

Contested Places and Ambivalent Identities – *Social Change and Development in UNESCO Enlisted Dubrovnik*

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Abstract

2016 marks the 25th anniversary for Croatia's independence. As young nation, Croatia has undergone considerable, in part traumatic transformations, which have had significant socio-political, economic and cultural ramifications. The article aims to provide an understanding of the possibilities and impediments of urban and rural sustainable development in Croatia. It will explore the ways contestations over the turbulent past, the composite present and the uncertainty of future socio-economic and cultural developments repeatedly cast shadows in negotiations over development projects. With Croatia's inclusion in the EU in 2013, Croatia provides a constructive test-case in analysing the challenges and potentials for steering towards sustainable development in a region with a recent history of conflict and instability. The many-sided consequences of the predominant tourism-based developments in post-war Dubrovnik are furthermore of global resonance as many of UNESCO's world heritage sites increasingly share new urban, environmental and infrastructural challenges relating to tourism.

Keywords: *Identity, Heritage, Sustainable development, Responsible tourism, Croatia, EU.*

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Introduction

2016 marks the 25th anniversary for Croatia's independence.¹ As young nation, Croatia has undergone considerable, in part traumatic transformations, which have not only had significant socio-political and economic ramifications, but have likewise made strong imprints on cultural identities, quality of life and the ways in which urban environments and landscapes are perceived, used and developed today. This article will provide a qualitative examination of urban developments in post-war Dubrovnik and explore how the strong reliance on tourism as a major vehicle in socio-economic development creates many challenges and vulnerabilities to sustainability.² These vulnerabilities become particularly manifest in a post-war context, where social memory, cultural heritage, identities and place often are inflammable and contested issues, which tend to inform and steer development processes.

With a particular reference to two sources of ongoing local conflicts; namely the growth of cruise-ship tourism and 'Golf Park Dubrovnik,' a planned large-scale construction project in the vicinity of Dubrovnik's UNESCO-enlisted town centre,³ the article aims to provide a better understanding of the possibilities and impediments of future urban and rural developments in Croatia. Although the internal dynamics within the Western-Balkan nation-states to some degree differ, the region shares many similarities in the ways in which history, socio-cultural memory, national and ethnic identities and heritage are areas of inflammable contestations in the post-war era in the region. Disputes over the turbulent past, the composite present and the uncertainty of future socio-economic and cultural developments repeatedly tend to cast shadows in negotiations over urban and rural development plans. With Croatia's inclusion in the EU in 2013 and the likely future EU extension to the rest of the Western-Balkans,⁴ Croatia provides a constructive test-case in analyzing the challenges and potentials for steering towards integrated, sustainable development in a region with a recent history of conflict and instability.

The many-sided and often problematic consequences of tourism-based developments in Dubrovnik's local context is furthermore of global relevance as depopulation and museumification of urban centres, environmental and infrastructural challenges are increasingly shared in many UNESCO's world heritage enlisted sites, especially in the 'tourist-historic cities' (Ashworth and Tunbridge, 2000).

Turbulent Past, Conflicted Future

Particularly two historical processes, both of which coincided upon the Republic of Croatia's independence from Yugoslavia, have had substantial impacts on post-war society. These are the Croatian War of Independence (1991-1995), and the transition from Yugoslavian communism to global capitalism. These highly transformative processes are central in order to understand contemporary socio-political developments, power dynamics and identity constructions in Croatia, and are likely to influence the ways in which future urban and rural developments are executed or impeded.

The turbulent and traumatic Homeland war caused enormous material damages in urban and rural environments, a collapse of industries and infrastructure nationwide. The war destructions, most of which were inflicted on central infrastructure, factories, hospitals and schools in the duration of half a year (1991-1992), were enormous. Public estimations calculate that around 30% of the industrial capacity was destroyed, the damages on infrastructural and public utilities amounted to 4.2 billion dollars, and approximately 10% of housing was damaged or destroyed, leading to the displacement of over a quarter of a million people (5% of the population). Furthermore, around 10% of the Croatian land mass, most of which constitutes forests, agricultural land, karst, scrubland and wildlife areas, became unusable due to the placement of around 1 million landmines and explosives (Bartlett 2003).⁵ The Croatian Mine Action Centre (CROMAC) estimates that from the 13.000 m² of mine covered land after the war the suspected mine areas have been reduced to 486.60 km² in 2016. CROMAC predicts that it will take until 2019 before all suspected mine areas are cleared. In national politics, mine clearance programmes are seen as being of utmost importance to future economic development and human safety. The consequences on the remaining mine areas on the Croatian economy are large. It is estimated that the annual economic loss amounts to €47.3 million annually, due to factors such as unusable lands for agriculture, tourism developments, and infrastructure, as well as delayed or missed opportunities for constructions and developments.⁶ Since tourism plays such an important role in the Croatian economy, mine clearance programmes in the most frequented tourist regions have been given first priority.

