

Commodifying Things Past: Comparative Study of Heritage Tourism Practices in Montenegro and Serbia

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Abstract : This paper presents a critical inquiry into the role of uncomfortable heritage in nation branding with the particular focus on the specificities of the politics of memory, forgetting and revisionism in the post-communist post-Yugoslavia. It addresses legacies of unwanted, ambivalent or unacknowledged past and different strategies employed by the former-Yugoslav states and private actors in “rebranding” their heritage, ensuring its preservation, but re-contextualizing the narrative of the past through contemporary tourism practices. It questions the interplay between nostalgia, heritage and market, and the role of heritage in polishing the history of totalitarian and authoritarian regimes in the Balkans. It argues that in post-socialist Yugoslavia, the necessity to limit correlations with former ideology and the use of the commercial brush in shaping a marketable version of the past instigated the emergence of the profit-oriented heritage practices. Building on that argument, the paper addresses these issues as “commodification” and “disneyfication” of Balkans’ ambivalent heritage, contributing to the analysis of changing forms of memorialisation and heritagization practices in Europe. It questions the process of ‘coming to terms with the past’ through marketable forms of heritage tourism, fetching the boundary between market-driven nostalgia and state-imposed heritage policies. In order to analyse plurality of ways of dealing with controversial, ambivalent and unwanted heritage of dictatorships in the Balkans, the paper considers two prominent examples of heritage commodification in Serbia and Montenegro, and the re-appropriations of those narratives for the nation branding purposes. The first one is the story of the Tito’s Blue Train, the landmark of the socialist past and the symbol of Yugoslavia which has nowadays being used for birthday parties and marriage celebrations, while the second emphasises the unusual business arrangement turning the fortress Mamula, former concentration camp through the Second World War, into a luxurious Mediterranean resort. Questioning how the ‘uneasy’ past was acknowledged and embedded into the official heritage institutions and tourism practices, study examines the changing relation towards the legacies of dictatorships, inviting us to rethink the economic models of the things past. Analysis of these processes should contribute to better understanding of the new mnemonics strategies and (converging?) ways of ‘doing’ past in Europe.

Keywords : commodification, heritage tourism, totalitarianism, Serbia, Montenegro

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