

Summary

CONCEPT OF THE WESTERN BALKANS: CROSSROADS OF CIVILISATIONS REGIONAL UMBRELLA IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Sarajevo, 20 December 2018

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Introduction

The *Concept of the Western Balkans: Crossroads of Civilisations Regional Umbrella Identity* development provides the conceptual document for development of the common regional umbrella identity of the WB6 economies under the Triple P project that will integrate the rich cultural and natural heritage of the region under shared, overarching regional identity and thus provide a comprehensive framework for the development and marketing of regional cultural tourism products/itineraries.

Final Concept of the Western Balkans: Crossroads of Civilisations Regional Umbrella Identity includes **rationale and justification** based on historical and cultural context, provides the **structure and design** of the regional umbrella identity as an **archipelago of monuments/sites** that is further upgraded with the **tentative list** of the most prominent monuments and sites in the WB6 economies, which clearly demonstrate why the region can be promoted as the crossroads of civilisations. The tentative list also includes some of the most prominent natural parks in the WB6 economies to illustrate the richness and variety of cultural and natural heritage sites that are already prepared to be included in the attractive cultural tourism itineraries.

The next step for efficient development of umbrella identity is to develop a business model that will include **an effective and viable regional governance and management structure** and facilitate the establishment of cultural tourism network involving key stakeholders from the public and private sector, and NGOs, and promote strategic alliance to generate joint synergies between culture, tourism and local communities and national authorities in the WB6 economies. This is the only guarantee to ensure the successful development and functioning of Western Balkans: Crossroads of Civilisations umbrella identity and later cultural tourism products. In this regard, an in-depth analysis of best practice cases of exiting similar cultural routes and cultural tourism projects shall be prepared at the beginning of the next stage of this project as a base for defining the most effective regional management structure, adjusted to the specifics of the WB6 economies.

Developing umbrella identity **brand label, brand management and marketing strategy** is, besides the development of cultural tourism itineraries, the main activity of the next stage of the Western Balkans: Crossroads of Civilisations Umbrella Identity project. It will be designed as a stand-alone project, which will provide clear strategic orientation for positioning, building an umbrella identity image, promoting and marketing of cultural tourism itineraries on the international market, with an action plan of priority actions to be implemented in the period of next two years.

Overall approach and methodology

The development of the concept consists of several steps and activities that will lead to the creation of a regional brand, as a shared, overarching regional identity that will integrate the rich heritage that effectively communicates the diversity of legacies present throughout the region.

The starting point in developing the concept was to provide a rationale and justification for using the narrative Western Balkans: Crossroads of Civilisations as an umbrella identity. Therefore, a **historical and cultural context** that clearly demonstrates why the region is a crossroads of civilisations was the first step in the development of the concept, including **the list of the most prominent monuments/sites** in the WB6 economies, which represent the crossroads of civilisations and are ready to be integrated into the attractive cultural tourism itineraries.

The second step was to define a **vision and mission** that will lead the process towards the creation of different itineraries in the three-year period and depict the story to attract visitors to the region.

A **set of criteria and guidelines** for the inclusion of monuments/sites under the umbrella identity was created as a basis for development of the **brand label** of the Western Balkans: Crossroads of Civilisations that will serve travel agents and tour operators, as well as individual travellers as a “quality guarantee”. This fourth step of the concept development includes starting points for development of umbrella brand label, brand management and marketing strategy.

The concept prepared based on this approach will provide a comprehensive framework for the development and marketing of regional cultural tourism products/itineraries under common identity, which will contribute to better visibility and recognition of the region and the WB6 economies in Europe and worldwide, attract more tourists to the region and thus create a favourable environment for economic development, growth and job creation.

The main **methodology** used in the development of the concept includes desk research, expert analysis and interviews with main history and tourism experts in the region.

