

The Influence of Political Factors in Fashioning Destination Image

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INTRODUCTION

During the last two decades, Croatia has successfully repositioned its image from an unknown Yugoslav republic, victim of war and newly formed Balkan state, to an attractive tourism destination which has become a member of the European Union in 2013. Although in the public domain of some countries, especially countries in northern Europe or Arab countries, Croatia is still somewhat associated with the war and the legacy of former Yugoslavia, the perception of Croatia has substantially changed over the past two decades. The main argument of this chapter is that tourism promotion has been the major force helping Croatia to improve its image distorted by the unfavorable political condition and, at the same time, to dissociate its image from the image of

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other Yugoslav countries and to become recognizable as a unique, small, Central European and Mediterranean country. Recent promotional efforts of Croatian tourism, characterized by the slogans ‘Croatia – The Mediterranean as it once was’ and ‘Croatia – Full of life’, fueled by the increasing global demand for original, different and well-preserved places, have additionally strengthened the positioning of Croatia as an attractive Mediterranean and Central European tourism destination. However, apart from positioning itself as an attractive ‘sun and sea’ destination, other comparative advantages of Croatian tourism, such as its tourism offer in the continental parts of the country, rich cultural heritage and political stability in a politically unstable region of the Europe, remain insufficiently and poorly perceived by the international community. Tourism has undoubtedly had a significant influence on building the contemporary brand of Croatia as a country. However, Croatia still has to undertake additional efforts to position itself as a new member of the European Union as well as an important political and economic entity in this part of Europe. Therefore, this chapter will try to demonstrate how promotional activities, implemented by the Croatian Tourist Board, have improved unfavorable image of Croatia in the international community, caused by war and war-related sufferings and directed the attention to the natural beauties of Croatia, positioning Croatia as an attractive tourism destination, providing authentic and quality tourism experiences. Through the example of Croatia as a tourism destination, this chapter also examines the role that tourism promotion has played in the evolution of the Croatian national brand which influenced Croatia’s current image in the minds of different target markets. The focus of the chapter is not on every singular promotional activity, but on the sum of all effects resulting from multiple activities and the way these effects impact the brand awareness of Croatia. This chapter is structured as follows. In the introductory section, the chapter provides an overview of the specific situation faced by Croatia due to the unfortunate war events. This is followed by the discussion on how Croatia used natural beauties and tourism promotion in order to disassociate its image from the war events and from the image of the rest of ex-Yugoslav countries. Finally, the chapter presents research results about Croatia’s image in the region, European Union (EU) countries and GCC countries, providing evidence that the current image of Croatia in the international community is largely determined by the tourism promotion activities.

CHALLENGES OF CROATIA'S INTERNATIONAL POSITIONING AFTER THE BREAKUP OF YUGOSLAVIA AND CROATIA'S INDEPENDENCE

Croatia was a former Austro-Hungarian, and thus Roman Catholic, constituent member of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which was founded in 1943, during the Second World War. The Republic of Croatia (then called Socialist Republic of Croatia) was one of the six Yugoslav republics for nearly 50 years, until the 25th of June 1991, when Croatian Parliament adopted a Constitutional Decision on Independence and Sovereignty of the Republic of Croatia. The independent Republic of Croatia was established in rather unfavorable historical circumstances. The late 1980s and early 1990s period of the last century was marked by the collapse of communism in Eastern European countries, the disintegration of multinational Yugoslavia and the Serbian military aggression against Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, unlike other European socialist countries which, during the democratic changes of 1989, relatively easily shifted from socialist to capitalist economic and social system, Croatia has, through its struggle for independence, produced a number of specific characteristics which are even today important determinants of Croatia's image. It should also be emphasized that Croatia, alongside Slovenia, was one of the economically most developed countries among socialist countries of Eastern Europe (Vukadinović, 2000). Due to the fact that it relatively easily avoided direct war conflicts, Slovenia has succeeded admirably in shaking off the negative perceptions of being 'Balkan', mainly through successful promotion of branded export goods (Elan skis, Gorenje appliances, Laško Pivo beer and others), through well-funded tourism campaigns and through NATO and subsequent EU membership (Anholt, 2007). Contrary to Slovenia, instead of taking advantage of a good starting positions, Croatia was thrown in the vortex of war, which resulted in a large number of human casualties, material damage and huge military expenditures, and in the end, after the liberation of the territory, the process of rebuilding the homes and return of war refugees. Because of the problems caused by the war in the former Yugoslavia, Croatia was also faced with a poor international image. Although Croatians have a relatively long tradition as a nation, due to 70 years of living in two Yugoslav states (1918–41, 1945–90), and to strong Yugoslav propaganda dominated by Serbs, Croatia has been largely either unknown or associated with negative stereotypes. One of the most common was the one that propagated the

