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THE PERCEPTION OF SAINT NICHOLAS BY ITALIAN, RUSSIAN AND TURKISH PEOPLE IN TERMS OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

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Abstract

The study discusses the level of perception of Saint Nicholas by people with different cultures from Italy, Russia and Turkey. The study aims to determine the cultural awareness of nationally different people and its potential impact on creating sustainable tourism destinations based on Saint Nicholas' cultural heritage. The perception of Saint Nicholas by culturally different people has been determined according to their nationality and gender. Therefore, a questionnaire of 20 questions has been given to 100 people in total living in Russia, Turkey and Italy. Findings of the study have indicated that the image of Saint Nicholas should be promoted to the population of areas with Saint's heritage sites. Cultural and historical reasons are indicated as the most motivating for participants to learn more about Saint Nicholas and heritage sites related to him. The results of the study should be taken into consideration of local administrations of areas with Saint Nicholas' heritage sites to choose the right directions in promoting programs.

Keywords: Saint Nicholas, sustainable tourism, heritage tourism, cultural awareness, pilgrimage

Introduction

There is a lot of research nowadays devoted to the study of tourism. These studies define various aspects of tourism, its types, its impact on the economy, social and cultural spheres of people's lives. One of the main ideas of these studies is the necessity of creating the sustainable tourism products based on the cultural values, ecological, historical, religious interests, which will satisfy the needs for both foreign and native tourists, and, at the same time, sustainable tourism will not affect the host side in a negative way, but it will be useful for the development of the area.

Saint Nicholas is a significant saint in Catholic and Orthodox Christian religions, his image as Santa Claus is also very popular in non-Christian countries, traces of Saint Nicholas' cultural heritage can be found in different countries. In this regard, cultural awareness of Saint Nicholas and perception of his figure as a symbol of common cultural heritage could play a great role in creating sustainable tourism destinations.

The figure of Saint Nicholas has a great value for Italian and Russian people as the Saint is among the most important saints of the Christian religion, which was reflected in tangible heritage as famous icons and churches and intangible heritage as the traditions of veneration, holidays and festivals in honour of Saint Nicholas. Image of Saint Nicholas has transformed into the globally well-known Santa Claus, which is also very popular in non-Catholic countries like Turkey. Additionally, Demre, Turkey, is the place where Saint Nicholas was born and lived. The Church where the relicts of Saint Nicholas were originally buried is located in Demre. Bari, Italy and Demre, Turkey are the places of heritage sites of Saint Nicholas. Both cities attract tourists (mainly from Russia) because they are related to figure of the Saint. The areas have opportunities to use their heritage to create sustainable tourism products and get benefits from it. In this study, we define the ways of perception of Saint Nicholas by Italian, Russian and Turkish people so we can trace the connection between the awareness of Saint Nicholas and capability to create attractive sustainable tourism destination based on the heritage related to the saint.

The Aim of the Study

The aim of the study is to determinate the cultural awareness of nationally different participants on Saint Nicholas' figure.

The Research Questions of the Study

The research questions of the study are as follows:

1. Do the participants have cultural awareness of Saint Nicholas?
2. Is there a significant difference in cultural awareness on Saint Nicholas of the participants according to their nationality?
3. Is there a significant difference in cultural awareness on Saint Nicholas of the participants according to gender?

Figure of Saint Nicholas in Terms of Cultural Heritage

Saint Nicholas is an important figure in Christianity. As religion is considered to be a part of the intangible cultural heritage, the image of Saint becomes an important element of heritage in the areas where the majority of the population are Christians, such as Italy and Russia. The story of Saint Nicholas has begun in the city of Demre, Turkey where the heritage sites related Saint Nicholas can be found. The character of Santa Claus, which was created based on Saint Nicholas' personality, became famous all over the world due to the cultural popularization, which has started in the USA. Therefore, Saint Nicholas could be called a symbol of common cultural heritage for people in different countries with different cultures.

