Re-imag(in)ing place: From Czechoslovakia to the Czech Republic and Slovakia

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SUMMARY

Tourism offers an arena through which a place identity is imagined, imaged, negotiated and contained. This paper compares the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and shows how these countries construct and assert their identities through tourism. Although they both share a common history as Czechoslovakia they are perceived differently by the outside world. These former Eastern Bloc countries are promoting themselves in several ways and they are also marginalising their socialist past and invoking their Central European identity. The Czech and Slovak search for destination identity takes into account tourists' demands and perceptions. This paper introduces the concept of the orientalist tourist gaze and demonstrates how orientalism may manifest in tourism. Data on how these two countries are imagined were collected in Denmark.

Keywords:
destination identity; host society-guest interaction; impact of tourism; orientalism

INTRODUCTION

The concept of identity has been subjected to debates in the social sciences for many years. The debates remain relevant today because the search, invention and presentation of identities are still prevalent. Social entities, ranging from individuals to countries accrue identities today. For instance, countries, cities and towns are branding themselves (Morgan, Pritchard and Pride 2002).

Their brand identities are seductively constructed, highlighting the place's historical significance, cultural uniqueness, natural beauty, technological achievements, etc. An identity is normally assumed as unique, fixed, solid and stable (Anderson 1991; Kellner 1992; Morgan *et al*. 2002, Schein 1996). However, many scholars and researchers (Bauman 1996; Giddens 1991; Hall 1996; Lash 1990) have shown that identities are

variously constructed across different intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions. Identities are subjected to radical historicisation and are constantly in the process of change and transformation. In other words, identities are selectively constructed, and these constructions are embedded in the circumstances and contexts when they are articulated, asserted and promoted. The fluidity and malleability of a place identity is illustrated when Czechoslovakia rejected its socialist identity and declared its Western European connections and identity immediately after the Velvet Revolution in 1989 (Ash 1990).

Tourism offers an arena through which a place identity is imagined, imaged, negotiated and contained (Lanfant 1995a; Ooi 2002a; Picard and Wood 1997). It is the space where a destination reflects on itself and projects its unique culture and identity in appealing ways to the world. It is also the space where foreigners imagine, visit and experience the place and its distinctive cultures. The internal self-reflection of the host society on its own identity, and the imagination of outsiders of what the destination is, underpins the on-going dialogic processes of negotiation and interaction in the constructing, re-imagining and re-imaging of place. Destinations try to shape tourists and potential tourists' perceptions of them by promoting their identity and unique cultures, and at the same time, information is gathered from these tourists and potential tourists so that the authorities can construct and present attractive destination identities that tourists want. The constructed and crystallised public image is then further introduced to the native population for it to recognise itself (Lanfant 1995b, Ooi 2002a, Picard and Wood 1997).

PURPOSE

This paper looks at how people in Denmark, as members of the West, imagine and perceive the Czech Republic and Slovakia. It also looks at how the Czech Republic and Slovakia, which shared a common recent history as Czechoslovakia, present themselves to tourists and tourists-to-be. This paper attempts to 1) explain why the world imagines these two countries differently although they share a recent common history; and 2) illustrate the re-imaging, re-imagination and construction of cultural uniqueness and place identities in these two countries, and point to the dialogic processes involved between host countries and tourists.

The second section of this paper addresses theoretical issues with regards to host societies and tourists interaction, in relation to the "orientalist tourist gaze". Edward Said (1979) argued in his book *Orientalism* that scholars and writers from Britain, France and other western countries selectively present Islamic Middle Eastern societies (the Orient) in inferior and false terms. Such misleading understanding of the Orient is perpetuated throughout the world. Some scholars have argued that Western Europe has a similar orientalist view of Eastern Europe (Ash 1989; Evans 1992; Kumar 1992; Okey 1992; Wolff 1994). With the victory of Western Europe in the ideological war against communism and the slow and bumpy manner in which the former communist countries are opening up, Western Europeans remain wary and treat their eastern neighbours with suspicion and caution.

Before presenting the cases of how people in Denmark view the Czech Republic and Slovakia, we discuss the research strategy and data collection methodology behind this paper in the third section. The fourth section presents the empirical situation in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, showing how people in Denmark imagine these two countries, and how these two countries are promoting themselves as destinations. The fifth section brings together the theoretical and empirical discussions. The short concluding section summarises the findings.