On the Adriatic coast, post-war urban and rural reconstruction and developments have predominately been connected with tourism developments. This is particularly the case in the popular UNESCO-enlisted tourist destination, Dubrovnik, where tourism undoubtedly has played a highly central role in stimulating towards economic post-war recovery. Despite the city's small population of around 42,000 inhabitants, Dubrovnik receives nearly 2 million tourists annually and has become the third most popular cruise-ship port in Europe.

The transition from Yugoslavian communism to global market-liberalism upon national independence has caused unprecedented cultural commercialism as cultural products, artifacts, cultural heritage, experiences and places are relentlessly promoted to a growing tourist market. Critics argue that Croatia's sudden, large-scale transition to the global market-economy coupled with the urgent need to recover the national economy and rebuild post-war rural and urban environments have created an unsustainable and noticeably uncritical tourist industry and poorly integrated development paradigm (Ott, 2005). Deep-seated corruption, challenges related to an inefficient bureaucratic system and unclear or lacking land cadastre and real estate registration systems have furthermore complicated the transition to private property ownership and heavily shaped the ways in which urban and rural developments are conceptualized, executed and received amongst the local population. The transition to global capitalism and private ownership has increased the socio-economic disparities and the local population often have an intimate knowledge of those who profited and those who did not

from the economic transition and from the chaos amounting from the war-torn society. The awareness of how a small elite, frequently with international connections to wealthy investors and entrepreneurs in the Croatian diaspora, often have gained their wealth through corruption, political and social connections (Bartlett, 2003), is frequently a cause of resentment, envy and discontent in contemporary Croatian society. There is a widespread feeling of discontent that a small minority of Croatians in positions of power took advantage of the desperate situation in the aftermath of the war to further their own ends. These historical circumstances have, in part, caused a strong sentiment of vulnerability and distrust towards the intentions and scopes of developers and institutions, especially if they are externally owned. These emotions are often underlying features of many of the cultural discourses regarding socio-political change, for instance both in connection with Croatia's EU accession and in local discussions concerning the golf and real estate constructions on Mount Srd.

Although there are some promising exceptions of tourism projects which utilize tourism as tools in community-based sustainable development and in restoring inter-ethnic and inter-cultural dialogues in an increasingly homogenized and segregated region, the majority of Dubrovnik's tourism developments are still steered by the logic where the growth in tourism numbers and economic profit is placed above all. This perception is evident in Croatia's tourism development strategy for 2012-2020, where the aim of doubling the tourist numbers by 2020 is placed as a prime national development objective.⁷

The lack of sufficient political regulations and management of tourism developments in most of the post-war era has led to new political, social and environmental challenges and a poorly integrated urban development, which is primarily steered by the incentives of short-term economic growth and driven the interests of private business. The reliance on tourism as a near mono-economy is contributing towards processes of cultural homogenization and lack of cultural and technological innovation and a prominent experience of cultural identity deprivation.

Depopulation

Dubrovnik's UNESCO-enlisted walled city has experienced heavy depopulation in the post-war era. Before the war around 5000 inhabitants lived within the walled centre. In comparison about 800 locals reside there today, the majority of which are elderly. With real estate prices in the town centre of approximately €3600 it gets difficult for residents with an average monthly income of around €500 to live centrally.

Furthermore, many citizens registered with their address in the old town rent out their flats to tourists large parts of the year. The experiences to how tourism affects the quality of life are often connected to where one lives and whether one's livelihood is dependent of tourism. Many who have moved away from the city centre claim that since tourism has increased their material wealth and living standard, their quality of life is subsequently improved. At the same time, many Dubrovnikans who have moved away from the centre also experience a sense of

identity deprivation, as local identity constructions in Dubrovnik are closely interwoven with the town centre. This is one of the reasons that those who remain in the city centre choose to somewhat lower their living standard and as they perceive their city identity and quality of life as inseparable.

Dubrovnik's tourism development has benefited many local property owners who rent out their homes to tourists. At the same time tourism has considerably increased the living costs in the city and enhanced the socio-economic differences within the local population by creating a visible disparity between those who earn a good income on tourism and those who are employed in the public sector or are engaged in low-paid, often part-time and seasonal work in tourism.

With its well preserved medieval city structure, which dates back to the influential Dubrovnik Republic (1358-1807), the large numbers of tourists create new challenges with regards to urban planning, lacking infrastructure, pollution and waste management. In the last decade, cruise-ship tourism has intensified the pressures in Dubrovnik's walled centre and its access roads, as large groups of tourists are escorted in shuttle buses from the cruise port in Gruž or by shuttle-boats to the harbour in the old centre. The high numbers arriving at one time, most of which access the centre through the city gate at Pile, contribute to creating a traffic bottle-neck on the only road leading into the town centre as well as pedestrian congestion both immediately outside and inside the walled town centre.

