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ANCESTRAL AND DIASPORIC TOURISM: AN UNTAPPED POTENTIAL

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Abstract. Ancestral tourism is a rapidly-growing sector of the tourism industry with the current wave of interest in genealogy. This is a case study report examining the untapped potential for ancestral and diasporic tourism in digital place brand management. A diaspora was selected, the German diaspora of 1863 – 1900, and a major migration route was identified (Baden-Wurttemberg, to Central Poland, to Western Ukraine, to South Russia). Tourism websites for those regions were identified through Google search and search engine optimization. Online content of the tourism websites was examined for appeal and target marketing to the German diasporic market, representing some 70 million people worldwide with key markets in the United States, Canada and South America. The majority of tourism websites along this migratory route are not tapping this particular heritage market (nor any other diasporic market with the exception of the Jewish diasporic market and, even then, minimally), nor are they addressing this market on their tourism websites in their digital footprint. These market needs are largely being met by private individuals and by small, privately-owned, custom tour and genealogical services-oriented sites. Further research could confirm this trend along other migratory routes, or with other diasporic markets, likely unveiling a market potential. Further research could also test for message effectiveness, and also the effects of technology on visits/repeat visits by descendants to their ancestral sites.
Keywords: ancestral tourism; diasporic tourism; heritage market; migratory routes.

This is a case study report examining the untapped potential for ancestral and diasporic tourism development through digital place brand management. It identifies a particular diasporic market, traces a major, historical migratory route, and then examines website content of tourism organizations marketing to key points along this route to determine the level of awareness of this target market by tourism managers and their efforts at addressing them.

Digital Place Brand Management

Place brand management is more than a slogan or logo: it is a mental construction, a set of perceptions in consumers' imaginations [5]. It is "the totality of the thoughts, feelings, associations and expectations that come to mind when a prospect or consumer is exposed to an entity's name, logo, products, services, events, or any design or symbol representing them" [16, p. 14]. It is one of the most powerful tools of brand communication with target audiences. Digital place branding and digital place brand management represent a development in the use of Internet and online branding for market distinction, market differentiation, and market development in response to competition and market viability [12]. Online branding can build awareness, attract and engage users, and create participation [7].

Scholars acknowledge that places cannot simply view their brands as unidimensional, appealing only to a single target public. For example, the city of Rome is successfully branded to Catholics as a place of religious pilgrimage, and it is also successfully branded to appeal to those interested in history, art and architecture. These two target markets do not necessarily overlap. Communication efforts directed at each would differ; and yet, both brands are authentic. Such a "one size fits all" approach with respect to place brand management, while common-place and perhaps easier, is limiting [18, p. 270]. Therefore, digital place brand managers, as a means toward market development, can expand their views of markets.

Cultural, Ancestral and Diasporic Tourism

Cultural tourism comprises a great degree of the literature on tourism. A sub-set of this field is ancestral tourism (sometimes referred to as heritage, roots, nostalgic, legacy, or genealogy tour-

ism). Ancestral tourism can be defined as "any visit which might be partly or wholly motivated by a need to connect or reconnect with an individual's ancestral past" [15, p. 13]. Ancestral tourism offers a differentiated market, providing an opportunity for digital place brand managers to remain competitive, to create unique selling propositions, and to develop additional points of attraction for mobility capital.

Researchers have concluded that perceived brand image influences emotional attachment to a city and that "city tourism marketers should focus on improving city brand images to enhance tourists' emotional attachment to the city to promote repeat visits among visitors" [8, p. 60]. Ancestral tourism provides such an opportunity to capitalize on consumer emotional attachment.

Ancestral tourism is reported as one of the fastest-growing segments of the heritage tourism market, riding upon a wave of interest by those interested in researching their cultural and ethnic roots [11]. It is filled with a globalized class of mobility-capital-rich consumers who have both the financial resources and the time required to engage in this kind of activity [6]. Genealogy is a significant part of Northern Ireland's tourism industry, [4] and research by Scotland's tourism office in 2012 revealed that of the estimated 50 million people with Scottish heritage worldwide, at least 20% intended to visit [17]. Millions are exposed to the possibility of travel to regions they consider ancestral homes (and often more than one ancestral home, due to migration routes) looking for rediscovery and personal development.