INTERNALISING THE ORIENTALIST TOURIST GAZE

When Edward W. Said (1979) introduced the idea of orientalism, he entwined political and cultural imperialism and argued that western writers and academics who study the Orient have misrepresented, and still misrepresent, the Middle Eastern Islamic world in a manner that has eased the way for the West to dominate the Orient. He wrote:

"Orientalism is not a mere political subject matter or field that is reflected passively by culture, scholarship, or institutions; nor is it a large and diffuse collection of texts about the Orient; nor is it representative and expressive of some nefarious "Western" imperialist plot to hold down the "Oriental" world. It is rather a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical and philological texts; it is an elaboration not only of a basic

geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but also of a whole series of "interests" which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains; it is, rather than expresses, a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world." (Said 1979:13, emphasis in original)

Many western scholars who study the Orient present and distribute particular images of the East, centred on the distinctiveness of the Oriental mind, as opposed to the Occidental mind. Such images create and caricaturise the Oriental identity, according to Said, and these images do not correspond to the empirical reality and reduce the significance of the varieties of language, culture, social forms and political structures in the so-called Orient. The logic and premises behind Said's orientalist arguments inspired many people to think critically about how we imagine countries and how we inadvertently disperse particular geopolitical messages in our activities. Orientalist types of lenses may be used inadvertently to gaze at the "Other" (Galani-Moutafi 1999; Graburn and Barthel-Bouchier 2001; Urry 1990a). The North-South, Rich-Poor, Develop-Undeveloped divides are now seen as parallels to the Orient-Occident dichotomy. As a result, tacit and biased discourses are highlighted by many anti-globalisation lobbies as they protest against the political, economic, social and cultural domination of the West (Chua 2003; Klein 2000; Shipman 2002).

In the context of this paper, many researchers have pointed out that the boundaries between Eastern Europe and Western Europe are not undiscoverably ancient, not naturally distinctive and not innocent, they are cultural creations, intellectual artifice that reflect Western Europeans' ideological self-interest and self-promotion (Evans 1992; Okey 1992; Kumar 1992; Wolff 1994). During the Age of Enlightenment, the ideas of "Western Europe" and "Eastern Europe" were invented as complementary concepts, defining each other by opposition and adjacency (Wolff 1994). After the Second World War in 1945, Western Europe accepted this sweeping construction by subsuming under the label Eastern Europe all those parts of historic Central, East Central and Southeastern Europe (Ash 1989). This imagined Eastern Europe was the communist Eastern Bloc, the enemy side of the Cold War.

While the West is seen as rational, humanistic, democratic, sceptical and tolerant, the Eastern Bloc was perceived as the opposite (Ash 1989; Kumar 1992). The Soviet was shown to perpetuate a non-European face through communism, the "face of Asiatic despotism" (Kumar 1992:457). After the end of the Cold War, history is written by the "victorious" West, and these East-West differences are kept. Arguably, writers, scholars and politicians in the West are still disseminating a sweeping orientalist view of the East, as the East is still being selectively and broadly constructed and imagined in relation to its communist past. Accordingly, the West sees that the East has to be helped and controlled, as the former Eastern Bloc countries are described and analysed as economically, politically, socially and culturally less developed. Many former Eastern Bloc countries will join the European Union (EU), but the domination of the East by the West in Europe is likely to continue as long as these former communist states are typified as backward.

According to Said, such geopolitical awareness would also be distributed through tourism. If there is an orientalist tourist gaze, how would that be translated into tourism behaviour and tourism practices? This paper suggests that there are at least three interrelated processes involved in the perpetuation and enactment of the orientalist tourist gaze.

First, tourists make sense of the places they visit or want to visit. This sense making process takes place before, during and after the visit. Before a visit, tourists-to-be develop secondary images (Gartner 1993). Secondary images are pre-visit images that have been gathered over time and through a number of sources, including travel reviews, guide books, movies, lessons in school, stories from friends, news stories in the mass media, etc. (Gartner 1993). Such images and information invite speculation, reverie, mind-voyaging and a variety of other acts of imagination (Harrison 2001; Lengkeek 2001; Rojek 1997). Such imaginations matter for people when they decide where they want to visit (Reisinger and Turner 2003). Such mental framings also function in the background while tourists make sense of and evaluate the places they visit. For instance, Waller and Lea (1999) found that tourists' preconception of a tourism destination and product will affect their enjoyment. Similarly, McIntosh and Prentice's (1999) study of visitors to three English heritage sites show that tourists reaffirm their preconceptions when they consume cultural products.

Therefore, if western tourists hold orientalist views of the East, then they may selectively seek out incidents, stories and sights to reaffirm their perception of the Eastern Bloc. Or they may be surprised if their views are not affirmed.

