Cross-cultural localisation of Serbian tourist destinations' websites: cases of websites of tourism organisations of Belgrade, Novi Sad and Niš

Кроскултурна локализација сајтова домаћих туристичких дестинација: примери сајтова туристичке организације Београда, Новог Сада и Ниша

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Abstract: Tourism and culture are inextricably linked. Visiting another country with a different culture gives tourists the opportunity to gain different perspectives and enjoy the destination as well. As a result of the development of Information and Communication Technologies, but also the development of the web as a primary source of information on tourist destinations, international tourism has increased over the past two years. Therefore, the cross-cultural adaptation of tourist destination websites becomes even more important. To that end, a literature review was conducted, which highlighted a research gap regarding the examination of the actual state of website localization practices for tourist destinations. The aim of this research is to examine and analyse the actual implementation of the practice of cross-cultural website localization on the example of tourism organizations of three cities in Serbia. An open-ended survey was conducted, and the research results show that the localization process is recognized as important for online marketing communication in all three tourism organizations.

Keywords: cultural localisation, website, tourism organisations of cities

JEL classification: M31

Сажетак: Несумњиво је да туризам и култура иду заједно. Туристи из једне земље са одређеном културом одлазе у другу земљу са различитом културом, како би уживали у дестинацији и стекли другачија искуства. Број међународних туриста се повећао у претходне две године, чему је допринео развој информационе и комуникационе технологије, али и развој веба као једног од првих места где ће туриста отићи у потрази за информацијама о туристичкој дестинацији. Стога, међукултурна адаптација веб-сајтова туристичких дестинација постаје још значајнија. У том циљу је урађен преглед литературе, који је указао на истраживачки јаз у погледу испитивања стварног стања пракси локализације веб сајтова туристичких

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дестинација. Циљ овог истраживања је да испита и анализира стварну примену пракси кроскултурне локализације веб сајтова на примеру туристичких организација три града у Србији. Спроведена је анкета отвореног типа, а резултати истраживања показују да је процес локализације препознат као важан за онлајнмаркетинг комуникацију у све три туристичке организације.

Кључне речи: културна локализација, вебсајт, туристичке организације градова

ЈЕЛ класификација: M31

Introduction

After a recorded decrease due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of tourists in the world is slowly starting to increase, according to statistics on international tourist arrivals in 2023, which increased in all regions as compared to 2022. According to Statista (2024), Europe had the highest number of inbound travellers last year, with around 700 million arrivals. The list of countries from Europe, which leads in international tourism with approximately 60% of all international tourist arrivals worldwide in 2022, is topped by Southern Mediterranean countries, such as France, Spain, Turkey, and Italy (Statista, 2024).

The number of international tourists visiting Serbia is also increasing. According to UN Tourism (previously known as The United Nations World Tourism Organisation - UNWTO) (2024), Serbia recorded 1,773,000 foreign tourists in 2022, compared with 871,000 foreign tourists in 2021 and 446,000 foreign tourists in 2020, based on the number of foreign tourists staying overnight. The Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (RZS) (2024) reports the same trend, indicating that the number of tourist arrivals increased by 8.3% in January 2024 compared with January 2023 in the Republic of Serbia, while the number of overnight stays increased by 3.9% and the number of overnight stays by foreign tourists increased by 1.2%. There is a projected growth rate of 0.9 million international tourists coming to Serbia between 2024 and 2029 (+47,62%), while a new peak is expected in 2029, with 2.78 million arrivals, following nine years of consecutive growth (Statista, 2024).

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) play a key role in supporting and encouraging this phenomenon (Mele & Cantoni, 2018), since tourists can now find information about their desired destinations more quickly and easily via the Internet, and gain valuable insight from other tourists' comments or reviews (Khan, Hussain, Hussain Mari, & Ali, 2022) posted on websites such as TripAdvisor, Yelp, etc. Communication between tourism providers and potential tourists is essential, as high-quality communication via a travel website should influence tourists' decision-making (Marić, Leković, & Džever, 2024). Furthermore, Khan et al. (2022) also emphasise the importance of using official websites of tourist destinations, as these websites influence tourists' decision-making and destination image.

