visit (Hughes, 2002). As a result, the city and its cultural offerings is suggested to be packaged and market together and branded as a unique experience. Kolb (2005) describes the importance of packaging in the cultural tourism marketing as a process of putting together, or bundling, the core cultural product with additional services. Moreover, this bundling of goods and services helps attract cultural tourists by reducing the amount of time they will need to spend researching what culture the city has to offer. According to Hayes and MacLeod (2005), if the cultural tourism packages are sensitively designed they can be used as a vehicle for making sense of places and they may hold much potential for themeing regions by 'packaging' a series of linked sites with each package telling a distinctive story.

There are several factors affecting cultural tourism nowadays. Among the trends having the most impact are to be mentioned: a greater demand for weekend travels, interest in travel packages and itineraries, and use of technology and the Internet (NTHP, 2004). Especially, the access to new information and communication technology (mainly the Internet) enabling people to have an increased awareness of different countries and their cultures is believed to have stimulated a growth in cultural tourism in the last years.

1 Cultural Tourism

The European Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS) defines cultural tourism from a conceptual point of view as: "The movement of persons to cultural attractions away from their normal place of residence, with the intention to gather new information and experiences to satisfy their cultural needs". Accordingly, from a technical standpoint it includes: "All movements of persons to specific cultural attractions, such as heritage sites, artistic and cultural manifestations, arts and drama outside their normal place of residence".⁵ However, Hughes (2002) points out the ambiguity of the term "cultural tourism" resulting from an interchangeable use of other terms such as heritage tourism, arts tourism and ethnic tourism for apparently similar activities.

Various authors recognize that cultural tourism has emerged as a consequence of the very development of the tourist market and its need for diversification (Richards, 1996; Bendixen, 1997; Bonet, 2003). Bonet (2003) argues that development of cultural tourism can be attributed to the growing importance of the new urban middle class with a high level of education, an interest in experiencing something different from the usual tourist traps, and a desire to learn something rich in cultural, symbolic, spiritual or historical content. In addition, Majó et al. (2004) highlight new trends in cultural tourism, which can be characterized by a spectacular growing of cultural tourist offer in the last years of the 20th century and a sensitive grown of pleasure trips with cultural finalities.

Increasingly, the tourism industry is recognizing the importance of arts and their complementary relationship with tourism and is finding ways to develop new links be-

⁵ Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS) www.atlas-euro.org.

tween the two fields. There are several attributes reinforcing the development of new partnerships of equals between arts and tourism (Reiss, 1993):

- The arts provide a unique travel experience otherwise unavailable at a reasonable cost.
- The arts offer a glamour product with good marketability.
- The arts broaden the appeal of a travel package.
- The arts are an alternative to the usual travel experiences.
- The arts provide a reason for lengthening a travel stay.

Tourists make an important contribution to the economic importance of the arts, since they make up a significant proportion of the audience for museums, galleries, theatres, and concerts, particularly in capital cities (Richards, 1996). Moreover, the large-scale development of cultural tourism has had a direct positive effect not just on the financial outlook of the cultural entities themselves but also on the local economy as a whole (Benet, 2003), and provides important incentives for a regional development.

On the other hand, cultural tourism is accused from being a threat to culture through its exploitation, dislocation and desecration (Johnston, 2000), and it has been identified as the principal culprit in the commercialisation and falsification of numerous cultural traditions and even the natural environment (Croall, 1995). Furthermore, the globalisation of culture represented by 'McDonaldization' (Ritzer, 1993) and 'Disneyfication' is seen by many as being a threat to national, regional and local cultures everywhere (Richards, 1996). To sum up, if the relationship between tourism and culture is to be sustainable, tourism will have to develop in harmony with community interests (McIntosh, Hinch and Ingram, 2002) both on the national as well as international levels.

