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Tourism and the Aesthetization of Backwardness – New Symbolic Orders of Regional Identity in Alpine Austria

The Case of the Hohe Tauern National Park

Introduction

'Regional identity' is a crucial phrase in the understanding of the genesis and nature of modern tourism as it is important for contemporary practices of tourism planning, policy and management. The creation and marketing of imaginary and desirable places includes this phrase and has made it into a powerful and frequently used watchword in contemporary tourism planning practices, where various actors strive to create new symbolic meanings for localities and promote distinctive features.

This is certainly the case in contemporary European tourism development, where city tourism has grown significantly and can be seen to challenge more peripheral regions, in turn forcing them to develop a distinctive pitch. As part of this process, 'culture' is frequently and heavily mobilised in the context of place production. Material culture, as 'tangible' and 'typical' expressions of values and histories (buildings, objects, foods etc.) along with more intangible cultural practices (language, song and dance) are harnessed in a constructed frame of 'nostalgia' to provide highly symbolized 'selected heritage' (Graham, Ashworth and Tunbridge, 2000). This is supposed to map out the very coordinates of a 'region' which again may serve as a reflexive, external or internal basis for 'identification'. In drawing together these markers of both culture and region for touristic purposes, identities are constructed, re-constructed and challenged.

What tends to be described as ‘culture’ in the context of regional tourism promotion mainly comprises the 'stereotypical' artefacts, specialities, representative and distinctive features which seem to summarize and form the sort of 'raw material' which is subsequently employed to promote and market the region through symbolic and aesthetic means. In doing so 'regional culture' and with that 'regional identity’ remain modules in a pre-given 'container' which encapsulates the 'essence' or -in the context of a classical regional geography - the 'character' or 'personality' of a particular and 'fixed' culture referring to its clear cut symbolic expressions i.e. ‘existing’ in a particular landscape, architecture, agricultural products etc.

In this sense regions may be viewed as "culture-bound products which generate associations and meanings that are influenced by the cultural backgrounds of the potential tourist” (Therkelsen, 2003).

In brief, “culture tends to be viewed as a resource, as a set of values productive of, or inimical to, regional development. Culture is important not so much in itself but in the way it is used” (Keating, 2001).

This paper addresses the role of tourism as an affirmative force in the production of regional symbols and images. It is questioned, how tourism is in the powerful position to represent and mobilise notions of 'regional identity' and how culture/ cultural heritage is utilized as a potential resource in this process. In addressing the seemingly backward 'symbolic economy' of an alpine Austrian national park region, I will try to show, how tourism is capable of transforming and changing 'traditional' configurations by creating 'new’ and aesthetically constructed layers of spatial meaning.

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This contribution, however, wants to go a step beyond a 'conventional' interpretation of 'regional identity' and the view of 'regional culture' as a bounded 'container' concept in the context of tourism destination promotion.

Instead, it addresses the problem of the institutionally driven and discourse-related formation of such 'new container models' by addressing historical as well as contemporary 'symbolic orders' of regionality, which may be found in preformed, contested and ideologically nurtured iconographies of a romanticised and 'authentic mountain peasant culture', themed in the particular case area.

**Regional identity and regional culture in tourism— two concepts in question**

However, 'regional culture' bound up with 'regional identity' - even in their seemingly 'innocent' context of 'destination place marketing' or 'destination promotion' remain contested concepts within regional (and) tourist studies and are questioned by an increasing number of regional and tourism analysts who hesitate to reduce the concept to a mere representational and static context.

Drawing on Beck, Paasi addresses the ambiguity of the concept and suggests to question 'regional identity' more accurately for people in late modernity more often shape their lives and environments through personal (and more often resistant) identities rather than holistic categorizations such as nationality, class, gender or 'home region'. Thus he finds it useful to distinguish analytically between the 'identity of a region' - classification features used in science, politics, marketing, etc. and 'regional identity'/ 'regional consciousness’ which points to the multi-scalar identification of people with institutional practices, discourses and symbolisms (Paasi, 2002).

Likewise, Thrift drawing on ideas of a 'new regional geography' resembles ideas of regional identity which try to reject conventional representational approaches but stress social interconnectedness, hybridity, possibility as well as tactile issues such as subjective affects, passions and dreaming instead (Thrift, 1998).

With a side glance to an apparently increasing 'cultural tourism' sector over the past few years and the indeterminacy, displacement or 'inbetweenness' of seemingly 'authentic' local cultures in an increasingly boundary-crossing process of 'globalization', 'cultural identity' on a local/regional scale is critically uncoupled from its state of framed 'stasis' and within a territorial 'container' concept towards a more process related and transformational understanding (Meethan, 2003; Coleman and Crang, 2002).

Likewise, and with their attempt to describe the socio-spatial dynamics of 'regional identity construction and deconstruction', Van 'T Klooster et al.(2002), differentiate three forms and functions of regional identity which they categorise 'essential' (a basic set of properties that persists throughout time) 'imposed' (formation of identity through societal power structures and ideologies) and 'imagined' (as a social allegiance to certain perceptions, norms and values basically defined by the 'significant other').