A growing number of foreign tourists worldwide and in Serbia, as well as the potential Serbia has in the field of tourism, have led to the question of how to make tourist destinations in Serbia more accessible to selected foreign markets. It is, therefore, crucial to first understand the culture of foreign target countries before adapting online marketing communications of Serbian tourist destinations. Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov (2010) describe culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the member

Cross-cultural localization of Serbian tourist destinations' websites: cases of websites of tourism organizations of Belgrade, Novi Sad and Niš

3

of one group or category of people from another" (p. 6). In their opinion, culture is always a collective phenomenon (Hofstede et al., 2010). Due to the fact that most of today's business, including sales and service provision, occurs online, or via the Internet, mainly through the web, and more recently via social networks, it is necessary to pay special attention to this aspect of cross-cultural Internet marketing communication of Serbian tourist destinations. Websites of domestic tourist destinations, as one of the first places where a tourist from a foreign country will go to seek information about a particular destination, require better adaptation of destination communication for foreign visitors. In this sense, as research on this topic shows (Mele & Cantoni, 2016, 2017, 2018; Mele, De Ascaniis, & Cantoni, 2015), it is necessary to localize tourist destination websites, which means creating a website in accordance with the cultural characteristics of tourists from different countries. Localization practices in online communication can be divided into two main topics: localization of multimedia content, which involves adapting cultural values, and localization of (website) design, which involves adapting cultural markers to a specific country (Tigre Moura, Sing, & Chun, 2016). Social networks, which have gained increasing popularity in the last few years, are no exception. Researchers such as Mele, Kerkhof & Cantoni (2021) analysed how Instagram promotes tourism from a cross-cultural perspective, referencing the official reports of national tourism organisations in four culturally different countries: Chile, the United States, the Netherlands and Portugal. The purpose of localising a tourist destination is to improve its perceived image and willingness to visit a heritage site (Mele, Kerkhof, & Cantoni, 2020).

A review of the literature on this topic has concluded that very few of the currently available studies provide an overview of the actual state of website localization practices for tourist destinations, and none of them focus on the websites of tourist destinations in Serbia, which represents a identified research gap. The aim of this research is to examine and analyze the actual implementation of the practice of cross-cultural website localization on the example of tourism organizations of three cities in Serbia: 1. Tourism Organisation of Belgrade, 2. Tourism Organisation of Novi Sad, and 3. Tourism Organisation of Niš.

1. Cultural localisation of websites

For a long time, authors have been interested in cultural localisation, a topic that has gained importance with the advent of the web. Websites have emerged as an unusual medium for presenting both local and global cultural values (Hamid, 2017), which are by their nature accessible to a global audience and as such require country-specific cultural adaptation (Singh & Matsuo, 2004). Accordingly, Singh, Zhao & Hu (2005) propose studying the web as a cultural document and determining whether it is culturally neutral or infused with local values. According to Singh, Zhao & Hu (2003), the web is not a culturally neutral medium, but a medium rich in cultural values that give country-specific websites an appearance unique to the local cultures. The characteristics of the web as a cultural document are summarized as follows (Cermak & Smutny, 2018, p. 207; Singh et al. 2005, p. 131): A website is visible to people across cultures; The interactive nature of the website makes it an ideal medium for

creating culturally sensitive dialogue; Links and search options depend on the user and his or her motivation to browse the web; Website templates can be adapted for different cultures; and Culturally appropriate websites can be better perceived and used by users. Wąsowicz-Zaborek (2018) state that culturally adapted websites can affect a website's usability, resulting in more positive attitudes towards the website and increased consumer's willingness to purchase, just as culturally incompatible websites can negatively affect purchase intents. Furthermore, the international study by Singh, Fassott, Chao & Hoffmann (2006) provides empirical evidence that a culturally adapted website significantly increases purchase intent and leads to favourable attitudes towards the website. However, despite ample evidence supporting that cultural adaptation of websites positively affects consumers' attitudes, country-specific websites are still in the nascent stages of cultural adaptation.

Many international issues about website design must be considered by website designers when developing country-specific websites, including translation, logistics, legal hurdles, and most importantly, the diverse cultural expectations of global consumers (Singh & Matsuo, 2004). Understanding local cultures and local websites requires both an etic and an emic approach by website designers (Singh et al., 2003). Such a comprehensive approach to localisation ensures that website is accessible and appealing to people from different cultural backgrounds (Mele & Cantoni, 2018).

Localisation of the website's cultural values in online communication could be described as adapting the design and content of the website to meet the cultural needs and specificities of the target markets. At first, this process was limited to only translating languages and adjusting simple website elements such as time, date, and currency. The localisation of websites has, however, expanded beyond that and encompassed adapting accessibility, sound, cultural values, functionality, graphics, information architecture, layout, search engines, symbols, videos, and navigation, among other features, to meet the cultural preferences and needs of specific markets.