Since the beginning of the Dubrovnik Republic, seafaring has played an integral part of the economic development and the city's local identity. Until the invention of the steamships in the 19th century, seafaring activities were predominately linked to mercantile activities and the navy.⁸

Under the rule of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a new type of seafaring activity was born; nautical tourism. Connections with steamships were made between Trieste, Rijeka and Dubrovnik. The Grand Hotel Imperial, Dubrovnik's first hotel was built in 1897, and the city witnessed the early days as a tourist destination for the European bourgeoisie. Nautical tourism played an important part in the early tourism developments on the Dalmatian coast and Dubrovnik has especially been a popular tourist destination since the 1950's. Antun Asic, the General Manager of Dubrovnik Port Authorities, sees nautical tourism as being part of the city's heritage and a natural part of the coexistence of the citizens and their activities. He does not see it as a problem that the rapidly growing cruise-ship tourism is changing the local surroundings as long as it is well handled, but he is concerned that the cruise-ship industry is growing so fast that it causes many challenges to the management and preparedness of the ports worldwide.⁹ The average number of passengers per ship was only 500 in the 1960's. Since the latter part of the 20th Century, cruise-ship tourism has grown significantly. With the introduction of the so called 'mega ships' in 1998, passenger numbers per ship had reached 3600 (Horak et al. 2007). In the recent years several Croatian and international scholars of tourism research have criticized how this emergent type of tourism has been allowed to develop without enforcing sustainability measures based on analysis on

environmental risks, pollution, social impacts and carrying capacity (Caric 2010, Horak et al. 2007). In the period of 1980-1999, the passenger number world-wide has increased by an average of 8.7% annually, which means that the number of passengers has amplified by 385% in this period. This upward trend is still continuing; whereas the total number of cruise-ship passengers was just under two million in the early 1980's, in 2010 the numbers had reached to 18.8 million (Perucic and Puh 2012). In this period there has also been a significant internationalization of cruise-ship companies, the average size of the ships have increased and concurrently the number of passengers arriving at one time too, thus intensifying the impacts on the ports of call.

Today three main cruise-ship corporations dominate the international market. Consequently, it has become increasingly more difficult for municipalities and port authorities in each of the cruise-ship destinations, to influence the traffic flow, routes, the ship sizes and numbers of passengers which arrive. This is especially the case in the smaller transit destinations such as Dubrovnik, where the cruise-ship passengers are only allotted a few hours to make a quick visit to the city centre. With the increased ship sizes and the capitalist logic of making cruise-ships into 'floating hotels,' and increasingly by attempting to mimic 'floating towns,' tourists have all the desired amenities on-board the ships and often spend little money in the ports of call, other than on a few souvenirs, drinks and snacks.

According to a survey carried out by the travel agency Rea, in 2006, the majority of cruise-ship passengers fall into the category of consumers with 'medium range purchasing power.' The same survey concluded that of the 70% of cruise-ship passengers who decide to disembark in Dubrovnik, the average spending amounted to €25 per passenger (Krželj-Colovic and Brautovic 2007). Out of this money, a substantial amount is usually spent on the entrance fee of the popularly visited city wall. Around 1 million people visit the city walls annually, and in the height of the tourist season there have been registered up to 8864 visitors in one day.¹⁰ In 2015, the city walls ensured an income of around 100 million Croatian Kuna annually (approximately €3.1 million), and with increased entry fees of €10 per ticket in 2016 this is likely to increase further. Of the total amount derived from the city wall fees, 25% VAT is paid into the national budget, and the remaining income is divided between the Dubrovnik municipality and the city's main heritage association¹¹ which has undertaken a lot of Dubrovnik's restoration and conservation projects. Dubrovnik municipality furthermore receives a high income in different port charges, such as on transit passage fee, wharfage, agency fees, pilot dues, garbage collection charges of solid and fluid wastes, water, and electricity.

When one includes the money deriving from tourist services, such as excursions and transportation, carried out by travel agencies, the total amount of money deriving from port charges and tourism services was estimated to €9,143,643 in 2005 (Krželj-Colovic and Brautovic 2007). As such, tourism, including cruise-ship tourism, has played a very direct, positive influence on the local economy and restoration of damages from the war and the earthquake in 1979. However, these do not take into account the hidden costs in which cruise-ship tourism generates.

Research carried out at the Institute for Tourism in Zagreb has brought the environmental impacts of cruise-ship tourism under closer scrutiny:

“Cruise tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors of the tourism industry and one that has significant environmental, economic and social impacts on target destinations. Yet, tourism decision makers, developers and managers rarely incorporate or estimate environmental impacts in their tourism development planning. Indeed, the analysis of the resulting resource exploitation is rarely undertaken until carrying capacity is breached and attractiveness diminished (Caric, 2010).”