Second, tourism authorities, acting as official tourism mediators, launch marketing and branding campaigns as part of an "image modification process" (Andersen, Prentice and Guerin 1997). Tourism mediators tap into the imagination and perceptions of tourists. In order to draw tourists and fulfil their expectations, many destinations conduct market research and provide attractions that tourists expect and want. For instance, Singapore is a predominantly modern city and since the 1980s, tourists are generally disappointed by its modern cityscape. Consequently, the tourism and other authorities revive Singapore's oriental character by conserving Chinatown and Little India so as to fit tourists' imagination (National Tourism Plan Committees 1996; Ooi 2002a). On the other hand, the tourism authorities in Singapore do not want tourists to continue perceiving Singapore in some specific ways. For example, Singapore is frequently perceived as boring; the authorities started organising events and festivals, such as the annual buskers' festival, to impress, excite and attract tourists (Ooi 2002b). The Singaporean authorities selectively enhance and also react against specific tourists' views of Singapore. A destination may start self-orientalising as it attempts to live up to the imagined stereotype, or to become "better" in the eyes of others.

Third, while there are concerns about the touristi-fication of society, studies have shown that over time, seemingly negative cultural effects of tourism can be neutralised by the host society (Boissevain 1996; Cohen 1988; Erb 2000; Martinez 1996; Picard 1995). The case of Las Vegas turning into a tourist Mecca is an illustration; what was deemed to be negative at first – another gambling town – may turn out to be otherwise in the long run (Gottdiener, Collins and Dickens 1999; Hannigan 1998). The expectations and images tourists may have of a destination may be manifested and eventually adapted into the society. The processes of catering to tourists' needs and expectations from a destination may not only lead to the material mani-festation of tourists' images of the place but also lead to local acceptance of tourism-led changes in the host society.

As discussed earlier, the former Eastern Bloc is gazed at in broad, often unflattering, terms by the West. As it will be discussed later, such images of the Czech Republic and Slovakia are prevalent in Denmark. The tourism authorities in the Czech Republic and Slovakia are trying to rid their countries of these negative views. However, before presenting the cases, the next section deals with the research strategy and data collection methods behind this project.

RESEARCH STRATEGY AND DATA COLLECTION

This project compares two country destinations and how they are viewed differently in Denmark. In this section, we will explain our research strategy, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using Denmark as an example of the West, and argue that the circum-stances surrounding the Czech Republic and Slovakia offer a unique opportunity for comparative research.

Pearce (1993) argued that the research strategy for comparative research must consist of three elements: a) the project must have clearly defined research pro-blems; b) common concepts are applicable to the areas of comparison (in our case, two destinations); and c) contextual differences are identified to explain diver-gence between the destinations. This project is based on this framework.

Problem definition: After conducting the preliminary fieldwork and literature review we formulated our two research questions: How and why do people in Denmark perceive Slovakia and the Czech Republic differently, considering that they share a recent common history? How do these countries present themselves officially in the tourism industry? The former question aims to map out the complex and dynamic processes behind how people imagine places. The latter question looks at how the Czech Republic and Slovakia project their destination uniqueness and identity to the world, and together with the first question, point to aspects of interaction between host society and tourists.

Conceptual equivalence: A number of concepts are used to establish the bases of comparison between the two countries. The main concept is destination image. In this paper, destination image refers to how people living outside a country imagine and perceive the

destination. This definition is broad and has allowed us to tap into the range of perceptions people have of places. We gather data on destination image through a series of focus group discussions among people in Denmark (later discussion). Another central concept is identity. Although this concept is challenged intellectually, the practice of asserting place identity is a common industry practice. Tourism authorities selectively assert their destinations' uniqueness and "core" character through their strategies and marketing campaigns. This project does not judge the truth-value behind the projected identities, instead it examines how and why the Czech Republic and Slovakia project and package themselves in their chosen ways. As alluded to earlier, one reason is that the authorities are responding to demands by tourists and potential tourists.

Contextual differences: The Czech Republic and Slovakia share a recent common history, and this situation offers a unique common basis for comparison. As a heuristic for comparing the evolving images of these two countries, their joint past offers a good starting point. As separate countries, they each face their own contextual and circumstantial situations. These differences allow us to draw lessons, as we understand why these two countries are perceived differently, and how and why they promote themselves in similar and also different ways to tourists. While these two countries are attempting to change the world's image of them, they are also searching for their own identity within their own local political, social, economic and cultural circumstances.

Supporting our research strategy is our data collection. Primary data on how people in Denmark perceive the Czech Republic and Slovakia were collected from 46 respondents via seven focus group discussions in year 2002. Our respondents represented a cross-section of Danish society; they were from different age groups, sexes, educational levels, marital statuses and household incomes. The discussions, conducted in Danish or English, delved into our respondents' perceptions of the two countries. To encourage our respondents to speak openly and frankly, we conducted warming-up and icebreaker exercises before the proper discussions began. We also assured our respondents that they would remain anonymous.