In order to successfully localise websites, Singh, Toy & Wright (2009) recommend that factors such as language, culture, customs, colour preferences, currencies, and time zones be taken into account when designing websites, while Alexander, Thompson & Murray (2016) believe that new cultural adaptations need to consider cultural preferences for *appearance, navigation, links, multimedia, visual representation, colours, and text.* According to Rafetzeder (2019), localisation involves two levels. The first is the surface level and consists of adjusting the language, punctuation, dates and time zones, units of measurement, currencies, etc., while the second is the cultural level, which includes aesthetic appeal, colours, images, communication patterns, etc. (p. 37). Singh et al. (2009) measured localisation in terms of adapting content to local users to achieve customisation of elements such as language translation, navigation structure, use of appropriate colours and graphics, global gateway for sites in different languages and culturally relevant web content, and identified five categories of websites based on these localisation variables: standardised, proactive, global, localised, and highly localised websites (p. 282). According to these authors, the first three categories (standardised, proactive and global) do not provide any localised content (more information in: Singh et al., 2009).

Although cultural localisation is the subject of numerous studies: on the creation of international advertising campaigns and communication materials that emphasise country-specific cultural values (Albers-Miller & Gelb, 1996); on e-commerce in order to analyse the cultural influence on the e-commerce experience (Panchal, Ray, & Schofield, 2020); on the influence of cultural elements in choosing pictures as part of web design and marketing strategy on universities' websites in Pakistan (Hamid, 2017); on models that would support the cultural localisation strategies of companies on the web (Cermak & Smutny, 2018; Singh & Matsuo, 2004; Singh et al., 2005), or on social media when examining the influence of psychological distance and message type on Facebook according to cultural orientation (Sung, Kim, Choi, & Lee, 2020), more research needs to be done in the field of tourism (Tigre Moura, Gnoth, & Deans, 2014).

2. Localisation of tourist destinations' websites

The studies listed in Section 1, specifically addressing the topic of website localisation of tourist destinations, were influenced by the research of Tigre Moura et al. (2014).These authors developed a cultural framework for evaluating cultural values in tourist destination websites, adapted from the framework for researching cultural values in websites developed by Singh et al. (2003). The mentioned framework is based on the three of the six dimensions of cultural values proposed by Hofstede (1980) – individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, and one cultural dimension of high and low context proposed by Hall (1976) (according to Singh et al., 2004). The masculinity-femininity dimension of Hofstede's framework of cultural dimensions was excluded during the framework consolidation due to low reliability, and the dimension of long-term and short-term orientation (pragmatism) was never included (Tigre Moura et al., 2014), nor was the dimension of indulgence versus restraint. Singh et al. (2003) explain that Hofstede and Hall's models were chosen for two reasons. The first is that Hofstede's model has been widely applied and validated in different cultural contexts and management research in general, while the second is parsimony, since both models are viable frameworks, given their analytical flexibility, which is desirable in measuring culture. According to Cermak & Smutny (2018), Hall's cultural dimension is represented in the literature because it accounts for a culture's common communication means. Tigre Moura et al. (2014) provide a critical perspective on localisation, highlighting the negative impact complete cultural localisation (such as boredom) has on online travellers' destination image and willingness to travel, which can be caused by reducing novelty in favour of familiarity (cultural congruence). However, the majority of studies confirm that cultural localisation contributes to familiarity, visitors' perception, and willingness to visit a destination.

Almost 90% of online buyers select their native language before making a purchase (Mele & Cantoni, 2017). In this context, Wąsowicz-Zaborek (2018) provide guidelines and recommendations for the development of websites adapted to cultural clusters. According to this, Anglo cultures prefer English on websites because it is consistent with their national language, Latin Europe prefers national language on websites, Eastern Europe prefers

national language, Latin America prefers Spanish, Arab cultures prefer Arabic and English, whereas South Asia prefers the national language and English. In this case, language is only taken into account as one of the factors in localising a website, but other elements and their adaptation according to cultural clusters are also important (more information in: Wąsowicz-Zaborek, 2018).

As Cermak & Smutny (2018) argue, website localisation is not only translation, although, in most cases cultural adaptation provides just that – translationof language, date, time, currency, number format or modification of graphic design elements (Alexander et al., 2016). The fact that a tourist destination's website is translated into English and offers various language options does not mean that the website is culturally adapted. Simply providing different language options does not equate to adapting to different cultures (Rafetzeder, 2019). Additionally, the fact that websites often offer only the English language option to their visitors should be considered carefully. According to Statista (2024), in 2023 there were approximately 1.5 billion people worldwide who spoke English as their first language or second language, but there were also slightly more than 1.1 billion people who spoke Mandarin Chinese, while Hindi and Spanish were in the third and fourth places, respectively. This indicates that although English is the most widespread language, it does not mean that all website visitors speak or understand English.

