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## **AESTHETIC AWARENESS AND SPECTACLE: COMMUNICATED IMAGES OF NOVI SAD (SERBIA), THE EXIT FESTIVAL, AND THE PETROVARADIN FORTRESS**

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More research and discussion is needed to understand how destination image and awareness links to aesthetic portrayals. Representations of image, awareness, and aesthetics are embedded in textual content, and the narratives portrayed offer valuable meaning that is open to interpretation. Newspaper articles and websites play a crucial role in creating and presenting new images of places to international audiences. While image is certain, what is often overlooked in textual sources are discussions addressing the importance of aesthetics, which also link to destination image and awareness. The city of Novi Sad, Serbia represents a unique case given the location of the city's popular music event, the Exit Festival, which attracts youths from across the former Yugoslavia, Europe and the world and has contributed to a new image of Serbia. Moreover, the event's unique setting, held in the Petrovaradin Fortress on the banks of the Danube River overlooking Novi Sad, is described in relation to historical/cultural ambiance, and aesthetic attributes. Sources analyzed stressed the beauty of Novi Sad and the festival venue, but mere notions of spectacle could not be ignored. Discussions of image, awareness, and aesthetic dimensions presented in newspaper content and websites are analyzed in this article to understand how the festival textual content challenges us to re-create place meanings of Serbia.

Key words: Aesthetics; Image; Awareness; Spectacle; Novi Sad, Serbia; Exit Festival

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### Introduction

Place images, settings, and landscape features are significant areas of research in tourism and geography (Cosgrove, 1984; Daniels, DeLyser, Entrikin, & Richardson, 2011; Knudsen, Greer, Metro-Roland, & Soper, 2008; Olwig, 1996; Rickly-Boyd,

Knudsen, Braverman, & Metro-Roland, 2015; Wang, 2005; Williams & Lew, 2015; Wise, 2011; Wylie, 2007). Meanings embedded in landscapes are complex, and landscapes have the power to define a place's identity and heritage (Daniels et al., 2011; Wylie, 2007). Aesthetics, and the presentation of aesthetics, are vital towards forging (new

images of places; moreover, cultural and natural landscape features greatly assist how we understand aspects of aesthetic design and/or representation (Arntzen & Brady, 2008; Kirillova, Fu, Lehto, & Cai, 2014; Maitland & Smith, 2009; Strannegård & Strannegård, 2012; Weaver, 2009). It has been acknowledged that aesthetics influence destination choice because people want to experience and gaze at the beauty of natural or cultural landscapes (Andrews, 1989; Barretto, 2013; Besermenji, Pivac & Wallrabenstein, 2010; Colbert, 2002; Ely 2003; Waterton & Watson, 2014). Knudsen et al. (see the article in this issue) suggest there is not only a need to construct an understanding of aesthetic concepts based around place and landscape, but it is important to explore how aesthetic meanings are communicated. Studies have assessed the role of representations and meaning of place concerning destination image and awareness (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2002; Hennessey, Yun, MacDonald, & MacEachern, 2010; Mulec & Wise, 2012). What is missing from the literature is a discussion that addresses how aesthetics contribute to place representations through narratives found in newspaper and online content. Therefore, this article attempts to address these points by acknowledging a place (Novi Sad, Serbia), an event (Exit Festival), and a venue landscape (Petrovaradin Fortress) to interpret elements of aesthetics in relation to destination image and awareness.

The city of Novi Sad, Serbia represents a unique case given the location of the city's popular music event, the Exit Festival, held in a medieval fortress. The Exit Festival has contributed to bringing international visitors to Serbia in recent years, and the performance and setting itself relate to what Maitland and Smith (2009) refer to as aesthetic consumption. Content from newspapers and online websites describe destinations and events; however, interpretations into the meaning of the content being communicated challenges us to understand how aesthetics representations are incorporated into the narratives to exemplify a place. Therefore, such discourses not only shape destination images, they go further to embed aesthetic meanings by describing landscapes and experiences in the setting. In the case of Novi Sad and the Exit Festival, how the landscape and event is narrated highlights significant attributes, but a further critical interpretation

challenges us not to overlook how the notion of a media spectacle can overshadow the focus on image, awareness, and aesthetics.

### *The Exit Festival*

Throughout the 1990s, the Western Balkans was a region of geopolitical dispute as the former Republic of Yugoslavia was violently fragmented by a turbulent war (see Rogel, 2004). Focusing on Serbia, the war negatively affected the country's national image and deterred international visitors, causing the country to rapidly stagnate. In Novi Sad, images of destroyed infrastructure, bombings, and international interventions were conveyed to global audiences through the media. Conflict left Novi Sad city and much of Serbia in a state of despair, thus deterring visitors. International audiences consumed negative images of Serbia as a country with much violence and political corruption, thereby projecting fearful imaginations and left the country isolated.