We chose the focus group discussion method because this strategy simulates the social environment during which people normally reflect and talk about other countries and their travels. While we moderate the discussions, the social interaction common in "travel talk" is maintained. We accept that our respondents are able to incite the production of meanings that address issues relating to our research concerns during the discussions (Holstein and Gubrium 1997). This is different from the perspective that the interaction during a discussion is a potential source of bias, error, misunderstanding or misdirection, a persistent set of problems to be controlled.

Also, we contacted the tourism authorities in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, seeking information and clarifying with them their strategies. One of the researchers is Slovak, and she is able to communicate with the officers in their native language. In addition, we have collected publicity materials. Many of these materials are available on the Internet.

In our analysis, what is not said is just as important as what is said. For example, our respondents mentioned mainly iconic aspects of the countries, and what they mentioned and ignored allude to their frames of mind. Likewise, what the Czech Republic and Slovakia promote and not promote informs us on how they imagine themselves, and how they think others imagine them.

There are weaknesses to our methodology. We are using Denmark as an example of the West. We do not maintain that there is a homogeneous West, just like we do not see a monolithic Orient. Instead of generalising about the West, the study here aims to identify processes and sources of information that shape Danish views of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. These sources of information – history lessons in school, media stories, information of products from these countries, etc – offer particular interpretations of the Cold War and on-going development in former Eastern Bloc countries. Many of these sources were and are also available to other parts of the Western world. Regardless, the discussions in this paper should be considered within the context of Denmark. As in all social phenomena, culture, image and identities are constantly emerging, and the data we collected reflect only an "ethnographic present" (Douglas and Isherwood 1996:10). Similarly, tourism policies change too. Fortunately, there were no drastic strategic chan-ges while we designed, conducted and finalised this project. The number of respondents is relatively small but the purpose, as mentioned earlier, is not to provide a general description about the West

or Denmark but to understand the processes of how people imagine places. The focus group discussions have allowed us to locate the logic and premises of how people in Denmark structure their images of the Czech Republic and Slo-vakia.

IMAG(IN)ING THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND SLOVAKIA

The Czech Republic and Slovakia were separated and connected several times since the 9th Century, the time of Great Moravia (833-907AD). They share many common histories. The Czech Republic and Slovakia were Czechoslovakia in the large part of the 20th Century, but they became two separate nation states in 1993.

During the time under socialism after the Second World War, the tourism industry in Czechoslovakia was neither lauded nor developed (Williams and Baláz 2001). However, the Czech Republic and Slovakia are now embracing the tourism industry. The Czech Republic is relatively more successful in attracting tourists than Slovakia (see Table 1). In both countries, Europe is their main source of tourists.

Table 1

FIGURES FROM THE TOURISM INDUSTRY - CZECH REPUBLIC AND SLOVAKIA, 2001

Main Indicators	Czech Republic	Slovakia
• Number of tourists (overnight visitors)	5.194 million	1.219 million
• Tourist arrivals from Europe	4.650 million	1.148 million
• Tourism expenditure in a country	US$ 3 106 million	US$ 639 million
• Average length of stay by tourists	3.2 nights	3.6 nights

Source: World Tourism Organisation, 2003

What the tourism authorities in the Czech Republic and Slovakia present and promote contrast to how people in Denmark imagine the country. Our respondents in Denmark have rather fragmented and vague images of these countries. Their views of these countries are also different although these countries share a common recent past.

In the following four sub-sections, we will first discuss how the Czech Republic presents itself to the world,

and then how people in Denmark perceive the Czech Republic. After that, we will similarly present the case of Slovakia in the latter two sub-sections. The "Discussion" section following these empirical cases examine how the orientalist tourist gaze is being perpetuated and also acted upon in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

THE CZECH REPUBLIC: EUROPEAN HERITAGE

The Czech Republic will join the European Union (EU) in 2004. The Czech Tourist Authority's (CTA) strategy to promote the Czech Republic is to highlight some attractions, including Prague, historical cities and castles, spas, natural beauty and nature for adventure (CTA 2003a). For instance, the spa industry is being revived. This industry was neglected, like other branches of the tourism industry during the socialist era, but its potential is being tapped into after the Velvet Revolution. The spas are seen as a means to attract more tourists. Another way the CTA hopes to attract more tourists is through the country's historical and heritage sites, which of many are being restored and promoted.