Main findings of the final concept development

- WB6 economies (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Serbia, and The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) all, to an extent, share the same threads in their cultural development. From the position of traditional historiography, this means sharing a traditional timetable: general prehistory (Palaeolithic, Eneolithic, the Copper Age, the Bronze Age, and the Iron Age), the Greek and Roman periods, early medieval, medieval, early modern, and modern history.
- However, taking into consideration the broadest possible timeline, from prehistorical cultures, over the Illyrians, Greek and Roman influences, local cultures of medieval states and state-like creations, four centuries of defining Ottoman presence, and the 19th century as a period of creating national states, it is very clear that only two cultural periods are present almost equally in all WB6 economies. These are the long-lasting periods of the **Roman and the Ottoman Empires**. The other civilisations were present in smaller territories of the region (i.e. Venetian Republic). However, for the purpose of this concept it can be concluded that Western Balkans: Crossroads of Civilisations can be used for regional umbrella identity as a shared, overarching regional identity that will integrate the rich heritage of the region under the same identity.
- The Western Balkans: Crossroads of Civilisations umbrella identity is designed as a **network, an archipelago of cultural heritage monuments/sites** in the WB6 economies that presents a pool of cultural and natural heritage points for creation of market-oriented, tailor-made itineraries for specific groups of tourists.
- The tentative list of the most prominent monuments/sites in the WB6 economies illustrates the richness and variety of cultural and natural heritage sites that are already prepared to be included in the attractive cultural tourism itineraries. This list will be further upgraded in the next stages of the concept development by the history and tourism experts from WB6 economies.
- There is a critical mass of monuments/sites in the region that could tell the story of the crossroads of civilisations in the region, thus providing many opportunities to create attractive cultural tourism experiences for the international tourists, using different themes for their creation (crossroads of Roman and Ottoman empires, rulers of the region, historical centers of the cities, etc.). The stories for selected themes or topics will be developed with the support of historians and tourism experts from WB6 economies in the next stage of the umbrella identity project development.
- A **set of criteria** for inclusion of monuments/sites under the umbrella identity is divided into two main groups. The first group are **monument/site related criteria** that determine historical significance, authenticity and operational capacity for the proper management of the monument/site. The second group of criteria are local community or **destination related**

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criteria that determine the level of readiness of the local community or destination to welcome the tourists. These criteria focus on 5 main tourist expectations, namely accessibility, accomodation, attractions, amenities and infrastructure, and awareness and commitment of local communities for cultural tourism development.

1. Historical and Cultural Context - Summary

The Western Balkans represents a bridge between East and West. Western Balkans is where Ancient Greece and Rome meet, it is the region where the Roman Empire splits, it was the border between western Latin and eastern Greek cultures of Middle Ages, it was the border of three Empires: Ottoman, Russian and Austrian. Western Balkans for the West was where the Orient began, and for the East a gateway to Europe. The legacies of numerous emperors, kings and sultans were only superseded by the number of armies which passed through its valleys and gorges, fields and mountains.

Rich and turbulent history of the region, combined with the rugged terrain of the Dinaric Alps, formed an intertwined cultural heritage, unique in Europe. Cities founded by figures of legend, which were built, destroyed and rebuilt for uncountable times bear witness to all the winds which shaped the old continent. Every village and town, every church and mosque hide numerous tales, legends and myths of 3000 years of history.

Because the region represents a geographical link between Eastern and Western Mediterranean (in the last centuries West Europe, East Europe and Orient) its cultural heritage became a unique multilayer blend of civilisations which competed for this part of Europe.

The region holds numerous cultural heritage sites, but for the visitor to experience the complexity and multilayers of the region's history which gave it elements to be called the Crossroads of Civilisations, one must look to the urban sites, which can, when properly arranged and combined with stories, offer the most appropriate insight into the complexity and originality of the region's history. It is a place of cultural intertwining too, where Roman influence can be seen on Byzantine churches, Byzantine influences on Ottoman mosque architecture and Ottoman influences on Austro-Hungarian architecture, and where unique local cultures like stećci tombstones and local cultures of medieval states and state-like creations complement the traces of the civilisations and empires that were present in the Western Balkans.

WB6 economies (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Serbia, and The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) all, to an extent, share the same threads in their cultural development. From the position of traditional historiography, this means sharing a traditional timetable: general prehistory (Palaeolithic, Endolithic, The Copper Age, The Bronze Age, and The Iron Age), the Greek and Roman periods, early medieval, medieval, early modern, and modern history. However, taking into consideration the broadest possible timeline, from prehistorical cultures, over the Illyrians, Greek and Roman influences, local cultures of medieval states and state-like creations, four centuries of defining Ottoman presence, and the 19th century as a period of creating national states, it is very clear that only two cultural periods are present almost equally in all WB6 economies. These are the long-lasting periods of the Roman and the Ottoman Empires. The other civilisations were present in smaller territories of the region (i.e. Venetian Republic, Austro-Hungarian Empire, etc.).

However, Western Balkans: Crossroads of Civilisations can be used for regional umbrella identity as a shared, overarching regional identity that will integrate the rich heritage of the region under the same identity.