In 2000 a youth-led movement began in Novi Sad as a response to the atrocities in Serbia throughout the 1990s. The Exit movement, which led to the Exit Festival, was organized by students from the University of Novi Sad. During this time, youths gathered to protest against the policies of Serbia's then president, Slobodan Milošević. Since Exit's origin in 2000, the festival has been visited by more than 2 million people from around the world, and continues to convey sociopolitical messages pertinent to contemporary global issues and struggles. What started as a passive political protest has evolved into one of the most popular annual music festivals in Europe. What is considered unique about this festival is the event is held in the Petrovaradin Fortress, located just across the Danube River from Novi Sad. The venue is a medieval fortress, a historical structure that is a symbol of history and local heritage, but is more recently renowned for the contemporary festival.

Although the Exit Movement was a political demonstration, messages across Serbia in 2000 were *otpor* (resistance and the people's movement against the Milošević regime) and *gotov je* (a slogan used referring to the end of Milošević's rule). People in Serbia often referred to the movement as the beginning of the end of Slobodan Milošević's

rule, and 10 days following the Exit movement the first democratic government was established in Serbia. Whether or not the Exit movement contributed to domestic change in Serbia's political scene is negotiable; however, the festival encouraged and generated social cohesion among youths. If we consider the impact of the event, its legacy links to the new opening of Serbia. Event organizers continued promoting sociopolitical messages pertinent to contemporary issues. Furthermore, event organizers recognized the importance of making up for the "lost decade" of the 1990s that youths in Serbia missed, so they can now experience popular international artists and meet more international visitors. Research on the Exit Festival exists looking at the setting/venue of the event in the Petrovaradin Fortress (Besermenji, Pivac, & Wallrabenstein, 2009, 2010), host/guest interactions (Zakić, Ivkov-Džigurski, & Čurčić, 2009), culture and entrepreneurship (Dušica, 2011), foreign visitor demographics (Željko & Lović, 2011), and politics, youths, and city/country image (Wise, Flinn, & Mulec, 2015).

## Literature Review

### *Image and Awareness*

According to Dwyer and Kim (2003), destination image relates to several situational conditions of a destination—important when considering demand factors. Moreover, images are associations, or how we come to recognize a place (Frew, 2014; Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2010; Urry & Larsen, 2011; Wise & Mulec, 2012). Numerous components make up destination image; for instance, attractions, available information, facilities, infrastructure and price (Beerli & Martín, 2004), and influences involving personal factors (i.e., values, age, motivation), and stimulus factors (i.e., information sources, previous experiences) (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Destination images are oftentimes generated through marketing strategies to highlight a place's significant developments and attractions (Govers, Go, & Kumar, 2007; Guss, 2000; Hernández-Lobato, Solis-Radilla, Miliner-Tena, & Sánchez-García, 2006; Kozak & Baloglu, 2011; Nelson, 2013; Richards & Wilson, 2007), but research has also addressed how past events provoke negative images

(Wise, 2011). Hennessey et al. (2010) note, "given the ever-expanding number of tourism destinations and the increased supply of products and services, the competition for visitors is intense and bound to become more so in the future" (pp. 218–219). Baloglu and McCleary (1999) assess how destination images are formed when people have not experienced a destination—linking to the focus of this article to show how images are forged through media and online content. In relation to image, the success of a destination is dependent on awareness, concerning what people know or perceive about a place. Keller (2003) argues for a destination to be successful, tourists must have some general destination knowledge, referring to awareness.

The literature concerning destination awareness relates to discussions of destination image concerning place perceptions (Cai, 2002; Hughes, 2008; Keller, 2003; Kim & Perdue, 2011; Kozak & Baloglu, 2011; Milman & Pizam, 1995; Mulec & Wise, 2012; Xiang, James, & Yuan, 2008). Destination awareness is often referred to as visual or mental impressions of a place (Milman & Pizam, 1995; Mulec & Wise, 2012), often constructed through past associations (Govers et al., 2007; Pan, 2011; Richards & Wilson, 2007; Wise, 2011). Awareness is informed through multiple modes of communication, and discourses of representation detail specific characteristics about a place (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2002; Hughes, 2008). Countries, cities, attractions, and events are dependent on positive associations and perceptions of the destination and what tourism products are offered (Murphy, Pritchard, & Smith, 2000).