Nowadays Saint Nicholas is venerated as Wonderworker in Russia and as a patron saint of children, sailors, travellers, scholars, captives in the western tradition. He is known as the friend and protector of all in trouble or need. Sailors, claiming Saint Nicholas as patron, carried stories of his favour and protection far and wide. Saint Nicholas chapels were built in many seaports. As his popularity spread during the Middle Ages, he became the patron saint of Apulia (Italy), Sicily, Greece, and Lorraine (France), and many cities in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Russia, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

Saint Nicholas became very popular in the West again in the 19th century, when writers, poets and artists rediscovered the old stories. In 1823 the famous poem "A Visit from Saint Nicholas" or "It was the Night before Christmas" by Clement Clark Moore, was published. In 1863 the magazine "Harper's Weekly" published the first illustration of St Nicholas/St Nick by Thomas Nast. Over the next 20 years,

Thomas Nast continued to draw Santa every Christmas, so his modified image became famous (Bennett, 2009).

Saint Nicholas is vastly popular in Russia. With Saint Andrew the Apostle, he is regarded as the patron saint of the nation. This special attitude towards the Saint has a long history started in 11th century.

The name of Saint Nicholas as 'Russia God' was found in the evidence of foreigners in the 16th century, who were amazed by this feature of Russian Orthodoxy. The idea of St Nicholas as a god was widely spread in the folk environment, where Nicholas was associated with ancient still pagan deities. In addition, there were cases when he was revered as the 'forth' face of Holy Trinity, and the days of his memory were honoured above the main Christian holidays.

The latest example of that special attitude and veneration of the saint was the event conducted in collaboration with Russian Orthodox and Italian Catholic Churches in May-June 2017. Pope Francis and Patriarch Cyril agreed that a part of the relics of St Nicholas would be delivered to Russia in February 2016 during the meeting in Cuba.

The relics were in Russia for 69 days, 53 of which in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow. In early July the relics were taken to the Alexander Nevsky Lavra of St. Petersburg. During the stay in Russia, about 2.5 millions of people have visited and worshipped the relics of the saint.

Russian people talked about the event, the news about the shrine of Saint Nicholas was shown on prime time on main television channels. It was on first pages of the newspapers and internet news resources. Event indicated the great importance of the figure of the saint for people not only in religious context but also in the context of the cultural heritage. Traditions of veneration of Saint Nicholas had a significant influence on cultural consciousness of Russians. Not only devoted Orthodox Russian people were involved, but also non-religious people have realized the importance of the organization and tried to be part of the event of such a grand scale.

Bringing the relics of Saint Nicholas from Bari to Russia has also shown that two Confessions successfully could act together and unite people of different cultures and countries. It was a very positive accomplishment of the whole event.

Nowadays, the relics of Saint Nicholas are located in Bari, Italy. The Basilica di San Nicola (Saint Nicholas) was founded in 1087 to receive the relics of this saint, which were brought from Myra in Lycia, and now lie beneath the altar in the crypt. It is situated in the old town of the city.

There is a long history of special "warm" relations between Russian Church and Bari, Italy. Russian community had approved and supported the transfer of Saint Nicholas relics from Demre, Turkey to Bari, Italy in the 11th century even though it was kind of an ambiguous act; the relics were taken by Italian merchants without any permission from Turkey.

Since 1915 (the date is approximate), the Orthodox Church of Nicholas the Miracle-Worker has been operating in Bari. The church and the courtyard were built on money collected throughout Russia.

There is a special festival in honour of Saint Nicholas which takes place in Bari and attracts a lot of tourists. The holiday lasts three days - from 7 to 9 May.

According to regional tourism statistic reports, Puglia region where the city of Bari is located was in 9th place in Italy (among 20 regions) in terms of the number of visitors in 2016 and hosted 3,6% of all tourists. Tourism in Puglia region has the seasonal specific; the number of visitors is higher during summer months. In January 2017 the number of tourists, including local, was 192.314, in July 2017 it increased to 3.624.149. Russian tourists make about 1,5% of the whole tourist flow to Puglia, most of them stay in Bari (Osservatorio nazionale del turismo, 2017).

Another heritage site related to Saint Nicholas is located in Demre, one of the cities of Antalya region. The ancient city of Myra is very near to modern Demre. The distance from Antalya to Demre is 140 km.

The city of Demre received its wide popularity mainly due to the fact that the church of Saint Nicholas is located here. It is considered the third most important religious construction of Byzantine architecture in the East. Saint Nicholas, after his death, was buried in his church.