The CTA has identified a list of 55 obstacles in the tourism industry (CTA 2002). The list includes high crime rate, double pricing for Czechs and for foreigners, the casual attitude of the state, regional and communal authorities to solving crimes in the service industry (illegal guides, overcharging by taxis), service providers who are not service minded enough and do not speak foreign languages, and the xenophobic attitude of some police and customs officers. Also, the authorities lamented the unsatisfactory cooperation with neighbouring countries, particularly Austria, Slovakia and Hungary, in the promotion of the central European region.

The Czech authorities are not presenting the country in relation to its recent socialist past. For instance, on the official Czech tourism website (http://www.czechtourism.cz) there is hardly any mention of its socialist past. When it is mentioned, it is seen negatively; in the section "Prague for young", it says:

"Prague, the Czech capital, is among the fastest-developing and most progressive regions in all of Europe. Over the past ten years, the city has transformed itself from a dreary East Bloc capital to a modern European metropolis". (Czech Tourism 2004)

While marginalising its socialist past, the Czech Republic is presented as a junction of European cultures, as a centre of Europe. The conserved and promoted historical sites, as mentioned earlier, are also meant to display and tell people about the Western European character embedded in the Czech Republic. In particular, the historical significance and the European identity of the Czech Republic are highlighted in Prague. Visitors are reminded and told to look out for the diverse European architectural styles, including Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque and the Art Nouveau in the capital city, for instance.

Imagining the Czech Republic from Denmark

Our respondents in Denmark who have been to the Czech Republic have more intimate views of that country than those who have not. The former country of Czechoslovakia offers the basis for many of our respondents to think of the Czech Republic. For example, respondent TEA visited Czechoslovakia in the 1970´s and the Czech Republic a couple of years ago, commented:

"I remember Czechoslovakia as a country where you could get very good, cheap beer and the finest crystal. Those things are easier to buy now, as the Czech Republic is so much more open to tourists than the old Czechoslovakia was".

TEA further described the Czech Republic:

"I remember seeing a lot of small details about the country, like markets with potatoes, potato salad, cities with large squares […] On the other hand I felt that the country is still not that open".

The former Czechoslovak images linger on in the Czech Republic for TEA, who has visited both countries. Also, comparisons to Czechoslovakia were made by our respondents who have not been to either of the countries. Particularly, old and popular images of Czechoslovakia were passed onto the Czech Republic – Prague, beer and crystal. These respondents also imagined the Czech Republic as a country with numerous museums, good infrastructure, beautiful architecture and old buildings, as well as nice and big cities. They associated nature and the countryside with the country too. They guessed that the Czech Republic is welcoming.

On the other hand, respondent REA, who has never visited the Czech Republic nor Czechoslovakia, commented:

"I always connect [the Czech Republic] with 'boiled cabbage'. I imagine my holiday in the Czech Republic to smell of the same; smell of the past would be all around me. If I could use colours to express my expectation from this holiday, I would use grey!"

In the context of REA's statement, 'boiled cabbage' is associated to the Czech socialist past, to the USSR and to poverty. This is another source of imagery for all our respondents - the country's association with the Soviet Union in its socialist history. Such general views were also mentioned by respondents, like BK1, who has been to the country:

"Even though I have been to these [East European] countries, they still seem like a block to me. I cannot really distinguish their images from each other".

Many people have read and learn from the Danish mass media about the progress the Czech Republic has made in its economic development since its independence, so that it can join the EU. For instance, TE2, who has been to the Czech Republic commented:

"I think that the Czech Republic is much more Western oriented and also Western like. I suppose that it is one of the richest countries in Eastern Europe, with the better transition to the new system than any other neighbouring country".

Many of our respondents who have visited Prague found the capital interesting, but a few said that they would not want to visit Prague again because, as respondent CG1 said, "it is too crowded and too Western".

While our respondents have different views of the Czech Republic, they tap into different sources to imagine the country. Notably, their perceptions are quite different from the images and identity the Czech Republic tourism authorities have projected. While some people still see the Czech Republic as part of the Eastern Bloc with its socialist past, a number of our respondents single out the country as not quite eastern European, for instance G5 said:

"The Czech Republic is a part of central Europe, different from the "real Eastern Europe".

This view is perpetuated through information in the mass media on Czech economic development and the country's future plan to join the EU. However, as presented above, our respondents' images are not always coherent and comprehensive. Each of them was able to tap into various sources of information, as they imagine the country.