Impressions positioning peoples' awareness of places come from unique attractions, the physical environment, accommodations, safety, public management, and user facilities, or what Wang (2005) refers to as *imagescapes*: a "mental schema developed by a tourist on the basis of impressions" (p. 123). For instance, Wise's (2011) study on Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia discusses how past communications have forged negative imaginations, but an analysis focusing on the role of newspaper and web-based content addressed how the positive images were (re)created, resulting in a (re)imagining of the countries based on the new narratives being communicated. In regards to Serbia's destination image and awareness, as noted above, war during the 1990s and international interventions

such as the NATO bombings left Serbia in a state of despair. In response to the brutal atrocities that plagued the region throughout the 1990s, in 2000 the largest youth-led cultural movement of its kind in Southeastern Europe commenced in Novi Sad. Wise et al. (2015) argue that the Exit Festival has aided in changing the image of Novi Sad and Serbia, based on an analysis of newspaper content assessing the presentation of the event to international audiences. According to Xiang et al. (2008), “destination awareness is not simply whether consumers have heard about a destination, but the likelihood the destination will appear in tourists’ destinations choice set” (p. 82) when planning travel.

### *Aesthetics and Spectacle*

What is missing from this dialogue concerning destination image and awareness is a particular focus on aesthetics. According to Postrel (2003), the age of aesthetics has arrived—and the focus is becoming increasingly important. Kirillova et al. (2014) focus on aesthetic attributes as elements of beauty, specifically how aesthetics are embodied to create perceived images. To Ely (2003), terrain, and what covers the terrain, constitutes the aesthetics of a place, now more often than not a product of modern times. Scenery itself is reminiscent, and for tourists or outside onlookers, stimulations, captured visually or imagined through transcribed narratives, are associations of picturesque beauty. Such beauty found in narratives of natural or cultural landscapes define romanticized images of places, or aesthetic pleasures. Wang, Xia, and Chen (2008) focus on aesthetic values, or feelings people have about certain landscapes. These values can influence perceptions of a destination—or imagined experiences. Aesthetic notions are omnipresent, seen in promotional materials for hotels, especially, and now in almost every aspect of tourism (Barretto, 2013; Colbert, 2002; Maitland & Smith, 2009; Murphy et al., 2000; Wang et al., 2008; Weaver, 2009). However, according to Kirillova et al. (2014), aesthetics and how images are conveyed are only regarded as potential elements in decision making.

Weaver (2009) focused on aesthetic design in the hotel industry and argued globalization is intertwined with the playful pursuit of difference and fashion. Products and services from all over the

world have become available, enriching the aesthetic mix. Therefore, aesthetics are an integral part of image and awareness, adding value to perceptions. Moreover, Barretto (2013) tries to link tourism to desires for beauty, arguing beauty matters to everyone. Barretto (2013) and Kirillova et al. (2014) propose notions of aesthetic judgement are often portrayed through particular attractions (i.e., events) and landscapes (i.e., locations or venues) that people relate to. Coordinated aesthetic qualities and values are reflected through descriptions and narratives of landscapes (Cosgrove, 1984; Daniels et al., 2011); whether natural or cultural—landscape elements influence the visitors’ initial perceptions that they feel will lead to a more desirable experience. Aesthetic elements are not only featured and embedded in promotional materials, but are embedded in more casual journalistic descriptions when a reporter incorporates their feelings alongside observations. Urry (1995) states that “tourism consumption is image oriented; it is visual consumption . . . [and] the consumption of places is increasingly aestheticized and less functional” (p. 151).

The focus on image concerning Novi Sad, the Exit Festival and the Petrovaradin Fortress are elaborated on in the first analysis sections. In the sections below, this article will show when aesthetic elements of a destination are presented in the media, this helps persuade a positive image or new awareness. Researchers can then use this content to interpret how new presentations create or re-create contexts and representations (Lehtonen, 2000; Nelson, 2013). Building on the notion of aesthetics, the notion of media spectacle is widely referred to in the study of events and festivals (Getz, 2013; Wise et al., 2015) because the media has the power to shape what defines a place (Street, 2004; Wise & Mulec, 2012). Therefore, events are regarded as spectacles because they contribute to the awareness of a destination (Getz, 2013), but the focus is often on the performance. It is also important to consider the display, setting, and place as complementary attributes—then from here we can interpret and discuss particular aesthetic meanings and elements embedded in online and media content.

### *Note on Method and Data*

Online gathering of textual resources from newspapers and webpages has transformed how content is



delivered, consumed, and analyzed; how we interpret a place is based on how the place is portrayed through particular narratives (Lehtonen, 2000). Textual content is a form of media communication that presents an image of time and space, place and event (see Ateljevic & Doorne, 2002; Frew, 2014; Hennessey et al., 2010). In the media, journalists prepare newspaper articles with primary information, and provide personal (subjective) insight from site visits or interviews. According to Hammett (2014), images produced through the media is a form of place-scripting. Texts, either media (newspaper in this article) or online, are important sources of information that create, or re-create, an image and produce a particular awareness (Buhalis, 1998; Lai & Vinh, 2013), and the same applies to aesthetics. Moreover, texts are sources of information, or what Baloglu and McCleary (1999) refer to as stimulus factors. Landscape semiotics are epitomized via visual and written texts, communicated through websites, visuals and narratives in newspapers each presenting an image and awareness (Wise & Mulec, 2012). In the case of this article, looking across the narratives presented helps construct a particular focus showing how the Exit Festival and the venue enables attendees to experience past heritage while attending a popular event.