Rafetzeder (2019) believes tourism is a highly internationalised industry, making the website of tourist destinations highly relevant to cross-cultural values, and its appeal crucial for marketing the destination and attracting tourists. A study by Luna-Nevarez & Hyman (2012) found that hotel booking services, maps, event calendars, descriptions of attractions, deals, activities, culture, shopping, and weather forecasts are the most important content for attracting tourists to websites of cities as tourist destinations. However, the question arises whether the designers of tourist destination websites, and cities as tourist destinations, are generally aware of the cultural implications. According to Rafetzeder (2019), websites of tourism organisations are mostly designed from an ethnocentric perspective, in accordance with the cultural values of the host country, without considering the cultural background and preferences of website visitors. This opens up a broad field for researching the state of website localization for tourist destinations and opportunities for their better adaptation according to the cultures of foreign target markets.

3. Methodology

Detailed information regarding the research methodology, the criteria for selecting the research sample, the method of conducting the research, and the method of analysing the results is presented in this chapter.

3.1. Sample selection

The national tourism organisations aim, among other things, to promote their destinations internationally. As a result, tourist destination websites are an excellent case study for investigating how localisation is actually integrated into tourism marketing and

Cross-cultural localization of Serbian tourist destinations'
websites: cases of websites of tourism organizations of
Belgrade, Novi Sad and Niš

7

communication (Mele & Cantoni, 2017), specifically in the context of cities as tourist destinations.

The statistics of overnight tourist stays according to the RSO's report (2023) for the first and second quarters of 2023 were a selection criterion for analysing tourism organisations' websites: 1. Tourism Organisation of Belgrade, 2. Tourism Organisation of Novi Sad, and 3. Tourism Organisation of Niš. In order to analyse the most important tourist destinations by category: Spas, Mountain centres, and Other tourist places, the first three tourist destinations ranked in accordance with overnight stays of tourists were considered: (I) Category Spas: 1. Vrnjačka Banja, 2. Sokobanja, and 3. Banja Vrdnik; (II) Category Mountain centres: 1. Zlatibor, 2. Kopaonik, and 3. Rudnik (the highest growth in overnight stays in the first six months of 2023 compared to the same period in 2022), and (III) Category Other tourist places: 1. Belgrade, 2. Novi Sad, and 3. Subotica.

After previously analysing tourist destination websites based on overnight stays by category, a narrower range of tourist destination websites was assessed in the further analysis. The criterion of regional affiliation was applied only to one category - Other tourist places, where tourist destinations were analysed by regions Serbia-North – Belgrade Region and Vojvodina Region, and Serbia-South – Region of Šumadija and Western Serbia, Region of Southern and Eastern Serbia and Region of Kosovo and Metohija, which are top three: 1. Belgrade, 2. Novi Sad, and 3. Niš.

Besides the statistics on tourist overnight stays from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS) report (2023) for the first and second quarters of 2023, the criterion for this analysis was the statistics of tourist arrivals/overnight stays - Tourist traffic for May-July 2023 according to the Statistical Release no. 155 - year LXXIII, 30th June 2023; no. 199 - year LXXIII, 31st July 2023, and no. 217 - year LXXIII, 31st August 2023 - Catering and tourism statistics of the SORS (2023). The comparative analysis of common parameters within the same category led to selecting only one category of tourist destinations – Othertourist places. In addition to the analysis of tourist destinations' websites as one of the main means of international internet marketing communication of domestic tourist destinations, an analysis of the offer categories was also included, followed by the selection of websites of cities as tourist destinations: 1. Tourism Organisation of Belgrade (TOB), 2. Tourism Organisation of Novi Sad (TONS), and 3. Tourism Organisation of Niš (TON).

3.2. Conducting research

The research in this paper is part of the dissertation titled *Cross-Cultural Specificities of International Internet Marketing Communication of Domestic Tourist Destinations.* In order to accomplish this, 1. Tourism Organisation of Belgrade (TOB), 2. Tourism Organisation of Novi Sad (TONS), and 3. Tourism Organisation of Niš (TON) were emailed with detailed information about the research, one part of which is a study of cross-cultural localisation of tourist destinations' websites, and each tourism organisation was emailed with an invitation to participate in an open-ended survey.