image of Croatia as a pro-fascist and undemocratic state in the international community. This was due to the fact that in period 1941–45, some parts of Croatia were governed by the quisling regime of the Independent State of Croatia, which was an active ally of Hitler's Germany and which often pursued discriminatory policy against ethnic minorities, such as Jews, Serbs, Roma and others. However, even though the Independent State of Croatia did not have the support among the majority of Croatian people, and even though most Croatians subsequently joined the anti-fascist movement, this fact remained a basis for deliberate and malicious propagation of negative stereotypes about Croatia in the international community during the communist regime (Sanader, 2000). The negative stereotypes tied to the Croatia and consequent negative image of Croatia in the international community is still partially present, and Croatia has not completely recovered from this negative propaganda to this day. Besides, the communist regimes were actively involved in the altering or removing the national identities in many other post-communist and transition countries because strong and internationally recognizable identities were considered to be major threats to the unitary political systems. This was also true for Croatia. According to Anholt (2007, p. 118), 'one of the most damaging effects of Communism was the way in which it destroyed the national identity and the nation brands of the countries. By stopping the export of their national products and by preventing people from travelling abroad, and in many other ways, the Communist regime effectively deleted the old, distinctive European nation brands'. For example, regardless of the fact that the city of Dubrovnik was most notable brand image (Hall, 2002), even tourists who vacationed for years in Dubrovnik associated this city not with Croatia but only with Yugoslavia. The importance of such an iconic landmarks for development of national brand is additionally stressed by Clancy (2011, p. 294), who argued that 'outsiders frequently know nations largely through constructs experienced by tourism, thus we may not know much about Croatia but we might likely construct the image of Croatia through the knowledge of the beauty of the Dalmatian coast and the Old City of Dubrovnik'. This is additionally confirmed by the fact that the former Yugoslavia had a relatively positive image in the international community and was already developing a recognizable country brand, which was largely based on tourism and the natural beauties of Croatia. Therefore, it could be ironically argued that, during Yugoslav era, the most important attributes of Croatian national identity were largely used with the purpose of deconstructing that very identity.

On the other hand, the positive image that Yugoslavia enjoyed in the international community played an important role in covering the undemocratic nature of the political regime in the former Yugoslavia and consequently blurred the insights of the international community into the causes of disintegration of Yugoslavia and eventual causes of inevitable war (Miličević, Skoko & Krešić, 2012). Because the ex-Yugoslavia was the founder and an important member of the Non-Aligned Movement, and because it developed a special Yugoslav model of socialist system, western countries perceived it, not only as the bridge between East and West but also as a bridge between North and South. In this context, it is also important to recall the role that the lifetime president of Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito, played in the international community. In his decades in power, as one of the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement, he played an active role in international politics and with his specific socialist system—the so-called socialism with a human face—gained many supporters and had a very positive image in the western countries which was, however, substantially different from reality (Sanader, 2000). In addition to the quite positive image that Yugoslavia enjoyed among western intellectuals, the political and media establishment, the long-term Serbian propaganda aimed against Croatia and Croats must also not be ignored. This propaganda left a substantial mark on international public opinion and prepared the ground for the negative attitude of the international community regarding Croatia's secession from Yugoslavia (Miličević et al., 2012).