Newspaper articles assessed and interpreted for this study were gathered using the search engine LexisNexis. Content included below offers insights on Novi Sad, the Exit Festival, and the Petrovaradin Fortress from 2005 to present. Articles since 2005 were used because this was determined as the year the Exit Festival expanded internationally, the same year MTV became involved with the festival (Wise et al., 2015). Articles were found by first searching for articles in the database where "Serbia" is mentioned. A subsequent search for 'Exit Festival' from the initial results containing "Serbia" further narrowed the results. All papers were reviewed and 56 newspaper articles that presented an in-depth narrative of Novi Sad, the Exit Festival, and the Petrovaradin Fortress were considered for the following analysis. Given the similarities of the narratives presented in the newspaper articles (i.e., repeated articles across different newspapers), content data from 21 of the articles are included below. All newspaper articles and websites analyzed were written in English and come from sources outside of Serbia to show how the destination is presented abroad.

English language sources offer an understanding of messages conveyed to international audiences, and it must be noted that search results from the database of newspaper articles only provided data from English language newspaper sources. Moreover, online content in the English language from promotional websites discussing Novi Sad, the Exit Festival, and the Petrovaradin Fortress were also incorporated. It was determined that messages from the online content and newspaper content offered similar narratives of the destination and landscape so all data were analyzed together to determine the two areas of main focus in the following analysis.

### Analysis

Qualitative content analyses attempt to seek meanings and determine wider themes to gain a greater understanding of how places and events are represented through texts (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2002; Frew, 2014; Wise, 2011). From the newspaper and website content used in the study, two themes emerged from this analysis. The themes were inductively derived from the data, and are the focus of separate analysis sections. What was initially observed was how the content portrayed a new image and awareness of Serbia. This became the focus of the first analysis section and the newspaper content presented below shows how the narratives have changed the image of Serbia as a destination. The second section focuses more on aesthetic representations and the event as a spectacle. It was observed that data concerning aesthetics and spectacle focused more on the event and venue (the Exit Festival and the Petrovaradin Fortress), while the first section put a greater emphasis on the place (Serbia and Novi Sad). The content from websites in this section emphasizes the beauty of the destination, while the newspaper articles articulate spectacle. Website content did not focus much on the past and only put emphasis on the present-day scenario and highlighted the Exit Festival when discussing Novi Sad. The websites also focused more on Novi Sad as the destination opposed to trying to frame the image of Serbia, and is why this content did not link to the first section theme. The second section attempts to understand if the content is communicating aesthetics representations or if the event and venue are merely just a spectacle. While both

points are interpreted, it is gathered that both seem to be occurring simultaneously in the data.

*Portraying and Framing a new Image and Awareness of Serbia and Novi Sad*

While this work focuses on the Exit Festival and Novi Sad, from the inductive themes, this first section put much emphasis on the image of Serbia as a whole. Internationally, Serbia's image was perceived negatively for years. Observed in the following texts is how the media presents a new image of Serbia. As Wise (2011) argued, forging a new (more positive image) is based on transitional content written as past tense portrayals of the countries controversial political times alongside present tense descriptions of current situations (based on the year and date the article was written). Such transitional content is observed in *The Herald* (May 26, 2007):

The Exit festival is based in Novi Sad, the second largest city in Serbia after Belgrade and the country's cultural hub. Located in the northern province of Vojvodina, it straddles the Danube and is delicately picturesque in the summertime. It's almost hard to believe that just eight years ago the city was devastated by NATO bombing.

Such was the level of uncertainty beforehand that friends and family seemed unsure of what I should expect, some even worried there would still be tanks rolling across a desolate and war-torn landscape. None imagined somewhere so scenic and sedate, rich with history and inhabitants so warm in their welcome that you immediately feel at ease.

The Exit Festival is the intermediary anchor in this content. The commentary starts and ends with some relation to the festival, but the author steps back in the middle to clearly articulate that all violence is associated with the past. To this regard, a new imagination is communicated, one with a particular and quaint ambiance, showing how the place has transitioned for the better—delineating the festival as the core attraction.

