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Perception of Young-Adults on Ottoman Heritage and The Opportunities for Tourism Development

Mladen MICEVSKI¹, Biljana PETREVSKA²

¹Mitko Pendzukliski High School Kratovo, Tourism & Hospitality Sector, North Macedonia

e-mail: mladenmicevski@hotmail.co.uk

²Goce Delčev University - Štip, Faculty of Tourism and Business Logistics, North Macedonia

e-mail: biljana.petrevska@ugd.edu.mk

Abstract:

Aim: The study makes an in-depth analysis of created images and perceptions of young adults on cultural heritage dating from the Ottoman period. The aim is to identify students' general attitude on the opportunities to apply the Ottoman heritage for tourism development and include North Macedonia in the Ottoman cultural route.

Method: The research investigates the perception of students (age 18-28) on: (i) Personal association to Ottoman heritage (OH); (ii) Assessment of OH in North Macedonia; (iii) Specific perception about the OH; and (iv) Establishment of a cultural route of OH in North Macedonia. The analysis is based on an online survey of 172 students during January-February 2021. Statistical evaluation is performed by calculating descriptive statistics and nonparametric tests.

Findings: The findings indicate low awareness and interest about OH and not having a clear attitude regarding the actual condition of OH and giving support to the development of a cultural route based on OH in Europe (including North Macedonia).

Results And Suggestions: The study informs tourism policymakers about the young adults' perception and created images on cultural assets belonging to others, and how to manage them in the line of improving tourism development of North Macedonia.

Limitation: Several factors may serve as a starting point for future work, like a small sample size, a narrow focus of an investigation, and a small set of indicators.

Practical Implications (If Applicable): The findings may serve as a valuable starting point in creating tailor-made new strategic approaches that may boost modest cultural tourism development in the country.

Social Impacts (If Applicable):

Originality: The research is a rare attempt to screen and identify the perception of the young population on creating images of OH and its application in tourism development.

Keywords: *Tourism Development, Cultural Route, Ottoman Heritage*

1. Introduction

Ottoman Heritage (OH) refers to all tangible and intangible culture that has been left on the territories where the Ottoman Empire used to be widespread. It includes many buildings, art and architecture influences, gastronomy, language influences, customs, etc. OH nowadays is recognizable both in modern Turkey and outside its borders. Ottoman architectural works outside Turkey cover in time and space large geographical areas and extensive historical periods (Kanetaki, 2012), as the 500 years Ottoman occupation on Balkan Peninsula is assumed to be the longest time of political unity in the region (Cupcea, 2012). During this period, the Ottoman culture has influenced the local cultures and many of these influences are still visible. The same happened with the Arab countries, as Sultan Selim conquered Mamluk state, with its capital in Cairo (Watenpaugh, 2007). The members of the Imperial dynasty and the Ottoman officials not only built new monumental institutional complexes that renewed the profiles and functions of cities, but also remodeled and redefined the existing monuments, shrines, and streets (Watenpaugh, 2007).

During the beginning of the last century, many countries that were under Ottoman administration got independence and start to develop. Nowadays, contemporary international cultural influences are visible worldwide due to the process of globalization. Yet, the presence of OH is still undeniable. People are aware of its presence and use it for tourism purposes.

The natural and cultural resources are the main factors of the tourism industry development. Consequently, the OH is recognized as a motive for traveling to different destinations and mainly involves the cultural type of tourists.

Many destinations have developed tourism products based on the OH (e.g. Sarajevo in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Istanbul in Turkey, etc.). On the other hand, some destinations still have not used the complete potential of the OH they possess. Nestoroska et al., (2017) discuss that not all of the sampled OH sites in North Macedonia have an attractive location, but they all possess uniqueness, esthetic, architectural, historic, and educational value. They are all evocative sites related to many legends, myths, and stories, thus been completely suitable to be presented as tourism products and part of a tourist route. Alvarez and Korzay (2011) concluded that knowledge and awareness of individuals regarding cultural and heritage aspects of the destination are positively related to their perceptions regarding the destination. The issue of its perception is important since it indicates its future positive or negative acceptance for tourism purposes, both by tourist and tourism product creators. Furthermore, young adults' perception is crucial knowing that in the future they will be the potential creators and tourists.