SLOVAKIA: THE HEART OF EUROPE

Slovakia, like the Czech Republic will join the EU in 2004. It had never been an independent nation and had always been controlled or dominated by another nation. For instance, Slovakia was formally considered an equal partner in Czechoslovakia only after the Prague Spring 1968 reforms. Slovakia has been less successful in attracting tourists, as compared to the Czech Republic (see Table 1). Its capital is Bratislava, which is also less known in the world than Prague. The low profile of the country is epitomised by the incident when the then American presidential candidate George W. Bush confused Slovakia with Slovenia in 1999 *(Economist 2001)*. The *Economist* even wrote an article on the lack of identity in Slovakia – commenting that the world does not know many remarkable people and places from the country *(Economist 2001)*. And at the end of the *Economist* article, it reported in a light-hearted manner:

"A country? Yes, but of peasant stock, young (eight years old) and small (5m citizens), say some Slovaks defensively. Getting an identity takes time. More tellingly, many say it should never have become a country in the first place. "If Czechoslovakia hadn't split," laments one, "at least we'd have Vaclav Havel [Czechoslovak and then Czech president]." (Economist 2001)

The Slovak Tourist Board (STB) is promoting Slovakia as "Europe's green heart" and "Little country in the heart of Europe". In its 2001–2006 tourism master plan (STB 2001), STB aims to create an image of Slovakia as a "country of tourism." (STB 2001:3). These two brand identities are chosen because:

"More than 40 per cent of the country is covered by forests and woods, mountain meadow, pastures and copses on the lowlands. Slovakia is really enjoyable and hospitable country with many tourist attractions,

favourable climatic conditions and plenty of natural wealth" (STB 2001:14).

The STB will focus on selected qualities of the country (STB 2001). They are mainly on the country's nature and landscapes. In terms of culture, "folklore in all its variety: dances, songs, costumes, customs and tradition, folk art", "folk wooden architecture reservation or open-air museums" and cultural monuments registered with UNESCO will be promoted. The director of the Hont Regional tourism office in Slovakia described an ideal cultural programme for a foreign tourist as follows (personal communication):

"We would like the tourist to come and see what Slovakia is. They can, for example, go and taste real Slovak wine, listen to nice folk music; children can sing for them some folk songs. They can also see some performance of the folk dance in traditional costumes. Then they should also try our food, they will love it!".

Like in the Czech Republic, Slovakia is not promoting its recent socialist past. Rural and folk cultures dominate the projected place identity of the country.

Imagining Slovakia from Denmark

As tourists and potential tourists to Slovakia, our respondents in Denmark have limited knowledge of the country, even less than what they know of the Czech Republic. Many could not mention any specific impressions they have of the country. Our respondents often cognitively filled up their understanding of Slovakia by comparing it to the Czech Republic, the former Eastern Bloc or to an imagined beautiful untouched country.

Many of our respondents, regardless of whether they have visited the country or not, perceived Slovakia as less developed than the Czech Republic. For instance, one respondent, E5, who has not visited the country described Slovakia as a "poorer brother of the Czech Republic". Likewise TE3, who has visited Slovakia, and one of only two respondents who could name Bratislava as the capital of Slovakia, compared the city to Prague:

"For me, Bratislava is similar to Prague, but with a lower quality of services."

Few could picture the culture and history of the country, and when they could it was often in connection to their general images of the former Soviet Union and communist Eastern Bloc. These images include pollution, heavy industry and poor people. For instance, AT1, who visited the Slovak part of Czechoslovakia in the 1960s, recalled:

"Slovakia seems to me like a country with a lot of agriculture and heavy industry polluting the area".

Another respondent, without having visited the country, imagined Slovakia with Soviet images, such as the car Lada; Lada was a Soviet-made car, commonly found in the Soviet Union and the old Eastern Europe. A few respondents pointed out Slovak political problems, especially with regards to minorities and democracy. For example, ST1, remembered:

"Slovakia has problems with minorities, especially gypsies. They do not have the proper kind of democracy and have problems with the human rights as well".

Basically, our respondents have a general impression of Slovakia as ecologically, politically and technologically backward, like during the socialist era. The Czech Republic and the former Eastern Bloc are cognitive anchor points and starting points for our respondents' imagination of Slovakia, especially those who have not visited the country before. Vague links were also made to Yugoslavia, Transylvania and Slovenia.

On the other hand, a few of our respondents who have not visited the country imagined Slovakia as romantic and untouched – beautiful landscapes, small villages, cafes, and bars. They were employing a "romantic gaze" (Ooi 2002b; Urry 1990b). For example, B4, who has never been to Slovakia or any part of Eastern Europe, commented:

"I have never been there, so I actually do not have an idea what the country is like. The only things I can think of are mountains, wild nature and forests".

Under the romantic gaze, these respondents also imagined the local people to be friendly and hospitable. However, those who have been there responded to such perceptions in the discussions. For example, RS1, countered:

"They [Slovakia] are trying but they are not very hospitable. Slovakia is trying and the Czech Republic does not care. However, I would like to go to Bratislava, as I like the old look. I would not go to Prague again".