Early motives and attempts to expand the Exit Festival was part of a wider initiative to improve Serbia's post-war image. *The Irish Times* (February 15, 2008) made clear the event "prides itself on having a strong social and political angle," and each year there is a social and political focus. In

2000 the focus was encouraging people to vote in national elections, since then the festival has focused on wider global issues concerning human trafficking and human rights violations (see Wise et al., 2015). Additionally, *The Sun* (March 6, 2010) highlighted, "now Exit has become one of Europe's most popular music events." Given Exit has maintained a social and political focus, actual political contexts/associations originally linked to the initial Exit Movement and the Exit Festival have been kept to a minimum. An interpretation of why original political contexts/associations are not overt is so to not delve into negative connotations of Serbia's past, as shown in the following quotes:

What began eight years ago as a post-war, anti-Milošević music event has evolved into Serbia's biggest music festival, and one of Europe's best. (*The Irish Times*, July 18, 2009)

Started by students as a protest against the former Serbian President Slobodan Milošević, Exit celebrates its 10th anniversary this year. (*The Times-London*, March 28, 2009)

Brave youngsters danced and debated against Milošević's despotism for 100 days in the university city of Novi Sad. And the festival's slogan—Exit out of ten years of madness. (*Birmingham Evening Mail*, July 22, 2009)

ELEVEN years ago, as Serbia was recovering from a vicious war, three students set up a pop festival that was to last for 100 days. (*The Sun*, March 6, 2010)

Negative semblances of the past are briefly referred to, and such insight from newspapers was widely synonymous when acknowledging the festival's foundations and the Exit movement. It must be noted that a general point observed was the majority of articles put emphasis on the future and discussed how the event has brought youths from the former Yugoslavia together, and a new international awareness has been forged. While the media has the power to shape a new awareness, what has been observed so far is distinct images of Serbia's past and present are clearly framed. Noted above, many people associated Serbia with war/negative atrocities—Novi Sad was greatly impacted by tragic events during the 1990s. A new image is being framed, by briefly acknowledging previous atrocities are no longer;

this puts emphasis on nascent opportunities available to tourists festivalgoers.

Continuing with the point that the media has the power to convey positive or negative images to international audiences and change the imaginative discourse of a place, the *Birmingham Evening Mail* (July 22, 2009) noted: a “new look of Serbia: magical music event helps dispel the memories of war as country’s youth celebrates.” Again, there is a clear changing of the narrative through past and present tenses embedded in the article’s full narrative. What was observed in the extended article is a sense of security, and numerous other articles do the same by making Serbia seem like a safe and new destination. Past tense emphasis ensures that negatives associations fade and a new image/awareness is achieved based on the success (and popularity) of the event. Wise and Mulec (2012) assessed negative impacts on place image, framing how the media has the power to alter place images during times of conflict. Their longitudinal assessment of Dubrovnik’s destination image showed clear transitional points in textual content to encourage the reimagining of a place. From the case of Dubrovnik and similar to this case, media content is playing a crucial role towards transitioning contexts through the narratives presented to (re)create particular associations of Serbia and Novi Sad. As shown from the quotes above, what can be observed from this study is how contexts of Serbia’s tragic past are positioned alongside new narratives of youthful futures and how cultural industries attempt to alter the discourse—presenting a “new” Serbia by removing past associations of fear and isolation.

In regards to Exit’s international recognition and increased popularity since 2005, the event has begun to sustain a lasting legacy, drawing larger international crowds that have responded to the changing discourse of Serbia’s image. Guss (2000) offers perspective on notions of legacy, where events potentially become “symbols for a nation at large, a purpose for which they were never intended” (p. 13). Furthermore, in recent years, Exit’s growth and success can be attributed to the influence of mass media and other such forms of popular discourse. Through recognition, there tends to be much less emphasis on the foundations and early motives of the event, and more adverts promoting the festival—based on popularity alone. The festival has been recognized

across Europe, and globally—as alluded to in some of the following promotional headlines:

Rocking all over the world. (*The Sunday Mail-Queensland*, January 25, 2009)

Where to soak up the sun, sea and sounds: European festivals big-name bands, beaches and blue skies (well-sometimes)—no wonder music fans are heading overseas for their festival fix. (*The Times-London*, March 28, 2009)

From California to the Isle of Wight, music-lovers are getting ready to rock. (*The Toronto Star*, April 11, 2009)

The focus here does not address particular attributes of the landscape in Novi Sad, but attempts to position Serbia as a global destination. This content leads into contexts of aesthetics discussed in the next section. Moreover, events as spectacles adds conceptual insight into the new imaginaries of places (Getz, 2013), encouraging people to gauge their own perception of not only the festival, but to frame the event alongside more traditional heritage attractions. As we saw in the *Telegraph* (June 23, 2014), there is a “popularity” transition occurring that is pushing festival goers east as these are deemed “more affordable” destinations with unique event experiences.

