

Interpreting ethnic and minority cultures for heritage tourism in Poland

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Objectives | The development of tourism in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 should be considered in the context of transition processes that created new conditions for mobility and returned the region to the world map of tourist destinations. On the one hand, we can talk about the structural dimension, including the transformation of institutions and entities responsible for the development of tourism in individual countries of the European Union and beyond, and on the other hand, about the specificity of the tourism market offer in the perspective of renegotiating the past (Banaszkiewicz & Owsianowska, 2022). In this project, we refer to the historical multiculturalism of the region, which was erased from the official public discourse in the post-war era. Of particular interest are the ways in which cultural minorities are represented in tourism practices and performances, which are the result of the revival of local and ethnic identities. What deserves special attention in this process is the so-called dissonant/difficult heritage, which includes the legacy of wars, the Holocaust and totalitarian times (Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996; Diekman & Smith, 2015; Owsianowska, 2018; Potz & Scheffler, 2023). The main goal of this study is to understand how elements of ethnic and minority cultures are incorporated into the tourism promotion of Central and Eastern European countries, on the example of southern and south-eastern regions of Poland.

Methodology | The theoretical context of qualitative research in the presented project is the anthropological perspective. The case studies included in the presentation discuss how Jewish heritage is being renegotiated, reactivated and restored in the memory of local communities. Examples are three destinations in the Lesser Poland Voivodeship: Kraków, Mszana Dolna and Dobczyce and two destinations in the Lublin Voivodeship: Lublin and Kazimierz Dolny. The first stage of the project was desk research, resulting in identification of themes and coding. Then field research in the above-mentioned locations were conducted and the methods include observation, participant observation, interviews with creators and managers of heritage tourism products. Finally, a multimodal discourse analysis of the collected material was undertaken, based on narratives of participants of festivals, workshops, performances and thematic trips.

Main results and contributions | The interpretation of cultural heritage, discussed in the proposal, relates to tourist activities leading to places or events for which the main motivation for the visit is the legacy of various ethnic and religious groups inhabiting the southern and south-eastern Poland before World War II. Heritage is defined not as specific resources, but as a dynamic relationship between the past and the present, with particular emphasis on the recipients of cultural heritage attractions and the narratives in which they talk about their experiences and which they share with others in a variety of media. The case studies included in the presentation discuss how Jewish heritage is renegotiated, reactivated, and restored in the memory of the local community, using the examples of destinations in Malopolska region (Kraków, Mszana Dolna, Dobczyce) and Lubelskie region (Lublin, Kazimierz Dolny). The results show that the involvement of the representatives of inhabitants is crucial in the commemorative practices and educational, cultural, recreational or similar performances.

Limitations | The study is based on chosen destinations and events in Poland; therefore one should consider the particular characteristics of the socio-cultural and political context. Moreover, this is a qualitative and interpretative research, conducted from an anthropological perspective; the study does not refer to quantitative data and methodologies.

Conclusions | The recipients of heritage are both visitors and residents, who often decide what elements of the past will be accepted, adapted, promoted, and made available to others. This relationship includes, of course, the role of the mediators of experiences, such as professional guides, local stakeholders and managers. However, the modern approach to the dissonant heritage interpretation attributes key importance to bottom-up initiatives and the involvement of the local community in the activities carried out which is evident in all cases presented in this project.

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