To our knowledge, there are no studies on the OH perception of residents from North Macedonia. Some work is noted in the neighboring countries, referring to a different time in history. Bryce and Causevic (2019) argue for the existence of a longstanding (Western) European disinclination to accept the Ottoman cultural and heritage legacy in places stretching from Budapest to Thessaloniki as being conventional of Europe or indeed that even less precise construct, 'the West'. Šešić and Mijatović (2014) find in Serbia, as well as in other Balkan countries that throughout history used to be part of the Ottoman sphere, the Ottoman material heritage was destroyed to a large extent, as it was also considered the heritage of the "other" – the enemy. They, also refer to famous Ottoman bridges on the Balkan as symbol bearers of several cities in different ways for different groups of the population. Thus, many of these bridges are part of the "heritage which divides". Bibina (2011) argues that the OH stopped to be seen just as a remnant of a "shameful" period in national history, but as a historical legacy, part of our own Past, that should remain in memory.

This paper contributes to the current literature by giving additional information about the perception of the OH specifically in North Macedonia among young-adults, as potential future tourism policymakers.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Ottoman heritage for tourism purposes

The OH is closely related to the development of cultural tourism. Heritage and culture often appear as interlacing terms since heritage can be described as loading a historical value to the customs, culture, and traditions of a society and carrying and transmitting them from one generation to the other. Therefore, both terms are considered in close relationship with the tourism phenomenon, given that they constitute important attractors for tourists (Alvarez & Korzay, 2011).

There are limited studies that address the Ottoman Empire, including the OH sites, from a tourism perspective. Generally, the literature review utilizes two approaches. On the one hand, the OH is explored as a legacy of the Ottoman Empire, but only presenting the periods of the architectural buildings, and arguing their monumentality and functionality (Daskalov & Vezenkov, 2015; Gençer, 2014; Hartmuth, 2008; Kiel, 1990). The remains from the different stages of the Ottoman Empire form a solid ground for the creation of OH packaged tours (Petrevska et al., 2020). On the other hand, despite the growing interest in sightseeing heritage dating from the Ottoman period, empirical investigation of tourist practices is missing. There is a need to better understand the tours based on heritage sites that are successfully developed in practice.

Understanding the cultural heritage leads to authentic interpretation and increased cultural experience along with their preservation and promotion, which is strongly recommended in the International Cultural Tourism Charter (ICOMOS, 2002). Alp (2009) argues the perception of a comprehensive cultural heritage of the Ottoman period (14-20 century) in the Balkans noting it as a common heritage for all nations in the Balkans. Although not equivalent to the buildings in Bursa, Edirne, or Istanbul (Freely, 2011), the variety of remains is an important heritage and attracts many tourists. Davis (2013) explores the representation of the OH in Israel by elaborating the case of the Hammam al-Pasha as a tourist attraction. Luke (2013) elaborates the rehabilitation of the Islamic heritage in the Balkans by putting different shade that the preservation of cultural heritage projects demonstrates the symbolic power of cultural sovereignty. Lagos and Ntoumi (2014) concluded that there is an urgent need for the development of cultural tourism on the Chios island given that it has a unique cultural heritage and numerous great Ottoman monuments that can contribute towards it.

Many of the cultural products with strong synergic intensity in the Balkans, are already offered as thematical packaged tours devoted to Byzantine and Ottoman's Empire cultural heritage. Consequently, the Balkans, which are rich in cultural heritage, may offer a unique product associated with the common cultural heritage that has been created during its history.

2.2. Ottoman heritage in North Macedonia

Cultural and historical monuments have always attracted tourists. Five centuries of Ottoman oppression in North Macedonia has left deep traces as a real mixture of cultures and religions. Unlike the darkness of the medieval Byzantine time, the Ottoman Empire brought the erotic and narcotic scent of the Orient. Each historic period, particularly the Ottoman rule (1392–1912) left deep traces on tradition, mentality, language, and people's culture. The Ottoman culture was a new cultural wave in the Balkans and many cities still have remains of that culture. In this line, Cupcea (2012) thoroughly discusses that the OH as a legacy has political, cultural, social, and economic continuity within the Balkan countries, including Macedonia as well.

According to Todorova (as cited in Cupcea, 2012), the OH is only the gathered remains of the time of Ottoman subjugation of the Balkan Region. The Ottoman Empire with its rapid extension on the Balkans has allowed the expansion of Islamic architecture and art in its areas. Macedonia was not bypassed by the new stylistic flows. Examples are numerous, and the most significant ones are in Skopje and Bitola. Korunovski (2008) explains that during the period of the largest expansion of Islamic architecture in North Macedonia, in the 15-16th century, there were similarities with Christian architecture because of their interdependence, but also because of the participation of domestic masters in the building of mosques. This tradition was continued and intensified in the 18-19th century. Sacral and profane buildings like mosques, masjids, imarets, madrasas, dervish lodges, inns, caravanserai, residences, bridges, etc. were built in various cities like Skopje, Tetovo, Bitola, Strumica, Struga, etc. (Jahja, 2012).