#### *Aesthetics Representations, Mere Spectacle, or Both?*

Tourism websites describe Novi Sad by emphasizing the beauty of the destination, but in the following quote the last sentence emphasizes the event as a spectacle in an attempt to set a more contemporary tone:

In the Serbian language, the synonyms for the word *sad* (plantation) are: garden, yard and bed of flowers. One of the first impressions the city makes is that it is a city of well-tended beauty. Its architecture and spirit have been shaped by many a nation. Easy-going and surrounded by fertile lowland, Fruška Mountain and the Danube, the capital city of Vojvodina is a pearl amongst the Serbian cities. It is also called the ‘Serbian Athens’, the Danube River Gibraltar and is home to south-east Europe’s largest music festival, EXIT which has earned a global reputation for its diversity and



cutting-edge music. (National Tourism Organization of Serbia, 2014b)

This attempt to exemplify the aesthetic beauty of Novi Sad as a destination transitions abruptly once the festival is mentioned. The imagination of the place changes, almost taking away from the local aesthetic nature of the city by putting the event (held in the city) into a wider global context. Experiences embedded alongside attending events are placed around different scenic ambiances. Exit is unique because the music festival is not held in a remote rural locale, as the case with many popular music festivals.

The Exit Festival is explored in relation to the unique ambiance of the event's venue—presenting the aesthetic setting. However, it can be argued that what is being communicated links merely to spectacle. This suggested, when it comes to aesthetic representations, we are drawn to specific representations about a place's characteristics, teased out through descriptions and narratives of locations, features, events, and landscapes. This is made clear in *The Irish Times* (July 18, 2008):

Festival tourism means longer-term gains as fans go away with positive impressions of Serbia and spread the word. And it's hard not to be impressed by what's on offer Novi Sad because EXIT really is a festival with lots of wow factor . . . the magnificent Petrovaradin fortress overlooks the Danube, and the city and is easily one of the most striking festival sites in Europe.

A similar narrative is conveyed in online promotional content by the National Tourism Organization of Serbia (2014a):

EXIT is the biggest music festival in South Eastern Europe. EXIT has taken place at a beautiful and magical fortress in Novi Sad, since 2001. Year after year the number of visitors is getting bigger; young people come from different parts of the country and Europe. Apart from quality music program that it offers, the festival is a place of wild fun, and you can enjoy the cool atmosphere of the fortress and the positive energy of the city.

While aesthetics refer to beauty, tourists look to consume and experience unique cultural and natural landscapes. Since this commentary considers an event, we have to address the content being conveyed

to interpret if the focus is merely on the beauty of this destination where the event is held, or if the event has been positioned solely as a spectacle.

One of the earlier depictions of the Exit Festival observed in the content was from *The Independent* (July 15, 2005):

Held in the stunning Petrovaradin fortress, on a hill above the Danube . . . and 50,000 ecstatic fans from all over the Balkans. They ringed the ramparts, moshed in the moat and crammed into 20 mini-arenas offering everything from drum'n'bass, reggae, rock and techno to jazz. Exit is now the largest festival in South-east Europe.

This quote shows the early popularity of the event, with 50,000 people from across the Balkans in attendance, there was the want and need to present the event and attributes of the destination in a manner that would encourage audiences from further afar to visit Serbia.

The Exit Festival is not just regarded as the largest festival in the region, but coined one of the best by numerous newspaper sources. The event saw exponential increases in attendance and more world-renowned performers each year—detailed in quotes below. *The Observer* (February 5, 2006) states:

Some of Exit's elements—face paint as formal wear, for instance—are keeping with the grand tradition of music festivals, but Exit, founded in 2000 as a student protest against President Milosevic, has a stronger rationale than most when it comes to the partying-with-a-conscience element. Last year, when Fatboy Slim headlined, with back-up from the White Stripes and Carl Cox, 150,000 revellers took in everything from extreme sports to extremely avant garde cinema. Beer is cheap (as are tickets), [and] the backdrop—the medieval fortress in Novi Sad—is unique and the climate cheerfully Mediterranean. As Annie Mac of Radio 1 put it: “The setting is spectacular, the line-up massive and the people completely inspiring. It's a truly special festival.”

Other newspaper outlets extended this narrative—some with very detailed content and other sources offered only brief overviews. Nevertheless, much of context on the event's venue, pertinent to its cultural and natural milieu, is emphasized:

There's the huge size of the site, occupying an Austro-Hungarian fortress on a promontory overlooking a bend in the Danube. . . . And don't forget

the simple majesty of the Danube. There are several places in the festival site to sit with a beer and watch the sunset or sunrise over the river, or to enjoy the reflections of the fireworks that open and close the event. (*The Guardian*, May 15, 2007)

Serbia's Exit Festival in a fortress overlooking the city of Novi Sad from July 6-9, looks set to be the coolest music event of 2006. (*The Mirror*, April 8, 2006)

The Exit 2006 music festival ([www.exitfest.org/](http://www.exitfest.org/)) takes place in Serbia's historic Petrovaradin Fortress, high on the banks of the Danube offering stunning views over the city of Novi Sad. (*The Guardian*, April 15, 2006)