Many people expected Slovakia to be a quiet destination, they also expected little. Therefore, many recalled their surprise when they saw the rich heritage the country has while visiting the country. For instance, TE4 was joyful:

"The first thing I have on my mind when thinking about Slovakia is culture. Even though I was familiar with the country's history before my trip, I was surprised when I saw so many beautiful castles and museums!"

In sum, many of our respondents who visited Slovakia were pleased with the cultural heritage and natural beauty of the country. But they also used the Czech Republic and the former Eastern Bloc to make sense of and imagine Slovakia, whether they have already visited the country or not. For some of those who have not visited the country, they imagine the country they hardly know as untouched and naturally beautiful. Their images of Slovakia are also incoherent and sketchy, even more so than for the Czech Republic.

DISCUSSION

The second section of this paper identified three sets of processes that are entailed in the translation of the orientalist tourist gaze into material forms in a host society. These processes – tourists making sense of place, tourism authorities wanting to change their destination image and the eventual local acceptance of touristified cultures – point to the negotiation and interaction between hosts and guests, and how the hosts may respond, enact and adopt the gazes of their guests.

The three sets of processes also form a model for us to analyse the two countries, as we examine why people in Denmark view the Czech Republic and Slovakia differently although these countries share a common recent history, and how may the orientalist tourist gaze be perpetuated and enacted in these two countries (see Table 2).

Table 2
PERCEPTIONS OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND SLOVAKIA IN DENMARK

	Czech Republic	**Slovakia**
Making sense of the country by people in Denmark	• Inherited images from Czechoslovakia and the Eastern Bloc. • Prague represents the whole of the Czech Republic. • Better developed than its former Eastern Bloc neighbours.	• Perceived in relation to the Czech Republic and the former Eastern Bloc. • Imagined as a pristine, untouched country.
The projected identity and image of the country as a tourism destination	• Czech Republic is essentially European. • Its socialist past hardly mentioned and therefore assumed to be an anomaly.	• Slovakia is the "Green heart of Europe" offering nature and folk culture. • Its socialist past hardly mentioned and therefore assumed to be an anomaly.
Responses to tourists' views and expectations	• Sidelines its Eastern images by asserting that it is western, Central European, cosmopolitan with deep historical European roots. • Wants to enhance tourism by adopting best practices from the industry and improving the environment for tourists.	• Sidelines its Eastern images by asserting that it is Central European, filled with nature and traditional folk cultures. • Wants to enhance tourism by adopting best practices from the industry and improving the environment for tourists.

Making sense of the Czech Republic and Slovakia

The first set of processes relate to how tourists and tourists-to-be perpetuate the orientalist tourist gaze by making sense of the places they visit or want to visit through different sources of information. The Czech Republic and Slovakia are relatively unknown in Denmark, but people in Denmark have formed impressions of these countries, whether they have been there or not. With the myriad of impressions, our respondents in Denmark suggest that the West has different images of the two former Eastern European countries. Nevertheless, the Czech Republic is relatively better known than Slovakia in Denmark, and people here relate the Czech Republic to Czechoslovakia, to its socialist past and also to the economic progress it has made. On the other hand, with little information and knowledge on Slovakia, people in Denmark are generally perpetuating a broadly socialist image of the country that is also viewed as less developed than the Czech Republic.

There are reasons why the Czech Republic has inherited the images of Czechoslovakia but not Slovakia. One of the reasons is that Czechoslovakia was also sometimes known informally as "Czechia", and people in this former country were identified as "Czechs" in the West.

Most western outsiders were not aware that Czechoslovakia consisted of two separate nations. Furthermore, Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic, was also the capital of Czechoslovakia. Prague hosted many political upheavals and was the centre of Czechoslovakia. To many people, Prague was Czechoslovakia and is now the Czech Republic. For example, MC1, unwittingly conflated Prague and the Czech Republic:

"I think that Prague and Slovakia are in competition. If you combine holiday in Prague and later in Slovakia, the Slovak people will be upset, if you tell them about it".

Because of its namesake, and the fame of Prague, the Czech Republic is seen as a continuation of Czechoslovakia. On the other hand, Slovakia does not have a similar iconic city to Prague. Consequently, Slovakia remains a lesser-known country and many people fill their imagination of the country by relating it to a general regional image – the former Soviet-controlled Eastern Bloc. It is seen as backward, as if it is still under socialist rule.

Some other people imagine the country as untouched, pristine and romantic, linking it to an unexplored place.