So in the early 1990s, as a new sovereign state on the map of Europe, Croatia faced two major challenges. Similar to many other transitional countries, Croatia suffered from an image forged during an earlier and very different political era, which constantly obstructed its political, economic, cultural and social aspirations (Anholt, 2007). Therefore, in a relatively short period of time, it had to position itself on the international political stage and win the favor of the international community while at the same time defending its territory in an imposed war. In such circumstances, it is extremely difficult to create recognizability with the European public and take care about its image. The outbreak of the war drew global attention, and Croatia was largely perceived as a victim of aggression. However, at the same time, Croatia was faced with a multitude of misinformation, prejudices, stereotypes and disorientation, which further complicated understanding of the situation in the former Yugoslavia, as well as the relationships between individual nations and the former republics. Thanks to the decision by citizens in a referendum on Croatia's independence

(an overwhelming 94.2 per cent of Croatian citizens supported leaving the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia), the presenting of the truth about the events in the former Yugoslavia and strong lobbying activities, Croatia managed to secure international recognition from the majority of European countries in January 1992. Subsequently, international communication was somewhat facilitated for Croatian government institutions. Due to a better visibility in the international community, Croatia was able to begin the process of disassociation of its image from the rest of its surroundings, especially from the former Yugoslav countries.

In this period, the war associations were still creating a very negative context of Croatian image. It took a lot of political and diplomatic efforts to convince the international community that Croatia's right to self-determination and independence as well as the necessity for international recognition of Croatia was grounded from the historical and ethical standpoint but also from the standpoint of international law (Sanader, 2000). Since the interrelationship between national identity and tourism branding has been commonly discussed in the tourism research literature (Hall, 2002; Huang & Santos, 2011), it is not surprising that international recognition and definition of Croatia in regard to other nations was the first and foremost prerequisite of international branding of Croatia. Furthermore, additional efforts were needed in order to win the media war and to eliminate prejudices against Croatia and to place objective information which would position the newly founded country on the political map of Europe. The Croatian government realized that, in order to make a perceptual separation of Croatia from other Balkan countries, it was very important to provide the international community with new and up-to-date information about Croatia, information not connected with war and the suffering of the Croatian people. Tourism provided huge potential for this, since Croatia has a very indented coastline and, unlike other Yugoslav republics, had a long tourism history, first as a part of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and later as a part of Yugoslavia.

Under these circumstances, it was vital, following the cessation of conflict, that Croatia should establish a national tourism marketing policy which, closely allied to national image rebuilding, would, as a brand, convey a distinct image to (Hall, 2004):

- Differentiate clearly the country from its neighbors;
- Reassure former markets that quality and value had been restored;
- Secure long-term competitive advantage through the country's major tourism attributes.

In order to emphasize its differentiation compared to other former Yugoslav republics, Croatia began its strong international tourism promotion even while the Homeland War was going on in 1994. The emphasis was on its natural beauty, the Adriatic Sea with its thousand islands and its rich cultural and historical heritage, as well as long tourist tradition, by which its uniqueness and advantages in relation to its neighbors were articulated. In this manner the attention was diverted from the war which, for the most part, awakens negative associations, regardless of compassion. Upon the end of the Homeland War, with its natural advantages and cultural wealth, Croatia invested additional efforts in tourism promotion and development of tourism, which positioned it as one of the leading tourism destinations in the Mediterranean.

Today, Croatia has successfully repositioned its image from Yugoslav country to an attractive Mediterranean tourism destination. Although Croatia is still associated with the war, former Yugoslavia and the Balkan region, this perception has substantially changed over the past two decades (Miličević et al., 2012). The Republic of Croatia became a member of the European Union on 1 July 2013, after years of negotiations, during which it had to meet criteria that were not required by any previous member. On this road, it had to shatter many stereotypes that had existed in certain European centers of power toward countries from the Balkans. However, despite numerous reforms, raising democratic standards and political and economic development, these efforts were practically unnoticed among citizens of the old EU member states. In countries of the EU, Croatia is primarily perceived as an attractive tourism destination. In addition to being familiar with Croatia's unique natural features, one segment of the European public still associates Croatia with the war and the legacy of the former Yugoslavia. The reason for such a 'unilateral' image of Croatia can be sought in the fact that, for two decades, Croatia strategically and continuously carried out tourism promotion and was intensively working on strengthening its tourism image. At the same time, it has ignored promotion of other attributes except for sporadic projects such as promotion of the culture, the economy and sporting achievements. Instead of Croatia presenting itself to its European neighbors in a strategic, creative and pragmatic manner, highlighting the strengths and potentials by which it could enrich the EU, the communication of Croatian political institutions with the world (with the exception of a few successful projects in the area of culture, as was the Croatian festival in France—'Croatie, la voici') was largely reactive and bureaucratic. In fact, due to the lack of pro-activity in relation