"Balkan rave . . . dancing in the dry moat of a spectacular hilltop fortress in Serbia . . . sunrise peeks through onto a clear indigo sky and, all around, the rave whistles scream and the hands reach higher . . . all within the 17th-century Petrovaradin fortress, overlooking the Danube. (*The Sunday Times*, August 6, 2006)

Not only will Exit host some of the biggest international banks and DJs in the world, from Prodigy to Snoop Dogg, but they'll be playing under the Serbian sun. Location is key, along with the same vision of peace and love that most festival goers aspire to (I'm only being vaguely ironic), there must generally be beauty all around. Exit is perched high and majestic above the river Danube in its historical fortress; about as far from humdrum as my imagination will stretch. (*The Evening Standard-London*, July 11, 2007)

Exit is an award-winning music festival. It is held annually at the Petrovaradin Fortress in the city of Novi Sad (Serbia), which is considered by many as one of the best festival venues in the world. (Exit Festival, 2014)

Overall, much of the content analyzed in this study offered similar narratives, emphasizing the unique ambiance of the location and surrounding setting. Holding an event in a fortress not only represents its uniqueness—but becomes part of the appeal and spectacle of the event, distinguishing it from similar events. Beyond the focus on the cultural landscape (significant to Novi Sad's heritage), the surrounding natural landscape adds another aesthetic element to the content. This representation creates an image highlighting cultural and natural scenic beauty alongside detailing the event

as a popular attraction. What is interpreted from the range of simultaneous points being emphasized is we clearly see there is a diverse range of significant aesthetic elements encompassed in one setting. Moreover, newspaper articles not only embedded elements of aesthetics (and distinctive ambiance), they highlight spectacle. Romanticized imaginations are apparent, and forged through the discourse, almost unanimously; landscapes presented do not suggest aesthetics as omnipresent—as most narratives focus specifically on the fortress (venue) and the event (attraction). The dialogue seems limited, and this relates to some of the struggles Serbia has promoting the vast range of tourism resources/visitor attractions (Mulec & Wise, 2012). Additionally, emphasized is the experience festival-goers will consume in a historic structure in addition to the eclectic range of music performances. This context positions how aesthetics are linked to the event's unique ambiance and Novi Sad's heritage.

While the actual event takes place in Novi Sad, in many instances, especially in the newspaper articles, the city was often just referred to as a university town or Serbia's second city. The vast majority of papers showcased the Petrovaradin Fortress, with aesthetic elements of the venue describing semblances of heritage and its transformation into a popular music venue. Still, there is a unique focus on the place, in particular through the following narratives:

Looking down the banks of the Danube in Novi Sad, Petrovaradin Fortress dates from 1692. Its history included spats between Austrian and Turkish forces and a brief run as a military barrack. It has recently found fame as home to the massive and frenetic EXIT. With annual attendance soaring over 250,000 and a docket heavily indebted to—though not entirely reliant on—electronic music, EXIT is an unrelenting party that pulsates throughout the stronghold. (*The Toronto Star*, April 11, 2009)

Today, the fortress is one of the finest examples of 18th-century European military architecture. It is very well preserved and is the second largest fortress in Europe. Having played its defensive role so well in the past, Petrovaradin Fortress today is a first-class cultural and historical monument and tourist attraction. A hotel and a great many coffee shops and restaurants are today located in the fortress and EXIT, the largest music festival in this part of Europe, takes place here every summer in the first week of July. (Turistička Organizacija Grada Novog Sada, 2014)

The text above incorporates selective history concerning Novi Sad's heritage. Different from the quotes presented in the previous section is the context of war. What is skipped over is the war in the Balkans during the 1990s; emphasis is put on the initial purpose of the fortress during the late 1600s, as it did not have military significance in the 1990s. Here is an attempt to reflect on the heritage of the site and its contemporary use as a modern spectacle, while skipping over the negative image of war that is part of the city's more recent history. This is an example of selective histories; war in the distant past is far removed so it links to a place's heritage, whereas recent war can act to deter. This again showcases past and present, creating an aesthetic image by framing elements of heritage alongside modern spectacles.