2 Starting point of the study

The starting point for this study was the high percentage of Austrian cross-border tourists at opera and ballet performances of the Slovak National Theatre in Bratislava, reaching almost 20 % of total attendance in the last 15 years. For the most part, the Austrians have preferred organized group visits by cultural tour-operators from Vienna and surroundings. However, in 2007 both the theatre and tour-operators reported a decrease in demand for cross-border trips to the performances in Bratislava.

We assumed that one of the reasons for the lower demand might have been the moving of the Slovak National Theatre from a historical building in the centre of Bratislava to a new modern building situated in a new urban area, which, moreover, is not supposed to be fully constructed until 2010. As a result, since 2007 the Slovak National Theatre has been simultaneously performing in two buildings – the historical one and the modern one – while the current repertory has been split between the two stages. Since the attendance of Austrian tourists dropped generally, and not only with regard to the performances in the new theatre building, it is assumed that other reasons might be revealed by the research.

On the other hand, Slovak cross-border tourists attending performing arts in Austria appeared to use mainly individual forms of travel. Nevertheless, there were no data available neither on the number and characteristics of these travellers nor on their motivations for attending performing arts in Austria.

3 Methodology

Cross-border visitors to two major performing arts institutions in Slovakia and Austria – the Slovak National Theatre in Bratislava (SNT) and the Staatsoper in Vienna – were analysed and compared. We focused on the determining characteristics of cross-border attendees of these organizations and on identifying incentives for their cross-border attendance. The research used both quantitative and qualitative research techniques. Provided that there are differences in forms of attendance (individual vs. group) we used different methods to examine Slovak and Austrian cross-border audiences.

First, we applied a quantitative research technique based on questionnaires to identify Slovak cross-border travellers. The questionnaires were distributed to the current audience of the Slovak National Theatre before performances, since we assumed that the highest probability of meeting Slovak cross-border visitors to the performing arts abroad would be among people who were actually attending performing arts in their homeland. In total, 516 questionnaires were distributed. 10,9 % of them (56 respondents) had already participated in a performance in Vienna Staatsoper. Besides other questions, these respondents were asked to answer open-ended questioning about their motivations for attending the performance in Vienna. The given reasons were analysed and grouped into several categories with similar characteristics using an expert evaluation method.

Second, a qualitative research method based on in-depth personal interviews with two principal cultural tour-operators (Opern und Reisen and Elite Tours) specialized in cross-border cultural tourism, was used in order to investigate Austrian cross-border group visitors. The prevailing theme of the interviews focused on revealing characteristics of these attendees and on identifying drivers for their cross-border visits to SNT. Nevertheless, other topics comprising origins of the cross-border cultural trips to Bratislava, reasons for organized group attendance, products and packages offered by the tour-operators, and current problems and perspectives were covered by the research.

4 Findings

4.1 Cross-border audience of the performing arts in Slovakia and Austria

The survey on the Slovak audience confirmed some of the well-known facts about performing arts visitors. First, higher education was identified as the most significant characteristic of cross-border performing arts attendees. Actually, 75 % of the respondents were university graduates in comparison to only around 15 % university gradu-

ates in the Slovak population. Females prevailed and represented 64,3 % of the sample. More than two thirds of respondents (67,9 %) were urban audience residing in the capital of Slovakia Bratislava. The only surprising results were those concerning the age structure. Here, the most numerous group consisted of respondents aged between 36 and 45 years and the second numerous one between 46 and 55 years. Only 28,6 % of the sample fell into the category over 56 years, yet, attendees under 45 made up almost half (48,2 %) of the cross-border travellers for the performing arts in Austria.

In contrast, Austrian cross-border audiences for the performing arts in Slovakia appear to form rather a homogeneous (in terms of age) and stable group, which has been travelling to Bratislava for cultural purposes already for around 15 years. At the beginning of the 90s of the 20th century, the group was composed from people in their late 50s and early 60s, residing in Vienna or close surrounding, rather conservative in their tastes. Today, these cross-border visitors reach from their early 70s to mid 80s. Thus, they fall into the category of senior travellers, which are considered to be an important emerging travel segment (Littrell, Paige & Song, 2004). However, only few new comers join the group nowadays, moreover, the total number of Austrian cross-border visitors to SNT is decreasing.