Diasporic tourism can be considered a specific form of ancestral tourism. 'Diaspora' implies a traumatic separation from one's current homeland, implying a certain unwillingness to leave, such as because of displacement, famine, political forces, economic forces, dispossession, or as extreme as exile [1]. Diasporas have involved mass migrations of almost every ethnicity and people group, including the Chinese, Jews, Southeast Asians, Croatians, the Dutch, and Irish, to name a few. Migrations of diasporic communities have occurred over the entire course of human history, touching almost every region of the world, so its impacts are far-reaching. In diasporic tourism, participants long to touch an imagined, or mythical, past (to the way things were) that may not exist today [13]. It is a theoretical abstraction that people embrace and act upon, by visiting the places in which their ancestors lived and travelled.

This case study examines the German diaspora of 1763–1900, and the potential of this specific market for digital place brand managers. It was chosen because of the researcher's familiarity with the subject as a descendant of German extraction.

The German Diaspora

The German diaspora is one of the lesser known diasporas of the world. In the 19th century alone, some five to six million Germans emigrated from their homeland, most never to return [2, p. 316]. It began with the mass emigration of Germans beginning approximately 1763 after the Seven Years' War with their lands devastated, to answer the call of Catherine the Great of Russia to journey eastwards to cultivate Russian lands. It wasn't until 1895 that any semblance of immigration and net increase in Germany's population was seen [2, p. 319]. While migration rates, patterns, and destinations varied during the long exodus, for the purposes of this study, one key migration route has been identified – the route from Baden-Württemberg in southwestern Germany, eastward to settlements in central Poland, and then farther eastward into areas of present-day Ukraine and deeper into Russia.

– Baden-Württemberg. The Württemberg region lies near the French border. Its emigration was so heavy by 1865, for example, that its net population decreased by up to 1.2 per cent, or 65,000 persons, annually [2, p. 317].

– Central/Eastern Poland. The history of Germans in Poland goes back millennia; however, large groups of ethnic Germans began to settle in central and eastern Poland in the 1800s. Within just a few generations, however, they found themselves uprooting and heading eastward once again, largely due to religious persecution and heavy taxation (See http://www.armin-zimmermann.eu/Bessarabien/Herkunft/Polen_englisch.html).

– Volhynian/Western Ukraine. This region is now the upper northwest corner of Ukraine, but then a part of the Russian Empire, and sometimes part of Poland. The first German settlement was

about 1813, with a strong influx from 1860-1875; northwest Ukraine was home to about 200,000 German colonists at its peak, dotting the landscape with thousands of villages and towns (See https://sites.ualberta.ca/~german/AlbertaHistory/Volhynians.htm).

– "Old South Russia" comprised mainly of the Volga, Bessarabia, Odessa and Black Sea regions.

The Volga. This is one of the earliest areas of settlement of Germans in Russia. It began to about 1765 at the calling of Catherine the Great and reached a peak of about 650,000 in 1914 (See https://sites.ualberta.ca/~german/AlbertaHistory/Volgagermans).

Bessarabia was colonized by Germans beginning in 1813 and by 1940 reached 95,000 at its peak (See https://sites.ualberta.ca/~german/AlbertaHistory/Bessarabians.htm).

Odessa and the Black Sea. Settlements can be dated from 1804-1856, and numbering about 100,000. (See http://depts.washington.edu/heritage/Organizations/Russia/Seattle%20AHSGR%20pamphlet.htm).

By 1915, there were approximately 2.3 million ethnic Germans in Russia [3, p. 138].

Further political and economic turmoil in Russia drove many of them out starting in Tsarist Russia in 1870s until the First World War, with many fleeing primarily to the United States, Canada and South America. They and their descendants are now known as the Germans from Russia. Their descendants have been said to number over a million; however, this seems on the conservative side, considering there were 2.3 million Germans in Russia in 1915 [10, p. 270]. The current market of all ethnic Germans (not just Germans from Russia), and their descendants living outside of Germany, now represents some 70 million around the world with key markets in US (50 million.), South America (17 million) and Canada (3.5 million).