to the media and international publics, on the eve of Croatia's accession there appeared a number of critical media reports on Croatia's unpreparedness for the EU.

NATURAL BEAUTIES AS A COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE OF CROATIAN TOURISM

Croatia represents a meeting point of the Mediterranean and Central Europe, the Alps and the Pannonian Plain. Its relatively small area is distinguished by a marked diversity of nature, landscape, traditions and cultures. Therefore, two biggest comparative advantages of Croatia in the international positioning are its preserved natural diversity and natural beauty and a rich and preserved cultural and historical heritage. However, Croatian cultural and artistic heritage was quite unknown to Europe and the world in the 1990s. Even though Croatia is a relatively small country, it has an abundance of monuments, which are integral parts of European artistic achievements, presenting the most prominent extension of Western European culture toward the south-east. Within this context, Croatia is unique in Europe because no less than four cultural circles meet in its territory: the West and the East and the northern, Central European and the southern Mediterranean circle. It has a large number of preserved cities of ancient or medieval origin, and every fairly large city has its individual quality reflecting a specific cultural and architectural period. Croatian cultural abundance permanently testifies to Croatia's connection to key European cultural epochs. Six monuments on the UNESCO World Heritage List (UNESCO, 2016) are particularly distinguished: the intact land division of the ancient Greek plain in Stari Grad on the island of Hvar, the urban core of ancient Split with the palace built by the Roman emperor Diocletian, the early Christian Euphrasian Basilica in Poreč, the Romanesque core of the city of Trogir, the early Renaissance Cathedral of Saint James in Šibenik and Renaissance Dubrovnik surrounded by the striking preserved walls. Croatia is also a European record-holder in non-material heritage under the protection by UNESCO¹.

Extending across 1.3 per cent of the EU territory, Croatia is not a large country (56.6 thousands km²), but it is one of the most environmentally preserved areas in Europe (Miroslav Krleža Institute of Lexicography, 2016). Its 1,777 km of the Adriatic coast (6,278 km with island coastline) represent one of the most distinctive and indented coasts in the world (Miroslav Krleža Institute of Lexicography, 2016) with 1,244 islands and

islets (Croatian Tourist Board, 2016). It has an exceptionally clean and clear sea, with clarity for 56 m in some places (Miroslav Krleža Institute of Lexicography, 2016). According to the Environmental Performance Index (2016), it is considered to be among the cleanest countries in the Mediterranean and the 15th cleanest in the world. Croatia is among top EU countries with the largest supply of fresh water resources per inhabitant (Eurostat, 2016). In terms of biodiversity, it belongs to the top countries in Europe, and in environmental terms, it is one of the most preserved European countries. The most valuable parts of the natural heritage of Croatia are protected through 409 different protected areas with the total area of 7,547 km² (8.5 per cent of the area of Croatia). Among the protected areas, the most important ones are two strict nature reserves, eight national parks and eleven nature parks. Four national parks are located in mountain areas (Risnjak, Paklenica, Sjeverni Velebit and Plitvice Lakes) and four in coastal or maritime areas (Kornati, Mljet, Brijuni and Krka) (State Institute for Nature Protection, 2016).