Taking into account Mele & Cantoni's (2017) research, survey questions cover four macro-areas related to website localisation practices and activities of cities as domestic tourist destinations. The questions covered four areas related to adaptation practices and activities: (I) current state of localisation processes; (II) market research for online content creation and selection; (III) most important adaptation activities; and (IV) use of key performance indicators (KPIs) to assess the effectiveness of marketing and communication ad hoc choices. Mele & Cantoni (2017) selected these areas after previous studies on the given topic (Mele, De Ascaniis, & Cantoni, 2015; 2016), where the questions from the mentioned areas were adapted to the needs of this research. Another area related to the state and practices of destination promotion in Serbia was added with questions from that area, along with two additional questions: 1. Do you think cultural adaptation would affect the increase in visits? and 2. Do you think cultural factors influence the choice of offer or product category? The questionnaire is available by e-mail: aleksandra.stojiljkovic@gmail.com

The participants in the survey were employed in the Sector for Promotion, the Sector for Development, Promotion of Tourism and Events, the Sectorfor Information and Commercial Activities, and employed at positions as Organisers for the Development and Promotion of the Niš Fortress, in the Tourism Organisation of Niš. The survey was conducted from December 8, 2023 to February 8, 2024.

3.3. Data analysis

A content analysis was used to analyse the survey data. Previous studies related to a similar topic have successfully applied this method (Singh et al., 2003; Singh & Matsuo, 2004; Singh et al., 2005; Tigre Moura et al., 2014). According to Singh et al. (2003), content analysis is considered an appropriate technique for analysing values, norms of behaviour and other elements of culture. The three Serbian cities listed as tourist destinations were analysed using content analysis to determine the actual state of website localisation practices. In order to analyse the answers received, a code sheet was manually created using an Excel spreadsheet, while keeping notes on observations for every response. As a result of the analysis, 55 lines of coded statements were obtained in an Excel table, which were then reanalysed to be reduced to the main localisation activities of the surveyed tourism organisations (see Table 2). In the subsequent sections, abbreviations will be used as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Tourism organisations that participated in the research

Name	Abbreviation
Tourism organisation	TO
1. Tourism organisation of Belgrade (TOB)	TO1
2. Tourism organisation of Novi Sad (TONS)	TO2
3. Tourism organisation of Niš (TON)	TO3

Source: the authors' research (2023)

Cross-cultural localization of Serbian tourist destinations'
websites: cases of websites of tourism organizations of
Belgrade, Novi Sad and Niš

9

4. Results

The first part of the survey examined the opinions of TOs regarding Serbia as a tourist destination in general, the degree to which tourist destinations in Serbia have been utilised, their quality of promotion, as well as the use of potential and quality of promotion of Serbian cities as tourist destinations. According to all three TOs, Serbia is a tourist destination with great potential, especially for foreign tourists, due to its diverse tourist offer, geographic location, cultural and historical heritage, natural beauty, and food and wine product offerings. The quality of gastronomic events positively contributes to enhancing the destination's brand equity (Čavić, Ćurčić, & Radivojević, 2023). Thus, according to TO2, the slogan of Serbia's umbrella tourism organisation is *Experience Serbia!*

Based on the survey results, all three TOs recognise Serbia's potential as a tourist destination. Regarding the utilisation of the tourist destinations' potential in Serbia, all three TOs consider it to be mostly well utilised, but that there is still room for full utilisation. Accordingly, TO1 stated the following:

"Increasing regional networked actions in long-distance travel markets, such as China and the USA, is important (for organising and presenting the circular tours of the region – the so-called Balkan tours)."

In terms of the promotion of cities as tourist destinations in Serbia, all three TOs said it was satisfactory, as evidenced by the statistics of visitors and overnight stays obtained by the SORS, especially in larger cities in Serbia, which have a comprehensive tourism offer. Moreover, better synchronisation and harmonisation with the general promotion of Serbia are needed, as TO3 pointed out, and TO1 stated as follows:

"We believe that Belgrade, Novi Sad and Niš are leading the way; however, there is certainly room for the further development of promotional activities in these cities, as well as in other cities in Serbia, especially in those nearby the mentioned three cities."

Secondly, the survey examined the actual state of the process of localising tourist websites and social networks of TOs participating in the survey. According to all three TOs, their promotion is tailored to tourists from different countries through the website and social networks, because they are not only targeting domestic tourists, but also those from the region, mainly from the former SFRY countries, but also beyond, according to TO2.