Long-term quantitative research carried out on the Adriatic Coast concludes that the economic benefits amounting from cruise-ship tourism in Croatia estimated to 50 million Euros while the environmental costs were estimated to amount to 338 million Euros (Caric, 2010). Based on sustainability measures and recommendations on carrying capacity in Caric and Horak’s research, certain regulations of cruise-ship arrivals and ship sizes has been initiated. Until then up to five cruise-ships could arrive daily with a total number of 15,000 passengers.¹² When one adds the number of tourists arriving in the historic, walled city with three city gates and many narrow and steep streets, it becomes apparent that a carefully planned tourism management is necessary to improve the living conditions for the local population as well as for its visitors. These findings clarify the importance of a more holistic revision of the consequences of tourism developments and the further tourism developments in Dubrovnik.

While Caric’s research is edifying in bringing attention to the environmentally unsustainable sides of cruise-ship tourism, is harder to measure to what extent it negatively affects the living conditions for the local population. However, there can be no doubt that the large number of practical challenges relating to lack of space, traffic congestion, parking, waste management, pollution, and the removal of the residents everyday facilities from the city centre to outlying areas in order to accommodate for tourist facilities, in sum forms the local population’s life experiences and quality of life. A minority of the citizens think there are no viable alternatives to tourism, but many residents argue for a more inclusive public debate concerning how tourism can generate economic benefits and at the same time maintain the citizens’ local identities, heritage and quality of life.

UNESCO World Heritage Status – A Double-edged Sword

Even though the poor management of tourism developments in Dubrovnik in the post-war period partly is connected with the acute need for material and economic recovery, there are many parallels to deficient sustainability perspectives in urban- and tourism developments in many UNESCO world heritage cities worldwide. Although domestic socio-cultural and political processes have influenced Dubrovnik’s post-war urban development, many of these processes are also paralleled globally. The local challenges of urban depopulation, cultural commercialization, homogenization and museumification of Dubrovnik’s historic centre, as well as the exclusion of democratic, grass-roots decision-making power and the unanimous right of all citizens to define and decide over their cultural heritage, are processes which are equally witnessed in other UNESCO enlisted cities across the world (Wang, 2012).

According to the UN's World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the tourist numbers increase between 40 to 60 percent in the first few years after a site is awarded UNESCO World heritage status. In the recent years, UNESCO has expressed concerns over the extent to which the considerable increase in heritage tourism in the long-term will have negative ecological and cultural impacts and will thus compromise the heritage value of the sites. UNESCO requires that the State Parties have to make a long-term management plan of the world heritage sites which come under their jurisdiction and after revisions to the operational guidelines in 2005 sustainable development has been given a much more prominent role in the monitoring of the sites. The State Parties are required to report on any 'key indicators' which might negatively affect the state of conservation of the heritage site. These measures may potentially yield positive results in terms of sustainable practices and might heighten the awareness and reflectivity regarding the many-sided consequences of heritage enlistment. Nonetheless, it is generally common knowledge amongst local politicians and managers involved in shaping the management plans that UNESCO has very limited budget and capacity to follow up each of the 1031 sites inscribed on the World Heritage list. The extent to which the management plans remain empty promises or whether they are treated as an opportunity to commit to sustainable development is therefore in practice up to the local authorities in each heritage site.

Dubrovnik's Elite Tourism Strategy

More or less regardless of political affiliation, Dubrovnik's politicians are nearly exclusively engaged in processes of cultural commercialisation and marketing the city in order to further increase tourism. This viewpoint is evident in an interview I carried out with Dubrovnik's Mayor, Andro Vlahusic, in 2012. In the interview he argues that since Croatia and a majority of European nations have lost their traditional industries, knowledge, cultural events, cultural heritage and tourism are the only remaining resources in which European countries can produce, market and compete with today.

In cooperation with the tourist industry and backed by the media machinery, Dubrovnik's local authorities have initiated a visible local and global marketing of the city as an elite tourist destination, with the increased focus on high-end tourism, such as business-, golf-, nautical-, 'high culture-' and gourmet tourism.

There are frequent reports in the local media on how the city attracts rich and famous international guests and represents an ideal location for the film industry. Parts of the popular HBO TV series, *Game of Thrones*, is shot in Dubrovnik, and has placed the city as the 7th most popular film localities worldwide. In an interview with the local newspaper, *Dubrovacki Vjesnik*, Vlahusic estimates that the TV series has brought an additional revenue of an estimated \$10 million in direct and indirect income to the city budget annually.

The city's recovery as a popular tourism destination and the architectonic restoration of the world heritage site has helped the citizens re-establish their proud historic city identity in the aftermath of the Homeland war. The conviction that

tourism also plays an important role in helping the city and the nation out of the contemporary global economic crisis is likewise a widespread idea. Simultaneously, many citizens are increasingly concerned that the elite tourism strategies will place the needs and wishes of the local population on the side-line.