According to the fact that four of the most prominent empires in the world were present in this region (Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empire), from the marketing point of view, using the name **Western Balkans: Crossroads of Empires** seems to be more attractive. This should be considered in the process of designing the brand marketing strategy in the next stage of the umbrella identity development.

2. Vision and Mission

2.1. Vision

The vision of the Western Balkans: Crossroads of Civilisations umbrella identity is to become **a leading regional identity** that will promote the story of the rich and diverse cultural heritage of the region through unique and attractive cultural tourism itineraries, developed in close cooperation of the cultural, tourism and creative industry stakeholders from the WB6 economies.

Through established regional identity the governance and management structure and efficient business model **will create a favourable environment** where new, creative regional cultural tourism itineraries will flourish, while allowing individual economies to continue developing own brands, sharing the umbrella identity.

2.1. Mission

The mission of the Western Balkans: Crossroads of Civilisations umbrella identity is to promote the common cultural and natural heritage through development of unique, attractive cultural tourism products/itineraries and experiences that will increase **the visibility of the region and its rich cultural and natural heritage** in the Europe and worldwide and, thus, **attract more tourists to the region, contributing to economic development, growth and job creation.**

3. Structure and design of the umbrella identity

According to the historical and cultural context description, and due to rugged terrain, the sites of cultural significance are quite often far from each other or lack proper communications, hence the **Western Balkans: Crossroads of Civilisations umbrella identity is designed as a network, an archipelago** of cultural heritage monuments/sites¹ in the WB6 economies that is not necessarily connected sequentially or physically, but presents a pool of cultural and natural heritage points for creation of market-oriented, tailor-made

¹ The European cemeteries route, Phoenicians' route and Transromanica, among others that are conceptually similar, share this structure of not having a start or an end in the strict sense of the terms.

itineraries for specific groups of tourists. The archipelago of monument/sites is presented on the Map 1 in Chapter 4.

This structure allows tourism sector stakeholders (travel agents, tour operators) and even individual travellers to pick up the individual cultural and natural heritage, and intangible heritage elements and create their own itineraries that will meet the visitors' expectation in the best possible way.

On the other side this structure provides opportunities for single monuments/sites that might not have enough pulling power on their own to generate a profitable and attractive tourism product to become part of a larger itinerary, thus creating a far more powerful, attractive and profitable product. These will generate opportunities for inclusion of many services and products in local communities in the cultural tourism products, thus generating jobs, economic development and better life for the local population.

4. Tentative list of the most prominent monuments/sites

The following list of the most prominent sites illustrates the wealth and diversity of cultural and natural heritage of the Western Balkans. The list is tentative and thus includes only the most prominent cultural sites and natural parks, selected by the history and tourism experts to justify that sufficient amount of cultural sites are already ready in the region for designing cultural tourism itineraries that will meet the expectations of international visitors. The list will be further upgraded during the process of development of the umbrella identity by the history and tourism experts from the WB6 economies.