Research Question and Study

With increased interested worldwide by people exploring their roots, and the large market of German diasporic tourists, are the regions named above (which represent points along only one popular migratory route) appealing online to this target market in their place branding to maximize market potential and mobilize capital from an audience already emotionally invested in the place brand? If so, how, what are their key messages? If not, are they appealing to other ancestral markets and what markets are they?

Method

This study was conducted through a content analysis of key tourism websites as selected via Google search and search engine optimization using the key words "custom tourism" and/or "genealogical tourism" in conjunction with each targeted region on the selected migration route (e.g. "Baden- Württemberg," "Ukraine," "Western Ukraine";" Poland"; "Russia"; "Black Sea"; "Volga"; Odessa; "Volhynia"; "Crimea"; "Bessarabia", etc.).

With the results of each search set, a variety of web sites were examined from "official" (sponsored by entities such as states, municipalities, regions, convention bureaus, tourist bureaus, etc.), to major tour operators, to minor tour operators or individuals, or sites that appeared high up in the order of search engine optimization (which would mimic the "hits" and search patterns that a descendant and potential tourist would encounter in his/her own Internet search and would likely influence his/her search).

Sites were examined for any content that would appeal to the ancestral or genealogical market, particularly the German diaspora. Such content could be references to the German diaspora, acknowledgement of this diasporic group, custom heritage tours, the mention of other heritage tour operators, the provision of sources and resources that would support diaspora tourists (such as archival sources), or any other information that would be of specific value or interest to an ancestral, genealogical researcher.

Results

A total of 66 websites were analyzed: Baden-Württemberg area, 14; central/eastern Poland, 12; Volhynia/Western Ukraine/South Russia, 40.

Results varied by region, but, generally, most official, large, and major tourism sites, both domestic and those offered through third parties such as Trip Advisor, or Tripoto, offered the typical tourism fare of museums, castles, theatres, shopping, nightlife, nature, city tours, major events, etc., but did not appeal to any diasporic market (with the exception of the Jewish diasporic market and that, only minimally). There were only a few exceptions.

Baden-Württemberg/Southwestern Germany

Fourteen websites were examined. One was EF Go Ahead Tours, a larger, traditional operator with standard tourism trips (175+) as well a well-developed heritage tour service, including one to Germany which comes with an ancestry DNA kit and a family history review with AncestryProGenealogists. (See https://www.goaheadtours.ca/qgm/german-ancestry-tour-family-emigration-origins). It has offices in US and Canada.

The German-American Connection, is a smaller tour operator (two principals) offering a variety of tours such as Christmas markets, beer tours, culinary tours, and including ancestry tours, with genealogical support services. It is a German-US partnership.

(See https://www.thegermanamericanconnection.com/TGAC_Home_Page.html).

Family Tree Tours specializes in tours and genealogy services to many areas, but with special focus on German-speaking countries. It has two principals, one in based in US and one in Germany, specializing in tours and ancestral support for those going to German-speaking countries. They regularly offer a Baden-Württemberg Tour, and a Heart of Germany Tour through its website. The site also includes a blog, newsletter, videos, events, books, and podcasts for German genealogists. This site is highly-targeted to German genealogical researchers and travelers (https://familytreetours.com/). This year, it will take any interested visitor, for example, to the village of Bötzingen, Germany in Baden-Württemberg, population about 5,400, which is hosting an Anniversary Tour and advertising for descendants of their emigrants to come in 2019 to celebrate this ancestral place's 1250th anniversary (https://familytreetours.com/2019-tours/baden-germany-heritage-tour-2019/). Anniversary celebrations will include the opening of the Exhibition "Emigration in the 19th Century." This event was not featured or cross-referenced on any other tourism site.