Golf Tourism

One of the political hot potatoes in Dubrovnik's local community for over a decade is '*Golf Park Dubrovnik*,' a large-scale development project on *Mount Srd*, situated on the large mountain plateau overlooking Dubrovnik's UNESCO enlisted town centre. Having formerly been a public place for anyone to roam and utilize during the Yugoslavian era, the mountain plateau is now privately owned by several owners with varying degrees of power and say in the future course of the future developments; ranging from Bosanka villagers who live on the mountain plateau to national and international developers. Since the first plots of land were acquired by the golf investment company, *Golf Razvoj*, in 2003, the company has steadily been buying up land areas from the villagers at low prizes. Many locals critical of the golf project argue that the golf company has taken advantage of the previous land-owners, many of whom have been struggling economically after the war.¹³ The ongoing conflict over the future developments on *Mount Srd*'s reflects many deeply embedded areas of contestation and power dynamics in Croatian society since national independence. How the mountain plateau's present and future developments are envisioned relate to where one's interests are placed, to one's political and ideological view-points, economic, educational and socio-cultural backgrounds, and the perceptions are thus numerous, complex and frequently marked by contradictions and sentiments of ambivalence. Moreover, the considerable scale of the golf project; a surface area 20 times the size of Dubrovnik's historic centre and twice the size of the whole city of Dubrovnik, places *Mount Srd* at the heart of contemporary constructions of identity and place.

Due to the golf investment company's promises of developing new employment opportunities and prolonging the tourist season and thus the opportunities of all-year around employment has led to some support amongst the local citizens in the development of '*Golf Park Dubrovnik*.' However, the planned golf and real estate construction on *Mount Srd* has met unprecedented grass-root political and cultural resistance locally. In 2009, widespread local discontentment over the golf project encouraged the establishment of the civil society initiative, '*Srd je naš*' ('*Srd is Ours*'), a conglomeration of six established local NGOs. The initiative's argues that the golf construction would significantly compromise Dubrovnik's cultural and natural heritage, the access to public spaces, and that the citizens' possibilities to participate in the local political processes regarding the future developments on *Mount Srd* have purposefully been excluded by politicians and developers alike. Through political lobbying, the production of own news fanzines and by organizing a large number of public events, demonstrations and discussions, the initiative have become a central grass-roots movement which has managed to gain some success in influencing the local political processes and urban developments.

Despite the local upheaval over the planned constructions on Mount Srd, in national politics golf development continues to be perceived as a central aspect of future economic development. In the national development strategy for 2012-2020, golf tourism is envisioned as a major area of future tourism development. In a press release in 2013, the Minister of Tourism, Darko Lorencin, pin-pointed golf tourism as the future 'key product' in tourism, which has the potential to elongate the tourist season and "attract a new segment of tourists."¹⁴ Although the national development strategy's focus on golf tourism as a major development area in Croatia harmonizes with the more recent attempts to re-shape Dubrovnik as an elite tourist destination, propositions of golf constructions as a central area of national economic development already appeared in national politics by the turn of the new Millennium. The belief in tourism's central role in economic and societal recovery following the 1990's Homeland war was formative in the establishment of the Ministry of Tourism's '*National Strategy for Tourism Development*' in 1999. This strategy recommended the expansion of the tourist industry by broadening the tourist attractions beyond merely offering beach and city holidays. The new element in which the strategy proposed was the development of golf tourism, as it was envisioned that this could aid in lengthening the tourist season beyond the summer months and stimulate in increasing the average duration of each tourist visit. In the tourism development strategy the construction of 27 golf terrains were proposed nationally, and it was deemed as economically beneficent to position the majority of these in the already touristy areas along the Dalmatian coast and in Istria. The large, undeveloped mountain plateau on Srd, with its spectacular views of UNESCO-listed Dubrovnik and the Adriatic Sea, was one of the locations designated as particularly attractive for golf developments. In 2003, the General Urban Plan (GPU) for Dubrovnik-Neretva County was revised and the Srd plateau was marked out as an area in which golf courses and touristic facilities were allowed.

At the start of the new millennium, during the Racan government,¹⁵ changes in spatial and urban planning regulations opened up for large-scale constructions in many areas which were previously protected from intervention. Further amendments to national laws concerning legalities of constructions and land ownership, especially the introduction of a law popularly referred to as the "golf course law"¹⁶ in January 2009, granted the government the rights to exercise eminent domain in areas which had been designated as suitable for golf developments. Eminent domain is generally intended to ensure that public projects, usually related to infrastructural developments, are not halted by objections of private owners to sell or lease their land. However, as golf tourism had been deemed as important in stimulating Croatia's economic development, the golf course law granted the government the right to delegate eminent domain to private companies who wished to invest in golf constructions.

The proponents of Srd je naš argue that the establishment of the national "golf course law" enabled investors to exploit a loop-hole in legislations regarding new developments, whereby the construction of golf courses is mainly driven by the desire to build exclusive villas and apartments, in an area otherwise protected by relatively strict urban and spatial planning laws.