Table 1: Tentative list of monuments/sites in WB6 economies

WB6 ECONOMY	No. on the map	CULTURAL MONUMENT / SITE	MOST CHARACTERISTIC TIME PERIOD	No. on the map	NATURAL SITE
ALBANIA	1	Butrint	classical antiquity	1	Valbona Valley – National Park
	2	Gjirokastra	medieval, Ottoman	2	Tomorri Mountain Park
	3	Antigonea archaeological park	classical antiquity	3	Llogara National Park
	4	Berat	medieval, Ottoman	4	Divjakë-Karavasta National Park
	5	Apollonia archaeological park	classical antiquity	5	Fir of Drenova
	6	Shkodra	classical antiquity, Venetian, Ottoman		
	7	Tirana	Ottoman onwards		
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	8	Sarajevo	Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian	6	Sutjeska National Park
	9	Jajce	medieval, Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian	7	Hutovo blato
	10	Mostar	medieval, Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian	8	Kozara
	11	Travnik	medieval, Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian	9	Bjelašnica
	12	Daorson / Stolac	classical antiquity, Ottoman	10	Canyon of the Neretva river
	13	Višegrad / Dobrun	medieval, Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian		
KOSOVO*	14	Pristina	Ottoman	11	Sharr Mountains National Park (+ Monenegro, Serbia, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania)
	15	Prizren	medieval, Ottoman		
	16	Peja / Pec	medieval		
	17	Vushtri / Vučitrn	medieval, Ottoman		
MONTENEGRO	18	Podgorica/Doclea	classical antiquity	12	Durmitor
	19	Old Town of Bar	classical antiquity, medieval, Venetian, Ottoman	13	Lovćen
	20	Kotor	medieval, Venetian	14	Biogradska Gora
	21	Cetinje	early modern city	15	Skadar Lake (+ Albania)
	22	Šas /Svač	classical antiquity, medieval		
	23	Pljevlja (Husein Pasha Mosque)	Ottoman		
SERBIA	24	Belgrade	classical antiquity, medieval Ottoman, early modern	16	Đerdap National park
	25	Studenica Monestery	medieval	17	Tara national park
	26	Lepenski Vir	prehistoric	18	Frushka gora National Park
	27	Stari Ras	medieval	19	Kopaonik (+ Kosovo*)
	28	Smederevo fortress	medieval		Nature park
	29	Bač fortress	medieval	20	"Saran - Mokra Gora"
	30	Gamzigrad	classical antiquity		
	31	Viminacium	classical antiquity		
	32	Justiniana Prima	Byzantine		
	33	Kupinik	medieval		
	34	Aranđelovac	prehistoric, classical antiquity, medieval		Risovača cave
THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA	35	Skopje	Roman, medieval, Ottoman	21	Markovi Kuli
	36	Ohrid Town / area	prehistoric, medieval, Ottoman	22	National park Pelister
	37	Stobi	Roman	23	National park Mavrovo
	38	Heraclea Lyncestic	classical antiquity	24	National park Galichica
	39	Kokino	prehistoric		

The archipelago of cultural heritage points, including the natural heritage in the vicinity, from the tentative list is presented on Map 1 below. The numbers in the map correspond to the number of the monument/site in Table 1. In the stage of development of marketing strategy of

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the Western Balkans: Crossroads of Civilisations umbrella identity an interactive map of the cultural and natural heritage points should be developed as a tool to support tourism stakeholders (travel agents, tour operators) and also individual travellers by creating cultural tourism itineraries and cultural tourism experiences of the Western Balkans as a crossroads of civilisations.

Map 1: Western Balkans: Crossroads of Civilisations umbrella identity as an archipelago of monuments and sites



Source: Author; prepared on Google maps

5. Criteria and Guidelines

Western Balkans: Crossroads of Civilisations umbrella identity will serve to travel agents and tour operators, as well as to individual travellers as a **“quality guarantee”** of the monuments/sites that will be included under the umbrella identity. For this purpose, a Western Balkans: Crossroads of Civilisations Label will be developed in the next stage of the project that will to a certain extent follow the already established cultural heritage labelling models, such as European Heritage Label³ and others.

A set of criteria for selecting the monuments and sites to be included under the regional umbrella identity has been prepared in this stage of the project. Firstly, a monument/site should possess historical significance for the region, be authentic and have also operational capacity for its proper management. Secondly, due to the intention of the common regional identity development to attract tourists to the region, the main conditions for development of cultural tourism in the destination should be considered, focusing on cultural tourist expectations. In other words, not only the monument/site but the entire destination should be prepared/equipped to welcome the tourists, offering them a unique, authentic experience of the heritage of the region. Therefore, not only the monument/site, but also the local community/destination should meet certain criteria. According to these, the draft set of criteria is divided into two main groups. The first are the monument/site related criteria and the second are the local community or destination related criteria. The structure of the proposed set of criteria is presented in Exhibit 2 below.

Exhibit 1: Structure of the draft set of criteria



While the monument/site related criteria are mainly obligatory for the monuments /sites to be included under umbrella identity, the location/destination related criteria should be understood more as guidelines and recommendations for local communities on how to approach cultural tourism development or to improve its present performance, how to increase the attractiveness of tourism destination in order to facilitate economic development, growth and employment for the benefit of local community and local population.

A draft set of criteria, divided into the main groups and subgroups, is presented in more detail below.

5.1. Monuments/sites related criteria

Monuments included in the Crossroads of Civilisations umbrella identity should be chosen in accordance with the need to present the highest graded locations, whose purpose is to represent the variety of different cultural and natural heritage found in the WB6 economies, through the widest possible historical timespan. Such an approach is necessary in order to effectively present the diversity of cultures inhabiting the Balkans, which is to be the tour de force of the Crossroads of Civilisations umbrella identity.

The historical significance is important. However, for the inclusion of monuments into the Crossroads of Civilisations umbrella identity in a short time period, the monuments should also have an operational capacity to welcome tourists and provide them with unique cultural tourism experience. According to this, the draft set of monument/site related criteria is divided in two subgroups, namely:

- Historical significance, and
- Operational capacity.