It is indeed difficult to find such natural and cultural diversity in such a small area, as is the case in Croatia. It is simultaneously a Mediterranean and Central European country, mountain and flat country and littoral and continental country. Croatia boasts an indented afforested coast with a multitude of islands just like in southern seas, green coastal grazing lands with drystone walls reminding one of Ireland. Mountain parts are covered with spacious woodlands just like in Scandinavia, romantic lakes, fast rivers and picturesque mountain spaces just like in the Alps, but also brutal karst bare rocky areas with deep passes and canyons such as those in western parts of North America. In wide plains of lowland Croatia, there are spacious preserved swamps which otherwise can only be found in the extreme east of Europe in Russia or Ukraine, while gentle hills are adorned with vineyards and medieval castles and fortifications such as those found in Germany or Austria.

Dalmatia spreads along the Adriatic coast, from the southern slopes of the Velebit massif and Zadar in the north to Dubrovnik and to the Prevlaka in the most southern part of Croatia. The second largest Croatian city, Split, is its regional center. The western part of the country, Istria, as the largest peninsula in the Adriatic Sea, is also a separate historical region which lies against the Croatian Littoral and Rijeka, the biggest Croatian harbor. As a result of its numerous islands and islets, Croatian coast is the third longest in the Mediterranean, behind Greek and Italian coasts. In north-east, Slavonia spreads over the lowland part of Croatia, between

the rivers of Drava, Sava and the Danube, and its largest cities are Osijek, Slavonski Brod and Vukovar. In the wider region around Zagreb, the largest cities are Varaždin, Karlovac, Sisak and Bjelovar. The Littoral (Adriatic) and lowland (Pannonian) Croatia are separated by the mountain and karst area of Gorski Kotar and Lika, whose relief only in some places exceeds 1,900 m above sea level.

In brief, thanks to its abundance, diversity and the preserved condition of nature, Croatia has huge potentials for the future. Skoko and Kovačić (2009) convincingly argue that it is extremely important that it expands its protected areas as soon as possible, or in other words, to put as larger part of its territory as possible under protection. By doing this, it will be possible to preserve them for the future from devastation, because only such natural preconditions enable Croatia to develop and present itself as an oasis of tranquility and rest. In this sense, they advocate clean industries, the production of healthy food, innovative program of rest and leisure and strengthening of cultural and health tourism.

TOURISM PROMOTION AS A CROATIA'S TOOL FOR ACHIEVING INTERNATIONAL IMAGE

The need for destinations to promote a differentiated tourism product is more critical than ever, since today's leading destinations offer superb accommodation and attractions, high quality services and facilities and almost every country as a destination claims unique culture and heritage (Morgan & Pritchard, 2005). Consequently, the marketing of places has become an important managerial activity and, in some cases, the generator of local wealth (Kotler, Haider & Rein, 1993). Although many tourism companies or destinations recognize the importance of integration of marketing communications aimed at strengthening the strategic position of the destination image and its market value, effective implementation of marketing activities remains a great organizational challenge (Magzan & Miličević, 2012). According to Morgan and Pritchard (2005), the battle for customers in tomorrow's destination marketplace will be fought over experiences promised, and this is where place promotion moves into the territory of destination brand management whose outcome is destination image.

Bearing in mind all of the aforementioned Croatia's comparative advantages, it seems only logical for Croatia to use them in its international tourism promotion, which was launched in 1992 under the slogan

'Croatia – a small country for a great vacation'. In that time, the public was presented with the Croatian tourism promotional strategy, and, in collaboration with the PR agency McCann Erickson, a series of promotional posters were printed along with the Croatian image booklet in 12 different languages in the press run of 700,000 copies. It was an edition which presented Croatia as an attractive 'old' tourism destination, which 'reveals itself' to the world again. During 1993 and 1994, Croatia was portrayed in two series of tourism posters, and 1994 saw the publication of the promotional booklet *The Thousand Islands of the Croatian Adriatic* and *Zagreb, the heart of Croatia – the new European Metropolis*. The motifs widely included Croatian tourism sites, an inventory of Croatian tourism places was created, and they were linked to Croatia in a red and black graphism (Skoko, 2004). According to Anholt (2007), tourism is, in most cases, the most important and most powerful of the nation's six 'booster rockets' (brands, policy, investment, culture, people, tourism). The rationale behind this line of thought is that tourism offers the opportunity to brand the country directly.