Journey to the Homeland is based in North Dakota, US, which is sponsored by the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection and regularly puts together trips for its members. (https://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/outreach/journey/index.html)

Central/Eastern Poland

Twelve websites were visited. In addition to the standard fare, some customized operators offered services for family reunions and also genealogical research, with most of those, however, targeted to ethnic Poles and only one targeted to those of any ethnic group with roots in Poland.

Poland Tourism had a site dedicated to the Jews of Poland with information on guided trips to the Jewish districts of Warsaw, Krakow and Lodz. The site reports that the theme of "Jewish Lodz," is the most frequently selected theme by tourists visiting the city since 2003 when the city began to highlight these offerings, but notes that Jewish-oriented heritage visits have increased in many other regions of Poland, also. The official site of the city of Warsaw, also featured Judaica. Intopoland offered multi-day themed tours (7– 11 days) that included Jewish history and culture in Poland. The Poland Tourism Organization also had tours related to the Jewish Diaspora.

A few sites targeted genealogists, specifically. Intopoland offered a genealogy tab on its site listing services (research in archives, translation, searches, family reunions, family tree assistance, private guided tours). This was a tab directly targeting anyone with roots in Poland, regardless of ethnic or religious background. This is an independent Polish tour operator, natives of Poland, specializing in tailor-made holidays. The Polish Tourism Organization offers a site called "Heritage Travel," but is focused mainly on those of Polish ancestry.

A Village Cluster is a combined website effort of multiple villages in the Lemko region in the Carpathian foothills of southeastern Poland, comprised of areas overlapping Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine. The site specifically targets descendants doing ancestral research and provides history, maps, resources, including links to other sites. (See http://www.avillagecluster.com/history.asp). They provide links to popular destinations of past emigres, (mostly US, where some 150,000 villagers from the region emigrated), specific points of destinations, information on church and civil records, photos, cultural info, and also invites researchers to submit their family stories. They say the following about an ancestral homeland visit, which conveys the potential of ancestral sites in digital brand management:

"The villages are well away from any kind of tourist destination. There are no castles, stately homes, theaters or art museums to lure the interested traveler. There are just the foothills, the forests, a church, tilting headstones, a few houses and grassy ruins. Yet, somehow, there is far, far more. Through this website, we invite you to join others who have found their way to the heart of their heritage, looking for vestiges of what had been, and perhaps will be. External, material aspects of a culture might fade, but not the heart. Not if we refuse to let it die, not if we keep the history and the memories alive." http://www.avillagecluster.com/homelandVisits.asp

Volhynia/Western Ukraine and "Old South Russia"

Forty sites were visited to cover this large region. In the Volhynia/Western Ukraine region, major tour operators did not offer heritage tours; however, there were private, specialized operators.

Volhynian Adventure Tours, a USA-Ukrainian partnership, specializing in trips to German villages in current Western Ukraine, previously known as the region of Volhynia (http://www.inthemidstofwolves.com/tours.html).

Dorosh Heritage Tours, based in Western Ukraine, specializes in tours to Western Ukraine and Eastern Poland (http://www.doroshheritagetours.com/genealogy-research).

Robert Schneider Tours LLC is a Canada-USA-Ukrainian partnership that specializes in tours of German villages in old South Russia and the Black Sea regions, including Bessarabia, Odessa and Nikolaev regions, as well as Crimea (http://russianroots.ca/tours_to_ukraine.html)

Volga German Tours, based in Oregon, USA offers a series of Tours to the German Colonies Along the Volga. It is a private company headed by an American and a Russian who lectures about cross-cultural communication University of Baden-Württemberg in Karlsruhe, Germany (https://volgagermantours.com/).

In Russia, the three major official sites that were visited, were focused on assisting the traveler in getting to Russia and provided tips on how to have a successful visit. Another 28 tour operator sites linked to the Association of tour Operators were examined. These were highly focused on family vacations, beach holidays and cruises, corporate and VIP trips, cruise operators, medical, wellness and spa trips, river cruises, museums and exhibits, sport tourism, event tourism, rail tours, fur fashion tours, cuisine tours. One offered a "cultural tour service", but there was no detailed information provided.