Annually, on December 6, the day of the death of St. Nicholas, Christians from all corners of the world gather in the temple for funeral services and to worship the holy relics.

Today, the church of St. Nicholas in Demre (Turkey) functions as a museum, everyone can visit it for a modest fee.

The region of Antalya is a well-known tourist destination. Every year tourists from all over the world come to Antalya. The major tourist flow is from Russia. One of the popular tourist products is an excursion, which includes a visit to Demre and Church of Saint Nicholas. The standard tour called 'Demre-Mira-Kekova' also includes visiting other attractions like the ruins of the ancient city of Myra and rocky Lycian tombs.

Antalya is a popular destination but tourism has strictly seasonal character. According to data, collected by Antalya Provincial Culture and Tourism Directorate, the total number of visitors of Antalya region in January 2015 (low season) was 117.746, 13% (12.870 visitors) were Russian tourists. In July 2015 (high season) the total number of Antalya visitors was 2.036.137 and 29% (567.887) were from Russia. Naturally, attendance of Saint Nicholas museum complex in Demre also depends on the touristic season. In January 2015 total number of visitors of the complex was 4.633 and in July 2015 it increased to 63.510. During the summer season, Saint Nicholas church becomes one of the most popular attractions for tourists among museum complexes in Antalya, 15,75% from the total number of museum complexes visitors (T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Antalya İl Kültür ve Turizm Müdürlüğü, 2016).

Method

The quantitative method was used in our research as we attempted to collect comparable standardised information from people in Italy, Russia and Turkey so it would be possible to collate the results, define the patterns and analyse it according to the possible cultural distinction of people with different demographic characteristics.

Quantitative data collection method included paper and online questionnaires. The target sample of the study was people from Italy, Russia and Turkey. Random sampling was chosen as the sampling strategy.

Numbered data was analysed using statistical procedures. The results of the questionnaire have been analysed with SPSS Statistics 21. Parametric statistical methods are used as the awareness score has a normal distribution. A t-test is used to analyse the distribution of the awareness score according to gender and nationality.

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

100 people filled in the questionnaire in total. 33% of participants are from Italy, 33% are from Russia and 34% are from Turkey. The equal division of responders according to their nationalities was made on purpose to make the results more comparable in terms of cultural differences. 39 men and 61 women took part in the survey. Gender distribution in three countries does not show any specific characteristics. Most of the respondents are between 21 – 60 years old (21-40 years old – 41%, 41-60

years old – 29%). Respondents show a university level of education, 48% of all respondents have Bachelor degree and 14% of all respondents have Master’s degree and PhD. Distribution of participants according to their religion is not accidental. Italian responders indicated Catholic Christianity (29% of all participants) as their religion, Russian responders pointed Orthodox Christianity (29% of all participants), and Turkish responders designated Islam (32% of all participants). 10% of survey responders indicated themselves as Atheists.

Findings and Discussion

Cultural Awareness on Saint Nicholas

Part of the questionnaire directly related to cultural awareness of participants consists of multi-choice questions about facts of real life of Saint Nicholas, his deeds and cultural heritage related to him. Participants had to choose the right answer from 5 suggested options.

The question about Saint Nicholas as a patron saint got more correct answers than other questions (92% of all responders gave the correct response). Questions about the date of the Day of Saint Nicholas and, where the image of Santa Claus was formed, had the smallest number of correct answers. For the rest questions, the ratio of correct and incorrect responses was 61%-67% correct and 33% - 39% incorrect.

Table 1: Cultural awareness on Saint Nicholas: number of correct and incorrect answers according to nationality of participants

	Number of correct answers			Number of incorrect answers		
	Italian	Russian	Turkish	Italian	Russian	Turkish
1. Where did St. Nicholas spend most of his life?	16	23	28	17	10	5
2. What did St. Nicholas do in real life?	15	26	21	18	7	12
3. What was one of the most known deeds of St. Nicholas?	19	19	24	14	14	9
4. St. Nicholas is the patron saint of?	30	29	33	3	4	0
5. Nowadays you can visit relics of St. Nicholas in?	25	28	8	8	5	25
6. When is the St. Nicholas Day celebrated?	16	27	8	17	6	25