In addition to this, the Croatian Tourist Board (the umbrella organization in charge of the tourism promotion of the country) organized the advertising of Croatia as a tourism brand in leading world mass media. Within public relations, study trips of foreign journalists to Croatia were organized, along with participation in leading tourist fairs worldwide. Over these years, the Croatian tourism promotion was the only organized and systematic Croatian international communication. It was also the most efficient mode of image management, as other modes (public diplomacy, cultural promotion, etc.) were quite insufficient. Therefore, more often than not, the Croatian leaders in international relations relied on the achievements of the tourism promotion, in order to present Croatia as a likable and nice country, hit by an unwanted war and which has done its best in order to return to a normal life.

With a continued tourism promotion, Croatia succeeded to provide the world with a sufficient amount of information on its advantages and particularities, keeping its distance from the rest of the region and creating a long-term recognizability. In this way, it started to be perceived as an exceptionally attractive country with a great tourism potential, which is evident from the constant growth of tourism demand. This helped in suppressing negative associations with the war and accompanying developments, associated with Croatia in the early 1990s.

In 2002 the Croatian Tourist Board appointed the consulting agency THR from Spain, to develop a strategic marketing plan for the promotion of Croatian tourism around the world, based on which a new wave of tourism promotion was launched under the slogan ‘The Mediterranean as it once was’. In this way, Croatia sought to position itself geographically as a Mediterranean tourism destination and to present itself as a culturally authentic destination. Croatia promoted itself simultaneously as a country brand, and then its tourism regions were separately presented as brands Istria, Kvarner and the Zadar, Split, Šibenik and Dubrovnik areas. Regrettably, the continental part of the country was neglected. These areas have substantial tourism potential, but awareness of them has increased only recently. Although the slogan ‘Croatia – the world of diversity’ was also launched with the objective to present Croatia in its entire diversity, it was used only sporadically. However, the focus of the promotion over the last 20 years or so was on the Adriatic Sea, coast and islands.

Strategic Marketing Plan of Croatian Tourism 2010–14 emphasized a new image of a destination based on the experience and emotions. The Plan suggested the communication of simple elements of the identity which can be offered to the market—preserved coast, unique system of islands, intact hinterland and rich cultural heritage. The Plan defined the basic positioning of the brand of Croatia as a Mediterranean country which has preserved the heritage of its ancestors. Thus, in spite of the efforts to bring the continental Croatian landscapes closer to the world, the Mediterranean heritage was still a foundation of the perception of the brand. The latest communication concept defined by the Croatian Tourist Board resulted with the new slogan for Croatian tourism promotion ‘Croatia – Full of life’. The new slogan is a product of marketing company BBDO and its subsidiaries from Croatia, Great Britain and Spain. It was developed in accordance with the *Croatian Tourism Development Strategy to 2020* (Ministry of Tourism, 2013). Tourism development strategy suggested implementation of rebranding activities in order to attract new target markets that are looking for excitement and product diversification.

CROATIA’S IMAGE IN THE REGION, EU COUNTRIES AND GCC COUNTRIES

In order to critically examine the previously presented arguments regarding the effects of political factors and tourism promotion on fashioning the image of Croatia in the international community, the results of three

separate public opinion studies, conducted in the countries of the former Yugoslavia, in the EU countries and the GCC countries, are presented.

The public opinion study from 2008, conducted in the countries of the former Yugoslavia, was carried out approximately 10 years after the end of war-related events. The research was conducted by one of the authors of this paper (Skoko, 2010) as a part of his PhD thesis. Although it was expected that the image of Croatia would still be quite burdened with the war, it was surprising to see that major associations connected with Croatia, in all former Yugoslav countries, were related to the sea and tourism, even in Serbia which was in open war with Croatia. The research was conducted on a sample of 5,087 respondents, whereby 1,000 respondents came from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1,025 from Montenegro, 1,019 from Macedonia, 1,011 from Slovenia and 1,032 from Serbia.