Image modification and constructing place identities

Second, the tourism authorities in the Czech Republic and Slovakia aim to change people's images of their countries by highlighting images and attractions that the authorities think tourists and tourists-to-be find positive. They want to eradicate negative and enforce positive images that the West may have of them. In their promotion campaigns, the Czech Republic and Slovakia selectively package their countries into attractive destinations. The packaging of place does not just aim to modify tourists' perceptions of the place but also provides a vision for the destination to develop (Leonard 1997; Olins 1999). Both the CTA and STB are involved in the two-prong approach of modifying people's perceptions of their countries and also enhancing their destinations.

In the first strategy, what the CTA and STB are presenting and projecting are quite different from many views our respondents have of the host countries. This is intentional, as the authorities want to change people's old impressions. The CTA and STB tactically marginalise their countries' recent socialist past by not mentioning much of it. In the second strategy, they accentuate and revive some other aspects of their countries, such as the spa industry in the Czech Republic and folk cultures in Slovakia, which correspond to the western orientalist imagination that these countries are romantic, pristine and relatively untouched by modern technology and development. Specifically, the Czechs are going back into their more distant and glorious past, as they search for their European roots. Their historical significance in European history is being accentuated. They are also claiming that they are now modern and like a western European country. On the other hand, Slovakia is highlighting its geographical location. It positions itself as the centre of post-Cold War Europe. It is also presenting itself as a place for nature and traditional folk cultures, with slices of distant Slovak history accentuated and celebrated.

Such strategies do not only educate and steer tourists and tourists-to-be to the desired versions of Czech and Slovak culture, identity and history. They also connect with how locals want to see themselves. Many citizens in these countries are not proud of their socialist past and they are searching for their identities in their new countries. Tourism has inadvertently become an avenue for them to assert their emerging identities.

Touristification of society

Third, tourism products are internalised into the host society. That process is ongoing in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, as it is in all other tourism countries. There are clear Czech and Slovak intentions to attract more tourists. They want to lower their crime rates, increase the use of tourists' languages, offer better hospitality services, etc. They are also moving towards becoming part of the global tourism industry, as they adopt "best practices" from the industry. For instance, these destinations, like many others, boast how many five-star hotels they have, organise film festivals, have informative websites, etc (CTA 2003b, STB 2003).

Increasingly, hospitality in these countries is commodified, as tourism service providers have to learn how to be friendly towards strangers, speak the languages of tourists and engage with people through monetary exchange (Watson and Kopachevsky 1994; Williams and Baláz 2001). While some "tourist-unfriendly" cultural products (e.g. poor services, disorganised tourism attractions) are improved, tourist-friendly cultural manifestations may be enhanced. For instance, traditional "folk cultures" are being accentuated and celebrated in Slovakia for tourists. New meanings and activities may be introduced. For example, the spectacular and majestic Bojnice Castle in Slovakia holds an annual "International Ghosts and Bogeymen Festival"; it was presented as "the ghosts and bogeys from all over the world haunt and entertain the visitors of the castle, the kingdom of the dead comes back to life, you can hear the wailing and rejoicing of the witches in the castle" (STB 2003:8). The staging of cultures may allow locals to express their traditional identities and invent new ones. Over time, such staging would be considered truly traditional, as if such practices had not been disrupted during the socialist past or as if they have been around for ages.

Czech and Slovak cultures are being transformed, like in other tourism destinations. Tourist-unfriendly cultural uniqueness will be sanctioned against and tourist-friendly cultural uniqueness will be celebrated. The demands by tourists are helping the country to preserve and enhance their historical identities. The resources available through tourism assist to enliven selected cultures and identities, while communicating the place's cultural uniqueness. Over time, touristified cultures would be part of their societies.

CONCLUSIONS

As our discussion shows, the projected cultures and identities of these two countries by their respective tourism authorities are quite different from how people in Denmark imagine them. Generally, people in Denmark still hold orientalist views, albeit incoherently, of these former Eastern Bloc countries. Their socialist past is used as a starting point to imagine them even though these countries will be joining the EU soon. This contrasts to the local reality in these countries, where tourism authorities and the local people want to disown their socialist past. They are searching for their identities in their new countries, and their searches are in the direction of them being European and being in Central Europe.

The processes of asserting a country's identity are on going. Similarly, how outsiders imagine a country evolves. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, they are responding to the orientalist gaze imposed on them by basically ignoring their socialist images, suggesting that those images are no longer relevant but highlighting the relatively more positive romantic, historical and pristine images. These two countries are adopting best practices from the tourism industry, and also embracing the Western model of economic, political and social development. The irony is that they will become more alike many other western countries as they construct, invent and package their cultural uniqueness and unique selling proposition.

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