In an interview I conducted with Zorislav Antun Petrovic, the former president of Transparency International Croatia (TIC, between 2002-2010), he explains how he sees the national golf laws as un-constitutional and being a prime example of how corruption, politics and private interests are interlocked in Croatia:

“The golf case is a book example of the worst possible corruption. The law on golf courses was written by the former [Sanader] government¹⁷ for several, already known investors. I tend to believe that the main investor on Srd [Golf Razvoj] was one of the investors for whom this whole law was written. In 2010 we [TIC] submitted an appeal to the Constitutional court because we believe it is a non-constitutional law, as it endangers the rights of equality for all citizens and for businesses. This law allows investors of golf courses to expropriate private land, and we see that as unacceptable.”

In 2011 the golf law was revoked, but since then many other revisions to national and local urban and spatial plans have been made, thus opening up for new ways of legitimizing the golf constructions in Dubrovnik.

In an interview with a Srd je naš activist in 2012, he explains how he sees the construction of real estate as the real motivations underlying the golf park:

“In Croatia, golf is used as an excuse to go into untouched nature, next to the most beautiful towns and surroundings and build where you cannot build in any other legal way...it's not just about building golf terrains, developing sport or tourism or work opportunities for the locals, but it's rather a large-scale construction scheme of villas and apartments.”

Places for Some or Places for All?

The concerns over the large growth of cruise-ship tourism and the controversy over the future development plans on *Mount Srd* reveal a lot about the changing roles and socio-cultural meanings in which *place* play in the construction of identities amongst different groups of Dubrovnik's population. Limitations of free movement and available spaces in Dubrovnik's tourist centre makes certain places into economic, political, cultural and symbolic battlegrounds, and become significant areas where contemporary constructions of cultural identities and place are forged and contested.

Few locals would dispute that post-war tourism investments has had many positive effects, especially on creating a faster economic recovery, in restoring the war-torn urban fabric and landscapes and in making places accessible and usable again. For this to transpire it has necessitated large investments from international entrepreneurs, developers, private and public organizations. However, the vulnerable historical period following the war and economic transition has had large consequences on contemporary power dynamics and for the possibilities of future developments. A large proportion of the money generated from tourism does not necessarily benefit the town budget, national economy or the local community at large, as a high proportion of the city's tourism facilities as well as many sought

after, central land areas, are owned by international entrepreneurs and developers, many of which are and expats living in the Croatian diaspora or constitute the ‘tycoon capitalists,’ the small elite of Croatians who have made their fortunes after independence often through having political and business connections (Barnett, 2003).

Land and real estate ownership disputes continue to be both inflammable and complicating factors in realizing new development projects. For instance this was the case in the project, *Centar iza Grada* (*the Centre behind the City*), which was commissioned on the behalf of Dubrovnik municipality. Launched as part of *European 11*, a thematized international competition in 2011, the focus on sustainable urban developments and how to create new public spaces for the citizens appeared as a promising project in combatting depopulation, reinvigorating the walled center and in providing new insights and solutions to infrastructural challenges and the pressing requirements of contemporary urban adaptation. The project area covered a space of 10,000 m² immediately outside the northern and less frequented city gate, Buža. The winner team, an architect group from Barcelona, envisioned the construction of a large underground parking house, with the establishment of, amongst others, a large city library, and shops providing everyday facilities for the local population. However, as the land area is part-owned by Dubrovnik municipality and part-owned by one of the most influential developers in post-war Croatia, the Chilean Luksic Group of Croatian derivation, the project has been halted as the different owners have not managed to find a common vision to how the land area should be developed. Like the highly sought-after land area on *Mount Srd*, being a land area right next to the UNESCO-enlisted centre, the ‘city behind the centre’ potentially represents a goldmine for the establishment of luxury real estate developments. As such, the greater good of the local citizens will generally not be of much priority to developers. The fact that this land area also falls into the buffer zone of UNESCO protection and contains a Jewish cemetery, also creates certain challenges with regards to realizing any development plans and in getting the approval from Dubrovnik’s conservation institute and from the Jewish ethnic minority group in Dubrovnik.

The open plateau of *Mount Srd* potentially provides a place of escape from the large crowds in Dubrovnik’s historic centre during the tourist season. However, the histories and futures of the mountain plateau and the city are intimately interwoven into the experiences, life-stories, and the ebb and flow of Dubrovnik’s civilization. This makes any potential developments into a symbolic and emotional battlefield, aspects of which developers, politicians and activists frequently utilize in their rhetoric when legitimizing or delegitimizing ‘*Golf Park Dubrovnik*.’