The results showed that, in the regional context, Croatia is most recognizable by the key association of coastal landscape and tourism (Table 5.1). Sea and tourism were the most important features associated with Croatia for 74 per cent of respondents from Macedonia, 71 per cent from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 67 per cent from Slovenia, 38 per cent from Serbia and 37 per cent from Montenegro. However, among respondents

Table 5.1 First associations with Croatia among respondents from former Yugoslav countries (%)^a

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Bosnia and Herzegovina</i>	<i>Montenegro</i>	<i>Macedonia</i>	<i>Slovenia</i>	<i>Serbia</i>
Sea and tourism	57	71	37	74	67	38
War	16	9	24	5	6	35
Sport achievements	6	4	9	9	6	3
Ustaše ^a	5	5	8	3	2	9
None of the above	4	3	6	0	8	4
Culture	3	3	7	3	3	1
Croatian products	3	2	4	3	1	3
Don't know	3	1	5	2	3	5
European Union	1	2	1	1	2	0
Partisans	1	1	1	0	1	1

Source: Adopted from Skoko (2010)

^aFascist collaborators in Croatia during WWII

from Serbia, the associations connected to the war were right next to the positive association to sea and tourism (35 per cent of respondents).

Additional analyses showed that there was no statistically significant difference between respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia, Slovenia and Serbia with regard to what were their most frequent associations to Croatia. Therefore, it could be concluded that in a relatively short period of time, Croatia was able to build its own distinctive and desirable image in the region and with positive associations of sea and tourism to completely overshadow associations on the effects and consequences of the war.

Similar results were obtained from the survey conducted with the goal of gaining deeper insights into the image of Croatia as a tourism destination in six European countries among population who has never travelled to Croatia but made at least one international trip over the last 5 years². The research was conducted in 2011 by the Institute for Tourism, Zagreb, on the sample of 2,574 respondents, whereby 502 respondents were from Germany, 508 from the UK, 250 from Sweden, 297 from Denmark, 503 from Poland and 514 from Spain.

The following are the internal data of the Institute for Tourism which show that, in those six countries, the dominant image of Croatia was mostly formed through the activities related to the promotion of Croatian tourism (Table 5.2). Respondents perceive Croatia as a coastal country, a country with green and unspoiled nature and a tourism country. At the same time, there are also organic attributes of the image arising from the war and social and political relations from the past, particularly common among older respondents, which lead to the conclusion that this is a case of a previously formed image.

As in the case of the survey in former Yugoslav countries (Skoko, 2010), the findings of this research suggest that Croatia was able to build a positive image thanks to the continuous tourism promotion and positive association with the sea, natural beauty and cultural sites, which are the result of investment in tourism promotion and strengthening of Croatian tourism.

Almost similar results were obtained during the last public opinion study about image of Croatia in the GCC countries. Study was conducted in 2013 in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates where the GCC citizens were questioned about their trip characteristics and the image of Croatia (Michael, Miličević & Krešić, 2014). The study was conducted on a sample of 279 respondents. The majority of respondents were Emirati (63 per

Table 5.2 First associations with Croatia in six European countries (%)^a

<i>Elements</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Germany</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>Sweden</i>	<i>Denmark</i>	<i>Poland</i>	<i>Spain</i>
Beautiful coastline, sea, islands	28	39	20	34	7	47	13
Beaches	19	23	10	17	10	27	22
Beautiful nature/ landscape, green landscape, mountains and forests, preserved environment	17	15	18	14	15	23	14
Tourist country, new tourist country, country for visiting	16	18	11	11	18	20	16
Warm, sun	15	15	7	24	16	29	3
War	14	12	21	10	30	5	13
History and culture, historic city centers	10	5	12	8	9	9	16

Source: Adopted from Institute for Tourism (2011)

Note: The sample of respondents who reported spontaneous reactions at the mention of Croatia

^aPossibility of multiple responses

cent) and Qatari (10 per cent). The others (27 per cent) were other GCC citizens and citizens from different countries residing in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates at that time.