The OH in North Macedonia is still visible as the remnants of that turbulent time are noticeable today in more than 150 different cultural relics dating from the Ottoman period that are dispersed over the whole territory of Macedonia (Petrevska et al., 2020). The Islamic monuments from this period represent the second largest group of monuments in Macedonia, as a composition of the cultural heritage of the country (Marinoski, 2012). According to the significance of the buildings, the extent of their preservation, and accessibility to the public, today there are only 33 significant OH sites in North Macedonia with specific features (Jahic, 2013; Korunovski, 2008; Marinoski, 2012; Pavlov & Petkova, 2008; UNESCO, 2008). Such presence of Ottoman cultural heritage stands as a great potential for creating a specific tourism product that may contribute to differentiation and diversification of cultural tourism supply in North Macedonia. This heritage is mostly concentrated in Skopje (13), Bitola (6), Tetovo (3), and Ohrid (3), and the rest is in Debar (2), Shtip (2), Struga (1), Kumanovo (1), Prilep (1) and Strumica (1) (Petrevska et al., 2020).

The protection and preservation of the OH in North Macedonia differs, but generally with good public accessibility. Namicev (2017) analyzed factors influencing the urban context of the city of Skopje and suggests that Ottoman hans need to have treatment for their protection to preserve the monumental properties, but it is necessary to constantly adjust the changes to the modern urban concept of the city. Petrevska et al., (2020) underline that Ottoman architecture and art are very visited cultural sites already being included in the OH routes as prearranged packaged tours.

3. Materials and Method

3.1. Research Aims and Questions

This study has two main research aims: (1) To find out the general perception and acceptance of young adults regarding the OH in the country; (2) To acquire knowledge about young adults' support for an Ottoman culture route including North Macedonia. These aims were achieved using primary data analysis and an extensive literature review. To preconceive the findings of this study, the following research questions were investigated:

Q1: What is the general perception of the OH as a part of the overall country's heritage?

Q2: What is the specific perception of the OH for tourism purposes?

Q3: Would young-adults like to see the OH as a part of a cultural route?

3.2. Data and Methods

This study is based mostly on quantitative research methods. Specifically, a survey has been conducted to obtain data regarding young adults' perception of Ottoman heritage and the opportunities for tourism development of North Macedonia. Data were collected online among 172 students from North Macedonia aged 18-28, between January-February 2021. Respondents

used different choices to judge the importance of each question, like a 5-point Likert scale (1=definitely yes, 5=definitely no), or a multiple options. The questionnaire was structured as follows:

Section 1: Personal association to the OH.

Section 2: Assessment of the OH in North Macedonia (choosing an option from a 5-point Likert scale).

Section 3: Specific perception on the OH.

Section 4: Establishment of a cultural route of OH in North Macedonia.

Section 5: General data of respondents.

Table 1 presents the demographic attributes of respondents according to seven questions (gender, age, nationality, religion, university, professional field, and level of studies).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics on general data ($\Sigma=172$)

Item	%	Item	%
Gender		Profesional field	
Male	53.5	Humanities	1.2
Female	46.5	Social Sciences	2.9
Average age 21 yrs		Business and administration	37.2
Nationality		Tourism	34.9
Macedonian	95.3	Natural Sciences	1.2
Serbian	1.2	Technical Sciences	8.7
Turkish	1.7	Other	14
Other (Roma, Vlachs, etc.)	1.7	Level of study	
Religion		First year	42.4
Christian	89	Second year	16.9
Muslim	3.5	Third year	25
Other	2.9	Forth year	15.1
Not religious	4.7	Master studies	0.6
University			
Goce Delčev-Štip	78.5		
Sts. Cyril and Methodius-Skopje	8.7		
St. Clement Ohridski-Bitola	11		
Other	1.7		

Source: Authors' calculations

As it is presented in Table 1, the survey was responded 53.5% by male, and 46.5% by female students. Most of the respondents are Macedonians (95.3%). Christianity is the religion declared by 89% of respondents, while about 11% are not religious, Muslims, or other religions. The majority of respondents study Business and administration (37.2%) and Tourism (34.9%), followed by Technical Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities, Natural Sciences and Other. The level of the study is Undergraduate (prevails the first year of academic studies), and only 0,6% are Master students. 78.5% of the students are enrolled in the "Goce Delčev" University in Štip, followed by the "St. Clement Ohridski" University in Bitola and "Sts. Cyril and Methodius" University in Skopje.