In response to a question about how they adapt their promotion via social networks and website to tourists from different countries, all three TOs stated that they adapt text and images based on the number of visitors from specific countries, where the text is translated only to English. TO1 and TO2 provide on their websites both Cyrillic and Latin script, whereas TO3 offers only Latin script. TO1 emphasised it pays special attention to the top 5 markets in terms of arrivals and overnight stays in Belgrade, as well as the markets of long-distance locations, while TO2 stated as follows:

"For marketing purpose, when we launch digital campaigns (social networks, specifically Facebook and Instagram), we make sure the copy is in the language of the target audience (Croatian, Slovenian, etc.). As for the visual element, in the case of a video, we typically play the Latin version for the majority of countries and the Cyrillic version for North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. ... With Google display ads, we try to adapt the visuals to the language of the target group."

Furthermore, TO3 said they are currently adjusting only the content, namely the purpose of posting on social networks, not necessarily the language of individual posts, to reach the most numerous target groups, as well as organising promotions directly in the cities in those countries. The same applies to the content on all three TOs' websites, where the version offered is only in English. Accordingly, TO2 stated:

"All content on the TONS's website is available in Latin and Cyrillic script, and English (short news are not translated into English, however, our projects, such as "52 weekends in Novi Sad", "Wine trails of Fruška Gora", "UNIQUE Novi Sad", etc., are translated into English, so that everyone has the best opportunity to learn about them)."

A third part of the survey focused on market research for creating and selecting online content, as well as how surveyed TOs select foreign markets for which they create content online, and whether they have branches in foreign countries or websites that are tailored to specific foreign markets. In this regard, TO1 and TO3 said that they select target foreign markets based on the RZS's statistics on arrivals and overnight stays, whereas TO2 said that it selects target foreign markets based on data collected from the information centre. While none of the TOs have branches in foreign countries or websites tailored to specific foreign markets, TO1 is considering hiring a marketing agency to handle its travel deals to target foreign markets. In this context, TO2 stated:

"Rather than having separate websites for each target group, we use promotion through online portals of the countries from which our target groups originate, so we present Novi Sad's tourism offer via PR and Native texts in their native languages (North Macedonian, Croatian, Bosnian, Slovenian, Hungarian, Greek, etc.)."

In discussing the translations into foreign languages offered on their websites, as well as any previous research or market analysis in this context, all three TOs indicated that English is the most common language used. According to TO1, a version in German and Chinese is also being prepared. Furthermore, TO2 clarified that its choice is based on the years of experience working with tourists and monitoring both RZS's and internal statistics, in which it is recorded from which countries tourists visit the information centres.

In the fourth part of the survey, the key activities of adapting the online content of websites and social networks were examined - text (language and context) and images (context), according to the cultural dimensions of foreign countries. In this regard, each TO stated that they adapt the advertising to specific markets and direct online campaigns based on the target market's specifics, and also adapt text and images in order to appeal to both domestic and foreign tourists. To address the above, TO2 selects content for domestic tourists, depending on the proximity of the location, such as invitations to events, exhibitions

Cross-cultural localization of Serbian tourist destinations' websites: cases of websites of tourism organizations of Belgrade, Novi Sad and Niš

11

or visits to certain historic and cultural sites, or food and wine content, whereas TO2 designs special projects for tourists from foreign countries. Adding to that, TO2 said:

> "Our project '52 weekends in Novi Sad' was designed and created for this reason. As Novi Sad held the title of 'European Capital of Culture' in 2022, and 'European Youth Capital' in 2019, we promoted the city during that period with the slogan 'Feel the spirit of Novi Sad in the year of the European Capital of Culture'."

Likewise, TO3 stated that it adjusts the content and images, for domestic tourists who see Niš as an interesting destination for weekend visits, which implies having a good time in bars with an impressive gastronomic offer and music, which is why TO3 usesa typical expressionfrom Southern Serbia for domestic tourists: "You can't put a price on a good time" ("Merak nemacenu"). On the other hand, TO3 wants to motivate transit and other foreign tourists to visit Niš as a city of rich and unusual historical sites from different time periods (prehistory, ancient and Ottoman periods, World War I and II), since by visiting monuments and reading stories about them, tourists can really get a sense of Europe's civilisational development. To accomplish this, TO3 used a slogan: "Niš-History of Europe in one city".

In regard to research into foreign tourists' motives for visiting the city as a tourist destination, TO1 stated that it performs research through regular surveys conducted at accommodation and hospitality facilities, as well as information centres, which allow TO1 to determine the visitors' preferences. As with the previous respondent, TO3 said that it also conducts surveys at its two information centres regularly. However, TO2 pointed out that in addition to direct conversations with visitors at information centres and at tourism fairs, surveys of visitors' opinions are carried out periodically by independent agencies. In addition to the previous respondent, TO3 mentioned it had its research conducted few years ago by the HORES association. In the context of that, TO2 stated:

> "In addition to talking with tourists who visit our information centres or attend tourism fairs in the country and abroad, we periodically conduct research on tourists' attitudes as to why they visit Novi Sad. It is done by an independent agency, which provides us with reasons why tourists visit Novi Sad."