There were well-advertised tours to Bessarabia, Odessa, Crimea and Volga. Only one offered a German heritage tour (Tours to the German Colonies Along the Volga, a German-US partnership of two principals). Odessa offered a Jewish culture tour.

In summary, the German diasporic tourism market is being reached in two main ways: a) by a few major tour operators who specialize in heritage tours, or b) by smaller tour operators who are native to a region or have formed US or Canadian partnerships closer to its major market. Tours are generally privately escorted, group, or independent tours (you explore on your own and a custom itinerary based on your ancestral home-town, including appointments with hometown officials and archivists, and genealogical contacts). These operators and individuals often have websites or Facebook pages and communicate to their markets online, by word-of-mouth, through genealogical sites, social media, or genealogical conferences. Occasionally, there are also tour services offered by individuals who are native to the region.

Services are largely developing from the points of emigration (US and Canada) with few initiatives by ancestral homelands.

Services to satisfy the general ancestral tourism market can be found by consumers if one searches diligently enough; however, official and major tourism websites (which are more searchable on the web and more likely to get "hits" by tourists) are not meeting this market need nor are they directing, or connecting, ancestral tourists to ancestral tourism services, to any significant degree.

Discussion and Analysis

Considering the many diasporas which have occurred throughout time and the migratory nature of the human race, there is great potential for ancestral and diasporic tourism to the benefit of almost any market. Additionally, it opens tourism possibilities to almost any village, town, municipality or region, and without the "castles, stately homes, theaters or art museums to lure the interested traveler," (see quote above) since the attraction is the land, itself; a region's brand asset is simply its location and its history. One specific example is the village of Milpoš, Slovenia, an ancestral village with its own website and resources for ancestral visits (http://milpos.sk). Place brands can be uniquely managed and marketed according to an area's own history of ethnic migration. This unlocks the marketing potential of even the smallest of locations.

International relations and diplomacy

Place branding has been identified as carrying potential in the process of international relations [16]. Scholars like van Ham (2008) have identified the potential of using commercially-oriented processes, like place brand management, to wield what pioneer scholar of international relations, Joseph Nye, calls "soft power." Soft power is "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments" through the power of "the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies" [9, p. 6]. Such notions open possibilities for diplomacy and international relations within the arena of digital place brand management.

In pursuing this, however, place brand managers may find themselves identifying and marketing to groups and peoples unlike themselves in race, color or religion. There may even be historical tensions, which may or may not have dissipated with the ensuring generations. Or, tourists may identify with a particular sub-culture within a region, but not necessarily with the major culture, with the existing government or state, or with any particular dominant culture; for example, the Jews in Poland, Muslims in China, Palestinians in Israel, or Ukrainians in Canada. This leaves open the possibility for diplomacy and public relations on the part of brand managers in a move toward relationship-building, particularly through the sharing of culture or the use of cultural diplomacy in the process of ancestral tourism.

A United Nations report (2004) states that proper management of a region's cultural diversity can produce greater stability within a nation-state [14]. Ancestral tourism, thereby, has potential to play a diplomatic role toward cultural diversity, cultural inclusion, peace-keeping, state survival, enhanced reputations and improved brand asset management. Ancestral journeys to areas with difficult historical relations present an opportunity for opening or growing new markets, effecting diplomacy, and/or mobilizing additional untapped sources of capital for the destination.

What can digital place brand managers do?

Digital place brand managers can a) research the history of their own regions, b) trace migration patterns of various ethnic and cultural groups through their areas to identify potential target markets and publics worldwide, c) examine emigration patterns and identify areas of settlement with the largest market potential, d) engage in consumer research to determine the wants and needs of the targeted market with regard to ancestral tourism, e) build relationships with those targeted markets (through genealogical societies, perhaps by attending conferences and engaging in communication on social media genealogical sites), and f) build an infrastructure and connections within the city or region that can accommodate genealogical needs such as assistance with research, archives, translation, cultural and historical education, meaningful encounters with locals, excursions, and other authentic services.

Further research

Further research could examine other diasporic markets for trends in the digital footprint of tourism services. It could also test for message effectiveness, and also the effects of technology on visits/repeat visits to a region.

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