Statistical evaluation was performed in the statistical package SPSS 24.0 by calculating the frequency distribution, a percentage share, and an exploratory factor analysis (EFA). In this manner:

Three questions were analyzed by a frequency distribution. These questions refer to the general association to the Ottoman legacy in North Macedonia; the type of heritage that students mostly

associate with the Ottoman period; and the possible prerequisites for the development of a cultural route of the OH present in North Macedonia.

The percentage share was used for three questions: the perception of two gastronomic products as an OH – the coffee and the sarma, and the recognition of sites or cultural resources in the country that are important examples of OH.

Ten questions were analyzed with the EFA. These questions are related to the contribution of the OH, the possible obstacles for a Cultural route of OH development, specific perception of two gastronomic products, and the general OH potential in North Macedonia.

4. Results, Findings and Discussion

The results obtained by the research regarding the personal association to OH indicated how students see the Ottoman legacy in North Macedonia (legacy of terror, oriental culture, war, specific social order, multicultural/multiethnic identity, or legacy of Islamic religion). The results showed that young adults associate with the Ottoman legacy in North Macedonia as Legacy of multicultural/multiethnic identity (76 students) and Legacy of Oriental culture (70 students). Those are the most frequent answer regarding the general association to the Ottoman legacy. The research revealed that students in North Macedonia perceive the OH as a cultural legacy more than a legacy with negative connotations, as terror or war. This gives us the notion that it is not recognized as a “harmful” legacy, despite the possible negative developments in the period they date back from.

The results also revealed that the most common association of young-adults regarding the specific type of heritage dating from the Ottoman period is the architectural heritage, meaning that the students are aware mostly of different buildings dating from the specific time. This includes fortresses, mosques, oriental houses, and bridges. These heritage examples refer to tangible heritage. Most respondents (over 70%) perceive this type of heritage as one of those that are the most associated with. Less than a third of the respondents recognized memorial places, ethnographic heritage in museums, gastronomy, intangible heritage religion, and religious practices as a typical OH example. Most of the last-mentioned heritage refers to intangible heritage. Hence, students are more likely to recognize tangible than intangible OH.

Young-adults also recognized specific examples of OH that are still present in the country’s culture. Both given examples refer to gastronomic products, i.e., sarma and coffee are fully recognized as OH. The coffee is recognized as an OH by 95.3% of the students, and 90.1% perceived the sarma as a traditional gastronomic dish to be an OH. An only extremely small number of respondents did not relate the coffee and the sarma as an OH (2.9% and 8.7% respectively). This finding is strongly supported with the EFA results (Table 2). Namely, the “Specific perception” as a factor of perception, was found to have the strongest influence among students when creating an overall perception of the OH. The specific dish as sarma, alongside the famous “Turkish coffee”, which is widely accepted by the youth is a strong influencer when imaging the OH. This indicates that although young-adults do not know the cultural resources that are important examples of OH, they are fully acquainted with some gastronomic specific dishes and drinks. It ensures that the Ottoman dishes (as sarma), and the everyday consumption of the coffee, are extremely important than any other heritage assets, and the most valuable intangible asset.

Table 2: Factors of young-adults' perception

No	Item	Loading	Mean (interpretation)
F1	Ottoman heritage contribution	0.571	
3	Do you regard the Ottoman cultural heritage as a part of the common heritage in your country?	0.601	2 (rather yes)
6	Do you think that such heritage sites are valuable and/or interesting for visitation in your country?	0.625	2 (rather yes)
11	Is such heritage proper for tourist presentation and commercial use?	0.720	2 (yes, to some extent)
15	What is the condition of OH in North Macedonia?	0.076	3 (I am not sure)
18	Would you personally support the development of a cultural route based on OH in Europe (including North Macedonia)?	0.782	3 (Undecided)
F2	Cultural route obstacle	0.644	
17	Are there any potential obstacles to the development of the Cultural route of OH in your country?	0.644	3 (Undecided)
F3	Specific perception	0.792	
a	Do you perceive the coffee as an OH?	0.784	1 (yes)
b	Do you perceive the traditional gastronomic dish sarma as an OH?	0.800	1 (yes)
F4	Ottoman heritage potential	0.722	
8	Have you ever visited heritage sites related to the Ottoman period in your country?	0.774	2 (yes, vacational travel)
14	Are there some sites or cultural resources in your country that are important examples of OH?	0.669	3 (I don't know)

Source: Authors' calculations¹

The EFA confirmed four factors. Table 2 presents each factor in a form of a statement. The first factor in creating a perception of young-adults is the "Ottoman heritage contribution" with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.571 and is consisted of five items. The second factor that contributes to imaging Ottoman heritage among students is the "Cultural route obstacle". It is represented only by one item with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.644. The third factor of influence is the "Specific perception" (Cronbach's alpha value of 0.792) is comprised of two items, while the fourth factor "Ottoman heritage potential" is consisted of two items and a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.722.