The advantageous geographical positioning of *Mount Srd* played an important role in Dubrovnik’s longevity as a Republic, and the mountain plateau’s cultural history in Dubrovnik is intertwined with local cultural recollection, individual’s life-worlds and collective, symbolic expressions throughout the times. As the city’s highest view-point towards the sea and a protective mountain range towards the Balkan interior, *Srd* has always constituted one of the principal strategic positions

for preparing or defending the city against attacks. Interwoven with the ubiquitous, local *libertas* (freedom) discourse, Srd simultaneously represents a place where the city's freedom is defended and where its religious and cultural borders are drawn. Mount Srd's cultural symbolism of defense and freedom has been reinvigorated in recent history, as it served as the main line of defence against the Serbian-Montenegrin siege of Dubrovnik in 1991-1992. The meanings of the freedom discourse are today expanded to also include aspects such as the freedom to or from developing, utilizing and roaming the land.

While some Dubrovnikans see the mountain plateau as a neglected, barren wasteland and a potential goldmine for further expanding the tourist industry and in boosting the economy, to others it entails one of the last areas of 'unspoiled' land in Dubrovnik, and its protection from large-scale interventions is seen as vital to the city's longevity as a heritage site and to ensure a living city for the local population. The reflections of a male activist in *Srd je naš*, makes the strong sense of 'lost spaces' apparent:

"The crowds we have here during the summer means that people don't have space to live their lives, so Srd is in the heart of Dubrovnik. Whatever is planned there will affect us. Instead of planning another area for recreation, education, living quarters, or sports facilities that will help the town... if you make this into a resort, put it behind a wire and say; 'locals prohibited'...and 'stay away', then you occupy the heart of the town, and all future generations have lost any kind of opportunity for real urban planning."

Nearly 13 years after 'Golf Park Dubrovnik' was first launched, the project remains unresolved. The difficulty of reconciling the diverse intentions and perceptions of the different local, national and international interest groups' and in creating a mutual, productive and inclusive dialogue from the first conceptualization of the golf park can partially explain this.

After lobbying against the planned golf development for several years, *Srd je naš* contacted UNESCO in 2012 and expressed their concerns that the increase and poor management of cruise-ship tourism and Golf Park Dubrovnik is compromising the universal cultural heritage value of Dubrovnik and negatively affecting its citizen's quality of life. Based on *Srd je naš*' appeal, UNESCO has necessitated that the Croatian State Party and Dubrovnik municipality need to create a new action plan, several thorough impact analysis of the socio-cultural, environmental, visual and economic consequences of the golf project and cruise-ship tourism. In July 2016 the World Heritage committee will evaluate whether it once again will be indispensable to place Dubrovnik on UNESCO's list for world heritage in danger. Due to the Homeland war's material damages Dubrovnik was inscribed on the world heritage in danger between 1991 and 1998. A re-inscription of the city being a heritage site in danger would not only be a blow to the population's proud urban identity, but would also be a setback to Dubrovnik's tourism industry.

The EU – New Opportunities for Sustainable Urban Development?

After a decade of international negotiations and the implementation of a large number of socio-economic, judiciary and political reforms, Croatia's eventual EU accession in 2013 marked to many citizens a symbolic 'reunion' with a Western-European 'cultural community' and subsequently a 'break' with the Balkans, a region with historic connotations of war, instability and political conflict. Processes of democratization, increased transparency and combatting corruption were some of the key issues and requirements in the EU negotiations and many Croatians saw EU membership as a new beginning and opportunity to steer towards sustainable development.

The controversy surrounding Golf Park Dubrovnik reveals that civil society groups are increasingly becoming agentive in steering social and political reforms in contemporary Croatia. However, the deep-rooted climate of distrust in the population at large, as well as the lack of recognition and initiative amongst the political leadership, especially at regional and local levels in combatting societal challenges, may prove to be impediments in making real changes domestically and not just symbolic gestures directed at the international community. Belloni (2009) argues that:

"The process of [European] integration remains visibly top-down despite the stated commitment to rely on local institutions and civil society...The European approach still lacks political unity...and does not fully mobilize reformist forces in the region, particularly civil society groups" (2009:330).

Encouraging European institutions' to increase their cooperation and support of Croatian civil society initiatives, may aid in stimulating reform programs at localized, grass-root levels, and provide the seeds of change towards increased societal transparency and locally integrated developments. However, the lack of resolution regarding future developments on Mount Srđ and the difficulty of establishing a mutual dialogue between the different interest groups highlights the necessity of addressing the extent to which civil society has agency to provide channels for societal reforms within the current political and cultural parameters of contemporary Croatia.

Land ownership disputes, a crippling bureaucracy and legal system, corruption and transparency issues are central challenges in post-independence Croatia, and initiating programs attempting to tackle these have been unconditional requirements to the nation's accession to the EU. Yet, many Croatians see these problems as nearly impossible to combat as they are too deep-rooted and ever-present in most aspects of their society. According to a qualitative report on the experiences and perceptions of corruption in Croatia (UNODC, 2011), only 9% think that corruption is declining, where as 44% and 47% accordingly believe it to be stable or on the rise. These sentiments are concurrent with my ethnographic findings for my doctorate research. Many informants believe that Croatia's sudden, and arguably unplanned transition from communism to global capitalism, has exacerbated and opened up for new areas of corruption. Furthermore, there is a wide-spread

belief in Croatian society at large, that the pressing needs for economic and infrastructural restoration and developments following the Homeland war have made the society particularly vulnerable to exploitation by domestic and international ‘snatch and grab’ investors who are in league with crooked politicians.