Aesthetic representations were embedded into the story of Serbia, Novi Sad, and the Exit Festival. Another interpreted representation is how Serbia is framed around depictions of the music festival, offering a nascent place identity. "Rocking Serbia is next gig thing" adds to the manifestation that is the event (*The Sun*, March 6, 2010). We see the event as the spectacle and the performers start to dominate the text in newspapers by 2010, perhaps because the event has established itself and a new image has been constructed. However, the aesthetic ambiance of the location, Petrovaradin Fortress, remains. For instance:

The year was the 11th EXIT festival and the madness in a historic fort on the banks of the Danube has grown to such international acclaim, it now attracts headliners such as Placebo, Missey Elliott, The Chemical Brothers, LCD Soundsystem and Mika. (*Liverpool Daily Echo*, October 26, 2010)

Held in the 18th century [*sic*] Petrovaradin fortress overlooking the Danube in Novi Sad, Serbia . . . these days EXIT draws music fans from all over Europe for its hedonistic atmosphere and idiosyncratic line-up. (*The Irish Times*, March 5, 2011)

Exit Festival's very civilised setting is the 17th century Petrovaradin Fortress in Novi Sad. . . . The four-day festival is now recognised as one of Europe's biggest with The Chemical Brothers, Pendulum, David Guetta, Missey Elliott and Royksopp all thrilling the crowds last year. With the fortress overlooking the Danube River, it's an ideal location. (*The People-Ulster Edition*, May 29, 2011)

Exit gives concert-goers the unique opportunity of exploring underground passages while checking out headliners Duran Duran, New Order, Plan B and Guns 'n' Roses. The 18th-century [*sic*] Petrovaradin Fortress in Novi Sad, where Exit is held, offers superb acoustics that allow bands to perform simultaneously without any sound interference. (*The Toronto Star*, May 26, 2012)

Besermenji et al. (2009) discuss how the place and landscape of Exit creates a unique ambiance. This was also made clear in the *Birmingham Evening Mail* (July 22, 2009), describing:

this is no ordinary festival and to think of it as one where you're trudging around in search for bands is to miss out on so much more. Among the cobbled walkways and tunnels linking the fortress buildings are little shops and cafes that would be great for sitting and chatting with mates as you wait for the next act, or strike up conversation with locals.

Overall, what is observed in the newspaper and online content are discussions promoting Exit, but in a way that details more specifics about the events venue and surrounding setting. Even the friendliness of locals, as detailed, adds to the appeal of attending an event in Serbia. Perhaps it is the aesthetic imaginations of the Petrovaradin Fortress, an iconic landscape, that defines the event, or because this particular venue offers something different that is out of the ordinary realm of large-scale summer music festivals across Europe.

### Concluding Thoughts

When thinking about aesthetics in this case, the landscape and descriptions of the Petrovaradin Fortress clearly dominate the narrative. Content from articles and newspapers presented offers insight into how aesthetics form part of the narrative, with much emphasis placed on the beauty of the fortress itself. The natural and cultural landscape is presented to create imaginative depictions of a new Serbia (and Novi Sad) by incorporating aesthetic elements into the narrative—encouraging readers to embrace Novi Sad's heritage. Moreover, the event itself then becomes an overarching spectacle offering insight into youth culture and the destination's future prosperity. As observed in this article, the Exit Festival has positively transitioned Serbia's

destination image. The Petrovaradin Fortress forges a newly defined aesthetic image for which people will come to recognize Serbia. The event itself is as much a part of the aesthetic narrative in image transition in Serbia, and the location steeped in heritage from medieval times to a modern spectacle—or the semblance of time and place. Moreover, the ambiance of the event encourages young travelers (mainly festival-goers) from around Europe and the world to ascend upon Novi Sad each summer for over a decade.

This work aligns with arguments addressed in Wise and Mulec's (2012) research, that over time memories of past tragedies can fade to the background once a destination recovers or establishes a new memory/association. Furthermore, Street (2004) discussed how the mass media plays a pivotal role in transitioning previous and more contemporary imaginations, successes, and failures—even aesthetics. It could be argued that Exit has become synonymous with Novi Sad's, or even Serbia's, destination image and place identity. Aesthetic descriptions of the event held in a 17th century fortress have (re)created the imaginative discourse of Serbia, contributing to how the event is promoted. As this work alludes, it is the location of the event that is aesthetically portrayed and represented; unanimous context attempted to forge a new imagination by bringing in the element of heritage to describe the venue. The focus almost always abruptly shifted to the event as the defining spectacle—or the reason to visit Novi Sad, Serbia. This was also apparent in the online content, where any mention of the Exit Festival brings new meaning to the destination. While festivals are common across Europe, perhaps it is simply this "sameness" that lends to a new image of Serbia based on the Exit Festival's "difference." This was evident in *The Herald* (May 26, 2007): "it would be easy to attend the festival without fully realising its [referring to Serbia and Novi Sad] rich history and cultural background."

Limitations to this research are texts only offer insight into how a place is perceived and imagined. Future research seeks to assess how changing narratives of Serbia impact visitation and continue to increase the Exit Festival's popularity. Further research is needed to survey festival attendees to understand how their understandings of Serbia and the event are shaped by the media and online

sources. It is also important to address to what extent aesthetic attributes and the imagined landscapes play a role in attracting people to Novi Sad and the Exit Festival.

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