7. In which country modern image of Santa Claus (based on personality of Saint Nicholas) was formed?	15	20	15	18	13	18
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Responders from Russia gave generally correct answers to all questions. High cultural awareness of Saint Nicholas caused by a long tradition of veneration of the Saint by Russian people, which was described in studies of foreign and local authors. Questions which caused difficulties were about the place where Saint Nicholas spent his life (30% incorrect answers) and about the famous deed of the Saint (42% incorrect answers). Italian respondents gave more correct answers to the question about Saint Nicholas as a patron saint of children and sailors (90% correct answers). 75% of participants from Italy answered correctly to the question about the place where you can visit the relics of Saint Nicholas. As the relics of the Saint are located in Bari, Italy, it was expected to get high per cent of correct answers from Italian respondents. Respondents from Turkey had high per cent of correct answers to questions about Saint Nicholas as a patron saint (100% correct answers), the place where the Saint spent the most of his life (82% correct answers) and the most known deed of Saint Nicholas (70% correct answers). Saint Nicholas has spent the most of his life in Demre which is located in Turkey, thus, it is logical, that majority of Turkish participants gave the correct answer to this question. On the other side, 73% of Turkish responders gave the incorrect answers to the questions about the place where the relics of Saint Nicholas are located and when the Day of Saint Nicholas is celebrated. The big number of incorrect answers is an indicator of lack of promotion of Saint Nicholas figure as part of multicultural heritage.

The results of t-test showed that gender of respondents do not impact on their cultural awareness of Saint Nicholas. But, on the other side, nationality of the participants has influence on the level of cultural knowledge about Saint Nicholas. Russian participants gave more correct answers, then participants from Italy and Turkey.

Table 2: T-test: Impact of the gender of participants on cultural awareness on Saint Nicholas

	gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	s value
Awareness_score	male	39	4,4615	1,46622	0,95*
	female	61	4,4426	1,44366	

*s>0.05 indicates that impact of gender on the awareness score is not statistically significant. Gender of the participants does not affect awareness score.

Table 3: T-test: Impact of nationality of participants on cultural awareness on Saint Nicholas awareness score

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	s value
Russian	33	5,2121	1,47389	,25657	0,001*
Italian	33	4,1212	1,34065	,23338	
Turkish	34	4,0294	1,24280	,21314	

*s<0.01 indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between Italian, Russian and Turkish participants in terms of their awareness scores. The awareness score of the Russians is higher than the Turks and Italians.

For most of the participants from Russia and Turkey Saint Nicholas is associated with Christmas: 48,5% of the Russian respondents and 79,4% of the Turkish respondents. For most of the Italian respondents (48,5%) the name of Saint Nicholas is connected with miracles. In general, Saint Nicholas is associated with Christmas (48% of all respondents). It is the evident result of a connection between the image of Santa Claus (Saint Nicholas) and Christmas, which was formed in the 16th-19th centuries in western tradition and later had a great development all over the world by extension of popularity of western cultural values.

Most of the participants would like to learn new information about Saint Nicholas due to cultural reasons (54%), then due to historical reasons (29%). Cultural reasons were more significant for Russian respondents (60,6%) and for Turkish (73,5%). For Italian participants, historical reasons are more important (36,4%), religious and cultural reasons affect the motivation in learning new facts about the Saint of 27,3% of Italian respondents each.

Cultural reasons to visit the places related to Saint Nicholas would be more significant for most of the participants (55% of respondents), historical reasons would be more important for 30% of all participants. Comparing answers of the participants by nationality, the most of the Italian respondents (42,4%) picked historical reasons as more motivating to visit Saint Nicholas' heritage sites. Religious reasons to visit Saint Nicholas' places would not be significant for Turkish participants at all and most of the respondents (76,5%) chose cultural reasons.

Table 4: What do you associate more with name of St. Nicholas (Santa Claus)?

Nationality			Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Russian	Valid	Miracles	4	12,1	12,1	12,1
		Christmas	16	48,5	48,5	60,6
		Christian religion	6	18,2	18,2	78,8
		Certain place / city	4	12,1	12,1	90,9
		Historical character	3	9,1	9,1	100,0
		Total	33	100,0	100,0	
Italian	Valid	Miracles	16	48,5	48,5	48,5
		Christmas	5	15,2	15,2	63,6
		Christian religion	9	27,3	27,3	90,9
		Historical character	3	9,1	9,1	100,0
		Total	33	100,0	100,0	
		Turkish	Valid	Miracles	4	11,8
Christmas	27			79,4	79,4	91,2
Christian religion	1			2,9	2,9	94,1
Historical character	2			5,9	5,9	100,0
Total	34			100,0	100,0	

Table 5: What kind of reasons could affect your motivation for learning new information about St. Nicholas the most?