The research results show that all three TOs pay attention to researching the motives of foreign tourists to visit a city as a tourist destination, with information centres being the main source of data. However, some TOs for this type of research also hire independent agencies in addition to research within the TOs themselves.

All three TOs cited the importance of social media research as a way to understand how the external environment perceives a tourist destination. For this purpose, TO1 uses specialized agencies for conducting research on the impressions and effectiveness of online campaigns, as well as impressions from the destination. To address this subject, TO3 stated the following:

> "Several sources of information are regularly checked, including Google reviews, blogger's texts, YouTube videos, and posts on various travel-related websites, such as

www.darktourism.com, which recommends its visitors to visit the Skull Tower (Ćele kula), the Second World War concentration camp and the Bubanj Memorial Park."

Both TO2 and TO3 conduct the research independently, while TO3 hires specialized agencies for this type of research. When asked about online tests that determine the focus of users' attention, such as landing page, TO1 and TO3 replied that they do not use such pages. However, TO1 reported that this type of page is in preparation, and TO2 reported that it is already in use.

The surveyed TOs evaluate the effectiveness of customised marketing and communication based on the analysis of a specific marketing campaign. As part of this process, TOs also analyse statistical data from various tourist markets to determine how effective the marketing strategy is. In addition, TOs also analyse data from digital communication channels, statistics on Instagram and Facebook, as well as Google Analytics and Google Search Console. The main factor of effectiveness, however, is the increase in tourists who choose to visit a destination. All three TOs provided the same answers regarding the assessment of the effectiveness of ad hoc marketing and communication.

Two additional questions followed in the fifth part of the survey. In the first question, TOs were asked whether cultural adaptation would result in the increase of visits to cities as tourist destinations. TO1 asserted that it believes it would have an effect, as tourists from the target countries would have more trust in those cities knowing their culture is respected. Similarly to TO1, TO2 believes it is possible that it would have an effect because other cultures might feel welcomed and respected in those destinations, which would contribute to a positive experience. TO3 also expressed a positive attitude toward the increasing visits to cities as tourist destinations as a result of cultural adaptation, since TO3 already tailors the promotion to domestic as well as foreign tourists, especially from the countries that generate the most tourists, such as Bulgaria. To address the above, TO1 stated the following:

"In our view, it would have an effect, since adapting a destination to a particular tourist market certainly involves cultural adaptation, a connection between the destination tourists visited and their culture, history, and customs, respect for religious, cultural, and other customs, holidays, etc. ... We believe that tourists feel safer in destinations where they know their culture is welcomed."

The second additional question examined whether surveyed TOs believe cultural factors influence the choice of TO's offer or product categories. In other words, would TO rather, for example, promote family city tours to Russian tourists, or a festival to German tourists? In this regard, TO1 stated the following:

"They have an impact, because culturally adapted tourist products are more likely to attract tourists. ... When we examine tourist markets, we can identify the dominant cultural factors and adjust tourist offer or product accordingly."

In order to engage effectively, TO2 said it is crucial to adapt the message to the target group and present content that is relevant to that group of tourists based on research or previous experience. As in the previous question, TO3 said it is already adjusting its product

Cross-cultural localization of Serbian tourist destinations' websites: cases of websites of tourism organizations of Belgrade, Novi Sad and Niš

13

offer to align with the culture of the target country that brings the largest number of tourists, such as Bulgaria. Table 2 shows the localisation activities of the surveyed TOs.

Table 2: Localisation activities of tourism organizations of cities

Localisation activities	TO1	TO2	TO3
Adapting tourism promotion through website and social networks	✓	✓	✓
Targeting foreign markets for online content creation	%	%	%
Selecting translations into foreign languages available on website to target foreign markets	%	%	%
The most important activities of adapting online content - website and social networks	✓	✓	✓
Adapting text and image	✓	✓	✓
Analysing foreign tourists' motives for visiting the city as a tourist destination	✓	✓	✓
Social media research, or how the external environment perceives the destination	✓	✓	✓
Conducting online tests that identify the focus of user's attention, e.g. landing page	✗	%	✗
Developing specific projects for adapting content to tourists from target foreign countries	%	%	✗
Assessing the effectiveness of adapted marketing and communication	✓	✓	✓
Assessing the effectiveness of ad hoc marketing and communication	✓	✓	✓
Notes:✓=achieved; %=partially achieved; ✗=not achieved			