4.2 Drivers for cross-border travels for the performing arts in Slovakia and Austria

As mentioned earlier in the paper the Slovak cross-border performing arts visitors prefer individual forms of attendance at the performances of the Staatsoper in Vienna. They are composed from diverse age categories, however, with a common feature, which is higher education.

The principal incentive for the Slovak cross-border attendees – a quest for a unique experience – was identified in one third of the sample (32,17 %). Besides others, this reflects the importance of experiential factors when marketing the performing arts events. The second most frequent motivation was related to specific characteristics of the product itself, like repertory or cast (26,79 %). Both reasons mentioned correspond to the nature of a culturally based stimulus, since the cross-border attendees were driven by differences in culture. The third reason was an invitation (17,86 %). In view of marketing, this finding suggests a need to explore the use of pro-active marketing techniques in order to attract some groups of consumers. The fourth incentive – tourism – deals with opportunity factors and coincidence (14,29 %). Here, the attendance at a performance was not a principal motivation for travelling. However, it points out the importance of marketing activities at the venue of a performing arts organization or incorporated in the city marketing. Finally, general interest in culture (8,93 %) reflects inner drives for cross-border visits to the performing arts. This motivation suggests the openness to diverse cultural offers in this group of consumers and makes from them a primary soft target on the cultural tourism market.

Table 1 Slovak audience's incentives for attending performances in Vienna

Incentive Type	Statements	Respondents (%)
Experience	Overall atmosphere, splendid experience, cultural experience, curiosity, to feel the tradition, to experience something new, to experience a performance abroad	32,17
Product	Repertory, cast, performance not available at home, to see preferred opera/ballet, singers	26,79
Invitation	Invitation from family, friends or business partners, won the tickets	17,86
Tourism	Trip to Vienna, school trip, interest to see the building, coincidence	14,29
General interest in culture	Culture, theatre enthusiasts, interest in the arts, interest in theatre	8,93

Source: Own processing.

Organized visits to the performances at SNT in Bratislava started to be popular among Austrian tourists at the beginning of the 90s of the 20th century. At that time, the reasons for the organized travel lay mainly in unknown conditions in the Slovak market after the borders open in 1989. Slovakia started its economic transition going along with lacking infrastructure and services, frequent economic criminality and problematic cross-border transport. This situation constituted a market opportunity for cultural tour-operators in Vienna, who promptly offered organized cross-border trips to performances in Bratislava. Soon after the beginning of the cooperation between the Austrian travel agencies and SNT in 1992, Austrian tourists made up 10 % of total audience for opera and ballet in Bratislava. Furthermore, in the middle of the 90s they already represented 20 % of all visitors to SNT. However, in 2007 tour-operators experienced a considerable decline in demand for attending the performances in Bratislava.

Table 2 Austrian audience's incentives for attending performance in Bratislava

Incentive Type	Reasoning
Traditionalism	Traditional operatic staging (contrary to modern staging which has been popular in German speaking countries in Europe in last decades), traditional ensemble theatre (SNT is a theatre with a permanent ensemble of artists who perform as a team, there are usually no one-big-star performances), historical building (some clients don't feel comfortable with attending opera and ballet performances given in modern theatres).
Nostalgia	In the past, there were vivid cross-cultural exchanges between Bratislava and Vienna. The two cities were even connected by a tram-line. Age structure of Austrian cross-border attendees suggests that there might be living witnesses of those times among the visitors. In addition, the historical building of SNT played an important role in cultural life in the past.
Price	Although SNT in Bratislava started to implement a differentiated price policy with regard to Slovak and foreign visitors at the begin-

	ning of the 90s of the 20 th century (prices for the Slovaks were lower, which was being justified by public subsidy from the state budget), the tickets were still incomparably cheaper than tickets for performances at Vienna Staatsoper corresponding to the same seat category.
Tourism	To make a trip (Austrian tour-operators offer the whole half-day package – transport, dinner/champagne, performance, and sometimes also shopping)
Curiosity	This was a principal driver at the very beginning of cross-border travel: What is hidden behind the iron curtain?