Historical significance

The basic criteria for evaluation of historical significance of the monument/site are as follows:

- A monument must **represent a historical landmark in accordance with the Concept of the Western Balkans: Crossroads of Civilisations**. This means that a proposed monument is more favourable if it follows the local interpretation of any cultural influence, if it is multi-layered or if its use has been changed.
- **Up-to-date scientific (re)interpretation in place**, which means that a monument must have a valid and, if possible, recent bibliography.
- **Satisfactory physical research of the monument** that allows its valid presentation.
- **High quality presentation**, ensuring the quality of the reception facilities such as the historical presentation, visitors' information and signposting; ensuring access for the widest possible public, inter alia, through site adaptations or staff training; quality of in-situ interpretation; interpretation on web, etc.

- **Recognisability** that should be proved with communication strategy in place; attractiveness of the site through the use of new technologies, digital and interactive means, as ways to attract virtual visitors, the international outreach and recognition; the current international/regional networks of the monument/site, etc.

Operational capacity of the monument/site

Besides the historical value, the monuments/sites will demonstrate that they have the operational capacity. Draft criteria that could be used for evaluating the operational capacity are as follows:

- **Management of the monument/site** by ensuring the sound management of the site, including defined objectives and indicators; ensuring the preservation of the site and its transmission to future generations in accordance with the relevant protection regimes; ensuring that the management of the site is as environmentally friendly as possible, promoting multilingual access to site, and by having clear ownership structure.
- **Operating budget of the monument/site** that should be proved with the outline of the current operating budget for the overall management of the site that includes: annual running costs, communication costs, cultural, educational, research, networking activity costs, while conservation works are excluded.

5.2. Destination related criteria

According to the main purpose of creating a regional umbrella identity to facilitate the creation of regional cultural tourism products/itineraries under this common brand, a marketing approach should be incorporated in the selection of the monuments/sites, which will respect the tourist expectations. Monuments/sites are always part of destination, with certain attractions, amenities, facilities, infrastructure that together create an integrated tourist product or experience.

Therefore, the second group of evaluation criteria focuses on **5 main tourist expectations** (5 A's), which are widely recognised as the main factors for successful tourism development by tourism experts worldwide. Development of a suitable combination of these factors is at the heart of tourism planning.

Destinations can only succeed in attracting visitors if they have a choice of ways to get there, places to stay, and things to do. Successful destinations meet five essential requirements. There must be a good mix and balance between the basic 5A's that are:

- Accessibility of the destination,
- Accommodation and food and beverage facilities,
- Attractions,
- Amenities and Activities, and
- Awareness and Commitment for tourism development.

6. Conclusions

Historical and cultural context provided in this document shows that the Western Balkans: Crossroads of Civilisations could serve as umbrella identity for promotion of cultural tourism in the region. A tentative list of monuments/sites in the region illustrates a huge potential for the development of attractive cultural tourism itineraries that in combination with natural and intangible cultural heritage could produce unique cultural tourism experiences of the Western Balkans for different target groups of visitors. The tentative list of cultural sites and natural heritage will be upgraded with other sites and heritage on the basis of confirmed set of criteria that will also form the base of the Western Balkans: Crossroads of Civilisations Label, which will be developed in the next stage of the project.

For the efficient development of umbrella identity, it is important to **develop an effective and viable regional governance and management structure, including business model**, that will facilitate the establishment of cultural tourism network involving key stakeholders from the public and private sector, and NGOs, and promote strategic alliance to generate joint synergies between culture, tourism and local communities and national authorities in the WB6 economies. This is the only guarantee to ensure the successful development and functioning of Western Balkans: Crossroads of Civilisations umbrella identity and later cultural tourism products. In this regard, and in-depth analysis of best practice cases of exiting similar cultural routes and cultural tourism projects shall be prepared at the beginning of the next stage of this project as a base for defining the most effective regional management structure, adjusted to the specifics of the WB6 economies.

Developing umbrella identity brand label, brand management and marketing strategy is, besides the development of cultural tourism itineraries, the main activity of the next stage of the Western Balkans: Crossroads of Civilisations Umbrella Identity project. It will be designed as a stand-alone project, which will provide clear strategic orientation for positioning, building an umbrella identity image, promoting and marketing of cultural tourism itineraries on the international market, with an action plan of priority actions to be implemented in the period of next two years.