The first identified factor ("Ottoman heritage contribution") is the least valuable when assessing the influence on how the young-adults create an image for the benefits of the OH (Table 2, F1). Young-adults regard the Ottoman cultural heritage as a part of the common heritage in North Macedonia and think that such heritage sites are valuable and/or interesting for visitation. According to the analysis, young-adults agree that to some extent such heritage is proper for tourist presentation and commercial use. It is noticeable that youngsters are not sure about the condition of OH in the country. This may point to a possible lethargic attitude about the actual condition, or furthermore even about the OH in general. Young-adults are

¹ Note: Extraction method: principal component analysis; Rotation method: promax with Kaiser normalization

undecided regarding their support of the development of a cultural route based on OH in Europe (including North Macedonia). One may speculate a lack of interest or a lack of available information.

There are not even aware to point out any potential obstacles to the development of the Cultural route of OH in the country. This is related to the identified factor “Cultural route obstacle”, which is found to be one of the less important factors in creating the OH perception among young-adults. (Table 2). This can lead one to the conclusion that they can’t indicate any obstacles which can be linked to the lack of interest in OH.

Discussing “Ottoman heritage potential” as a factor, we have to specify that young-adults have visited heritage sites related to the Ottoman period in North Macedonia, and the majority has done that because of vacation purposes i.e., vacation travel. This means that the most visits are realized during leisure travel. According to the analysis, this factor of perception was found to have the second strongest influence among students when creating an overall perception of the OH (Table 2).

Upon the frequency distribution, it was found that the students think that the interest from foreign tourists is the most important prerequisite for cultural route development. This is on the side of the demand which means that most of the students except the drive of a potential cultural route should be the interest. Lesser answers refer to the interest from domestic tourists, meaning that students perceive a direct link for relating the cultural route as an international tourism product. On the other hand, students perceived that the supply side is also important, as making combinations of OH with other cultural and historical resources, and finding the interest from local tourism businesses to include this heritage in their products.

Furthermore, the study found an interesting perception that only one-third of the young-adult respondents agreed that there are some sites or cultural resources in North Macedonia that are important examples of the OH. More than half of the respondents (54.7%) are not familiar and do not know any important example of an OH in the country. This may be an interesting issue for some future in-depth investigation since it raises the dilemma about a negative connotation on the knowledge and perception about the OH among students.

Additionally, this can give us an explanation of why the availability of appropriate sites of tangible OH, and the availability of appropriate intangible OH are not frequent prerequisites for the development of a cultural route. This can also lead to several conclusions. Firstly, young-adults have low awareness of all Ottoman sites or cultural resources. Secondly, it can be found a high level of lethargy regarding the specific important sites or cultural resources. And, finally, young-adults are not motivated for cultural heritage, at all or just the Ottoman heritage.

5. Conclusions

The study explored the opportunities for incorporating the OH in the tourism development of North Macedonia perceived by the young-adults, aged 18-28. Four general factors were identified when creating an image among students. The specific perception was found to be the dominant factor, followed by the perceived potential. Young-adults fully recognized some characteristic dishes (coffee and sarma) as specific intangible assets of the OH. Most respondents have visited some sites related to the Ottoman period due to vacation travel, but despite this, they are not well informed to point out some sites or cultural resources that are important examples of OH in the country. Surprisingly, youngsters do not have a clear attitude on giving personal support to the development of a cultural route based on OH in Europe. Additionally, they are not sure what is the actual condition of the OH in the country. Overall, low awareness and lethargy are noted among the students on the issue of OH, and they are not motivated for cultural heritage.

Several limitations are still open in this research, which can be addressed in some future work. First, the sample size is small and maybe further expanded. Second, it addressed only students' perception, so it may be extended with other aspects of the investigation, like adults, tourism policy-makers, etc. Finally, the set of indicators is rather small and may be additionally expanded. However, these limitations do not diminish the contribution of the research and the significance of the findings. This study presents a good understanding of students' general attitude on the opportunities to apply the OH for tourism development and includes North Macedonia in the Ottoman cultural route.

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