Source: Own processing.

Motivations of Austrian cross-border visitors to SNT in Bratislava may be grouped around three types of stimulus: cultural, economic and general one. First, incentives like traditionalism and nostalgia suggest that tourists were attracted by rediscovered aspects of historical and cultural heritage and traditions previously shared by Bratislava and Vienna, and thus, point out the culturally based stimulus. On the other hand, the exploitation of price differentials between Slovak and Austrian performing arts market is a clear example of the economic stimulus. Two other incentives – tourism and curiosity – belong to the category of general interest in travelling. In this case, cultural offers have to compete with all other tourist attractions on the market to address this group of consumers. Nevertheless, the results concerning Austrian cross-border cultural tourists came out from the qualitative research based on in-depth interviews with cultural tour-operators in Vienna. Therefore, they have to be proven by a quantitative survey among Austrian attendees, which is currently being carried out in the framework of this project.

Conclusion

The research revealed considerable differences in both characteristics and motivations between Slovak and Austrian cross-border cultural tourists. According to Caldwell (2001) buying-consuming experiences of attending performing arts involve a unique combination of factors, which besides others, are underpinned by multiple motives, sometimes unconscious, that facilitate or inhibit each other. Moreover, the author argues that attending performing arts involves a set of complementary, often symbolic, and sometimes ritualistic and/or compensatory behaviours. This was clearly manifested in our research by diverse incentives perceived by cross-border attendees, which comprised rational/economic (price), symbolic/cultural (experience, product, traditionalism, nostalgia) and general/unspecific (tourism, curiosity) stimulus. In addition, in this case the diversity was reinforced by intercultural aspects of audience's perceptions given by different cultural backgrounds of cross-border visitors.

The Slovak visitors were driven mostly by cultural stimulus, which they sought in specific experiences and unique characteristics of performing arts products. In contrast, the Austrian visitors driven by cultural incentives were looking for traditional features of performances and nostalgic aspects related to the historical venue. However, they were also motivated by economic stimulus given by cheaper tickets for perform-

ances in Bratislava. In addition, both groups were driven by unspecific incentives like general interest in culture and travelling.

Given that Slovak and Austrian cross-border audiences are different in many respects, different marketing strategies have to be applied to address these two groups of consumers. In this particular case, we suggest to attract Slovak cross-border tourists by promoting experiential factors of cultural products, reinforced by pro-active marketing techniques, using more advertising on the venue and enhancing cooperation with the city marketing.

On the other hand, it is suggested to address Austrian cross-border visitors by creating new incentives for their cross-border travels. We argue that the recent decline of Austrian audience in SNT was caused by a gradual diminution of two major groups of stimulus: economic (ticket prices) and cultural (traditionalism, nostalgia). The economic incentive was diminishing due to a continual increase in admission prices, moreover, amplified by the persistent firming of the Slovak currency before a move to Euro currency in 2009. The cultural incentives were delimited first by the inclination towards a modern staging in recent SNT productions (traditionalism), and second by the moving to the new building – in comparison to the historical building from 1886 – situated in a modern urban area (nostalgia). Therefore, it is needed to create new marketing programs, which would encompass attractive tourist offering and packages replacing previous motivations and enhancing relationship marketing that would provide a special value to frequent visitors.

To conclude, the findings of the research should help marketing managers to create more effective and individualized marketing programs to attract and retain cross-border audiences. They highlight a need of using different marketing methods to address different consumer groups in the cross-border cultural tourist market given by intercultural differences in perceptions of cultural products.

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