Post-war tourism promotion and development projects in Croatia generally have pay little heed to community development and quality of life for the local population. However, Croatia’s EU membership has simultaneously opened up to many new opportunities for funding of projects to foster sustainable urban developments and urban regeneration. For instance, the EU financed project, EUPLETT (2014-2015) is potentially a step in the right direction towards creating urban sustainability. Through a network of five European cities, which all undergo similar challenges with regards to tourism, urban developments and confinements of public spaces, they work together in attempting to ‘developing vibrant town centres together’ by re-envisioning how new urban spaces and meeting-points can be developed.¹⁸

Conclusion

Tourism’s Potential in Cultural ‘Bridge Building’

The personal and cultural traumas and humiliation caused by the four year long war is often glossed over in tourism promotion and the city is represented as a city restored to its former glory and a sought after elite tourist destination. The extent to which integrated, community-based tourism projects have a potential to aid in helping post-war societies re-find dignity and meaning, and not just help in economic terms, is almost entirely absent in local and regional tourism developments. However, in the recent years there have been some promising examples of small-scale initiatives which attempt to utilize tourism’s potential in stimulating towards revitalizing ethnic- and cultural dialogue, local, sustainable development and persisting peace in the region. Only one decade ago many locals perceived cooperation on tourism projects across the national borders as both undesired and improbable, and when some Dubrovnik based tourism agencies first re-established contact with Montenegrin and Bosnian tourism agencies around the turn of the Millennium they received a lot of resistance from parts of the local population. Today, tourism projects established in cooperation between Dubrovnik, Herzeg Novi in Montenegro and Trebinje in Bosnia-Herzegovina, stand as promising examples of how tourism can contribute towards re-establishing trust between the different ethnic and religious groups in the cities which 25 years ago fought against each other, and where a ‘silent hostility’ still exists today.¹⁹

In order to successfully implement new construction and development schemes it is thus of paramount importance to create transparency of the scope and intentions of the project at an early stage, as well as to pertain to the local population’s diverse perceptions, needs and wishes in their conceptualization. In the aftermath of the 1990’s wars in the Western Balkans the wounds are still omnipresent in the region. Steering towards a responsible tourism can potentially aid in healing some of these wounds and in reconciling the composite populations by providing ways of working together in order to safeguard regional stability and sustainable development.

Endnotes

- 1 Croatia and Slovenia declared their independence from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on June 25th 1991. Croatian independence was followed by the bloody and highly destructive Croatian War of Independence/the Homeland war (Domovinski rat), which lasted from 1991-1995.
- 2 22% of Croatia's GDP comes from tourism.
- 3 Dubrovnik was inscribed on the UNESCO world heritage list in 1979.
- 4 Serbia and Montenegro have started EU negotiations. Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Albania are also likely future membership candidates (http://eeas.europa.eu/western_balkans/index_en.htm).
- 5 <http://www.hcr.hr/en/protuminUvod.asp>.
- 6 <http://www.tportal.hr/kultura/208protivmina/227332/Kako-mine-koce-hrvatsko-gospodarstvo.html>
- 7 <http://www.poslovni.hr/hrvatska/cilj-je-udvostruciti-potrosnju-do-2020-251012>
- 8 http://www.atlant.hr/eng/povijest_dubrovackog_pomorstva.php
- 9 Interview with Antun Asic, September 2015.
- 10 [Visit.dubrovnik.hr/blog/?p=2019](http://visit.dubrovnik.hr/blog/?p=2019)
- 11 The Association of Friends of Dubrovnik's Antiquities
- 12 Cruise-ship arrivals reached its peak in 2013 with 1 086 925 passengers. Due to restrictions placed on cruise-ship arrivals, the total number was 844410 passengers in 2014 (Dubrovnik Port Authorities).
- 13 Most houses in Bosanka were burned and looted during the siege of Dubrovnik (October 1991- May 1992).
- 14 <http://www.poslovni.hr/hrvatska/cilj-je-udvostruciti-potrosnju-do-2020-251012>
- 15 As the head of the centre-left Social Democratic Party (SDP - Socijaldemokratska partija), Ivica Račan (1944-2007) served as Croatia's prime minister (2000 – 2003).
- 16 Zakon o golf igralištima.
- 17 Petrovic refers to the Ivo Sanader government (HDZ - Croatian Democratic Union) 2003-2009.
- 18 <http://euplett.eu/>
- 19 Draganic, A, 2012, *At the Crossroads*, 2012 and Simpson, M, 2010, *Managing Multi-ethnic Cities in South-Eastern Europe*.

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