Nationality			Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Russian	Valid	Religious	2	6,1	6,1	6,1
		Historical	11	33,3	33,3	39,4
		Cultural	20	60,6	60,6	100,0
Italian	Valid	Religious	9	27,3	27,3	27,3
		Historical	12	36,4	36,4	63,6
		Cultural	9	27,3	27,3	90,9
		Others	3	9,1	9,1	100,0
Turkish	Valid	Religious	2	5,9	5,9	5,9
		Historical	6	17,6	17,6	23,5
		Cultural	25	73,5	73,5	97,1
		Others	1	2,9	2,9	100,0

Table 6: What kind of reasons would be more significant for you if you would decide to visit the places related to St. Nicholas (Santa Claus)?

Nationality			Frequency	Per cent	Valid cent	Per Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Russian	Valid	Religious	4	12,1	12,1		12,1
		Historical	10	30,3	30,3		42,4
		Cultural	19	57,6	57,6		100,0
		Total	33	100,0	100,0		
Italian	Valid	Religious	7	21,2	21,2		21,2
		Historical	14	42,4	42,4		63,6
		Cultural	10	30,3	30,3		93,9
		Others	2	6,1	6,1		100,0
		Total	33	100,0	100,0		
Turkish	Valid	Historical	6	17,6	17,6		17,6
		Cultural	26	76,5	76,5		94,1
		Others	2	5,9	5,9		100,0
		Total	34	100,0	100,0		

Conclusions

Saint Nicholas has a great importance for Italian and Russian people as he is considered as one of the most important saints in Christianity. For Russian people, this special attitude towards the Saint has a long history started from 11th century. There are heritage sites related to Saint Nicholas in Bari, Italy and Demre, Turkey. Russian tourists make up a certain part of the touristic flow to these regions. Both areas have potential to develop sustainable tourism based on cultural heritage.

According to the findings of the study, despite on popularity of Saint Nicholas (and especially his image as Santa Claus), the cultural awareness of the Saint is not that high. Most of the participants correctly indicated that Saint Nicholas is a patron saint of children and sailors, but more than 30% of all respondents do not know about heritage sites related to Saint Nicholas in Demre, Turkey, where Saint Nicholas spent the most of his life, and in Bari, Italy, where relics of the Saint are located since 11th century. The results of T-test and ANOVA showed that gender of the participants do not significantly affect the cultural awareness. The nationality of participants has a statistically significant influence on cultural awareness. Russian participants are more culturally aware on Saint Nicholas then Italian and Turkish, which shows that Saint Nicholas should be better promoted for the local population of the areas with Saint Nicholas heritage sites.

The results of the study show, that the disposition of participants towards Saint Nicholas does not significantly change according to their nationality. In general, participants would like to learn more information about Saint Nicholas and visit places related to him, more than 75% of all respondents. Respondents can see the cultural value of Saint Nicholas for people in different counties and consider him as the symbol of common cultural heritage. The study detected that mostly cultural and historical reasons would affect the motivation of participants to learn more about Saint Nicholas and visit places related to him. Popularisation of Saint Nicholas' image should take into account these findings.

Suggestions

Participants suggested that organising tour and events related to Saint Nicholas, education and media activities, financial support of heritage sites related and advertising should advance the image of Saint Nicholas in terms of tourism and culture. These ideas could be a good contribution in creating effective promotion program of Saint Nicholas and places related to him.

The results of the study should be taken into consideration by the administrations of the areas with Saint Nicholas heritage sites. Our study offers suggestive evidence that image of Saint Nicholas and locations of heritage related to the Saint should be promoted to create sustainable tourism destinations. It should give positive effects to the areas and local people, who should become aware of their cultural past, thus, it should unite them in cultural terms and bring benefits to economic-social life. The realisation of the figure of Saint Nicholas in terms of common cultural heritage for different countries with different cultures should make a large contribution to international communication and cooperation.

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