Source: Authors' research (2023)

Conclusion

According to the research objective, this paper provided insight into the state of website localisation practices and activities in three surveyed tourism organisations. According to the research findings, all three tourism organisations consider themselves to be localising their websites and social networks to cater to the needs of foreign target audience. Consequently, the text and images are adapted to the culture of the foreign target countries, while the translated texts are only provided in English on all three websites. They select target foreign markets based on the statistics of the RZS on arrivals and overnight stays, as well as on data collected in the information centres. While none of the tourism organisations surveyed has

branches abroad or websites designed for specific target foreign markets, one is considering hiring a marketing agency to handle the offer to certain target foreign markets. When it comes to examining the motives of foreign tourists to visit the city as a tourist destination, the main sources of data are information centres, and research carried out by tourism organisations themselves, as well as by independent research agencies. Likewise, social media research, or how the external environment perceives the destination, is conducted both internally and by specialised agencies. Generally, with the exception of one, the surveyed tourism organisations do not use landing pages, but instead develop special projects to localise content for tourists from foreign countries, with the exception of one that does not make such projects. The tourism organisations surveyed assess the effectiveness of adapted marketing and communication based on the analysis of statistical data from various foreign markets, as well as analysis of data from Instagram and Facebook, Google Analytics and Google Search Console. However, the main indicator of effectiveness is the increase in the number of tourists who decide to visit the destination. There is a general agreement among all three tourism organisations that cultural adaptation will increase visits to cities as tourist destinations.

In this review of localisation activities and practices in surveyed tourism organisations, it is clear that each of the three organisations is aware of the importance of cultural localisation and its advantages. However, the practices of cultural localisation on the websites and social networks of the surveyed tourism organisations appear to differ from the actual cultural localisation of websites and social networks. Would a translation into English suffice, or would complete cultural localisation have to be carried out at the expense of novelty? The answer to this question remains to be found in further research.

Multiple contributions have been made by this research. First, the research shows that surveyed tourism organisations are aware of the localisation process and engage in activities and practices related to localising their social media and website content. Second, the research confirms that localisation is a process, not a finished product, as mentioned before, a point also acknowledged by tourism organisations in the survey. Third, the research provides an overview of the current state of localisation activities and practices applied by the surveyed tourism organisations, which could be a starting managerial implication for other tourism organizations as well. Fourth, the study shows that localisation activities can be used to improve online content for foreign target audiences, since targeting localisation activities can reduce the risk of information overload (information confusion). Fifth, the question that arisesis whether tourism organisations' websites and social networks must be completely or partially congruent with foreign target culture. Sixth, this is the first research on the topic of cultural localization of websites and social media for tourist destinations in Serbia, specifically in the case of cities. It can serve as an introduction to further research, as well as a research framework for other researchers who wish to explore this and similar topics. This represents a direct contribution to both theory and practice in the field of cultural adaptation of tourist websites in Serbia and the international market.

This research also has certain limitations, primarily related to the sample, as only the tourism organizations of three cities, all from one category – cities as tourist destinations – participated in the study. Additionally, the research methodology, as only the survey method

Cross-cultural localization of Serbian tourist destinations' websites: cases of websites of tourism organizations of Belgrade, Novi Sad and Niš

15

was used, as well as the limited budget and time available for conducting the research, may have impacted the depth and breadth of the data collected.

Future research should include a larger share of tourism organizations from cities as well as from other categories. It should also consider other aspects of localization, such as costs and profitability, of both culturally adapted and non-adapted websites of domestic tourist destinations. Additionally, it should investigate how culturally adapted and non-adapted websites of tourist destinations affect destination visits and, consequently, economic effects, as well as whether cultural adaptation of tourist destination websites is justified in this regard. In this sense, it would be necessary to conduct longitudinal studies that track changes in the effects of cross-cultural localization over an extended period. Detailed analysis of successful examples of cross-culturally localized websites should be carried out to identify best practices that can serve as models for other tourism organizations. Research into how new technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning can assist in automatic localization and personalization of content for different cultural groups. Collaborate with experts in linguistics, anthropology, and communication to ensure comprehensive and accurate localization. Integrate knowledge from marketing, tourism, IT technologies, and cross-cultural communication to gain a complete picture of the impact of localization. Finally, compare localization strategies of domestic tourist destinations with those from other countries to identify global trends and improvement opportunities.

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Cross-cultural localization of Serbian tourist destinations'
websites: cases of websites of tourism organizations of
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17

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