Even though Croatia was not much promoted in the Arab countries, few associations connected with Croatia were mostly related to its beautiful nature, landscapes, sea, beaches and islands (Table 5.3). Since Croatia has not developed a recognizable national brand, high on the list were associations with other countries like Russia, Yugoslavia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania or even with entire continents like Africa or Europe.

From the findings of this research, it is evident that Croatia has built its image as a beautiful tourism destination, but it is also recognized by some other elements such as its national football team, history and culture and, unfortunately, by poverty and the war. The lack of branding activities on national level results in many unknown facts about Croatia, such as that Croatia is home country and birth place of Nikola Tesla, the country where the tie, as the most popular male accessory, was invented, the country where ballpoint pen was invented and so on. It is also less known fact

Table 5.3 First associations with Croatia among respondents from the GCC countries (%)

<i>Elements</i>	<i>Total GCC</i>
Beautiful nature/landscape	9
Sea, beaches, islands	8
Association on countries other than Croatia	8
Europe	8
Football team	5
History, culture and architecture	3
Poor, not safe	3
War	1
Note: multiple responses	

Source: Adopted from Michael et al. (2014)

in the international community that Croatia is a country rich in cultural and historical heritage with UNESCO-protected areas and non-material heritage. Croatia is a country rich in water and the country with 1244 islands. Besides the football players, Croatia has world top handball players, skiers, tennis players and water polo players. Finally, it can be concluded that Croatia is much more than attractive tourism destination, but unfortunately, as shown by the aforementioned studies, this has not been fully recognized by the international community mostly because of the absence of a clearly defined national umbrella brand.

CONCLUSION

Croatia is politically and, to a certain extent, economically stable country, currently claimed to be a potential leader of regional political stability³, and it is the second country from the former Yugoslavia, after Slovenia, who joined the EU. Still, Croatia is underutilizing the power of its image which is something that developed western countries have been using for decades as a powerful tool for achieving political, economic and other interests.

It can be argued that Croatia has done a lot in the last two decades on its international positioning, because it has transformed its image from a completely unknown country to one of the most attractive tourist destinations in Europe. In doing so Croatia has heavily used its natural attributes in order to dissociate itself from the rest of its surrounding, especially from the countries of the former Yugoslavia. However, since Croatia did

not simultaneously work on or manage other attributes of its identity, its current image in the world is predominantly determined by natural beauties, sea or, in other words, by tourism promotion. This is the reason why Croatia is, besides for its tourism offer, still a relatively unknown country in the world and some of its competitive advantages are fairly unknown and underutilized even in regional context. This is the main conclusion derived from the results of three surveys concerning the national image of Croatia in the international community presented in this paper. The research results suggest that Croatian national brand is still not sufficiently recognizable in the international community. Elements that are sufficiently recognizable are mostly elements promoted by tourism promotion activities.

In order to become more recognizable in the international community, Croatia must define its own brand and reach consensus about its own identity and vision of the future. In order to place its products on the foreign markets, to attract foreign investments and to gain respect in international relations, Croatia will have to build a strong and distinctive umbrella brand. In this umbrella brand, Croatian natural beauties, Adriatic Sea and tourism offer will certainly play an important role, but Croatia must make efforts to show to the rest of the world its other attributes or to show that it is not just a destination for pleasure but also a country of hard working people, creativity, science and technology and so on. In doing so, Croatia will have to use a more systematic and coordinated approach for building its identity and image, and it will have to combine individual efforts carried out by different government institutions, among which the Croatian Tourist Board will remain one of the most influential, but hopefully not the only one, architects of Croatian identity in the international community.

NOTES

1. UNESCO—the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization is a specialized agency of the United Nations.
2. Countries covered with the survey of the image of Croatia as a tourist destination were Germany, Great Britain, Sweden, Denmark, Poland and Spain.
3. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, during her visit to Zagreb on 31 October 2012, referred to Croatia as the ‘anchor’ of the region, a prosperous country which can be an example to others, and as having a terrific geographic location and an educated workforce.

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