Deacon is able to illustrate the role of institutions and organisations in the construction process of regional self-understanding and 'culture' in England's South West. To him, regional identity is characterised by the continuous (re-) production of representational space-discourses within everyday (institutional) practices. This 'discourse of region', evolving within and becoming part of the everyday not only is in position to constitute a regulatory system for 'social practices' but has also consequences for those who adopt a 'different' definition of region/ regional identity at a different scale (Deacon, 2004).

**The mobilisation of distinctiveness**

The meanwhile almost commonsense view that globalization generates localizations within – among other things- processes characterized by the disappearing of spatial and temporal barriers (e.g., see Harvey, 1989; Appadurai, 1996; Hannerz, 1996) has certainly fuelled a new interest in 'regional culture' and 'regional identity' briefly outlined before. The reading of Robertson's (1992, 1995) 'glocalization' - the local adoption of the local - as a compensational or counterbalancing concept towards a 'homogenizing' globalization process has lead to the perspective that actors with similar world views seek to reassert their identity and interests towards other collectives i.e. on a regional scale. Likewise, 'glocalization' in the sense of micromarketing and therefore capable of 'inventing new consumer traditions’ (Robertson 1995) is seen to explain why places/regions increasingly seek to forge a distinctive image and to create an atmosphere of place, nature and tradition that may prove attractive to capital, to highly skilled prospective employees, and to visitors (Lash and Urry, 1994; Dredge and Jenkins, 2003).

Coupled with this process analysts have recognized an emerging 'economy of sign and symbols' in that an endless number and transitoriness of different images are continuously produced and spread particular notions of spatial (local, regional) uniqueness and ‘identity’ on a novel global scale (Lash and Urry, 1994; Featherstone, 1991). This perception interrelates with postmodern approaches which see the mobilisation of
distinctive symbols purposefully employed in a highly developed technology of ‘branding’ and ‘theming’ which is supposed to guarantee orientation in a ‘bewildered and liquid modern world’, where consumerism has gradually lead to the transition from ‘need’ via ‘desire’ to ‘wish’. (Bauman/Franklin, 2003).

Spatially defined 'distinctiveness' has also become a major watchword in a discourse about 'Europeanization'. In the process of ‘building’ up a shared European sense of ‘cohesion’ and unity, localized cultural particularism and ‘regional identity’, though notoriously elastic concepts, played and still play a decisive role and are understood in a double sense as having symbolic as well as economical potential (see Graham and Hart, 1999). Thus, culturally produced differences represented through landscapes, foodstuff, product designs, agricultural products etc. are viewed as an opportunity for the economic development of disadvantaged areas and, in addition, with the invention of key phrases like 'unity in diversity' and 'Europe of regions' the concept of culture itself has been discovered as an important resource of European identity politics (MacDonald, 1996; Shore, 2000; Johler, 2002).

In this context, tourism often seems to be serving as a ‘panacea’ and the troika tourism, culture and ‘regional identity’ - is frequently put on the political agenda by promising a successful and sustainable regional development, for example implemented by rural development programmes such as 'LEADER+' or 'Interreg'. The European Union is indeed a fitting example, where new governmental practices have increased radically the number of region/ identity 'builders' and actors who operate with ‘regions’ and who write, talk and draw public representations to market them. When the European Committee of Regions invited the general public to its annual open day in April this year, there were no less than 30 regions “which introduced their food specialities, folk dances, music and their touristic and cultural heritage” in the Committee's Brussels headquarters. (CoR webpage, April 2005)

In fact, the discourses on region and regionalisation, in which power-holding actors invest their interests and presuppositions in things and words, may actually create the ‘reality’ that they are describing and suggesting. In this context regions and ‘regional identities’ turn out to be complicated, multilayered, ideological and material media of power, which may affect individuals as well as social groups.

Drawing together these discourses and returning to the notion of 'regional identity' as a symbolic-representational concept, the ubiquitous production of symbolic particularity and distinctiveness remain relevant as well as contested agendas in contemporary tourism promotion and everyday touristic practices. It seems more often that we face the development of new formats of region equipped with new symbolic orders of ‘regionality’ in that tourism is in position to create new and virtual layers of meanings between and over ‘established’ political/ geographical regions. The (re-)invention and ‘mushrooming’ of different and differently themed ‘bio’-, ‘wellbeing’- or ‘culinary regions’ etc. as well as the creation of various ‘lands’, ‘countries’, ‘hearts’ (Van ‘T Kloosters et al., 2002) or ‘national parks’ (many of them denominated as ‘regions’) most strikingly reflects the demand for difference within a steady rise of the tourism and leisure ‘industries’.

Akin to these observations and partly coupled with the reformulation of regional identities through externally and internally definable signs and symbols, the ‘aesthetization of contemporary everyday life’ (Featherstone, 1991; Schulze, 1995) and the diagnosis of the so called ‘post-tourism’ (Feifer, 1985; Urry, 1994) have made us aware of the fact, that tourism is not merely a ritual of escaping the humdrum flow of the everyday for a promising ‘elsewhere’ but has to be considered an aesthetic experience and consuming practice which is taking place in people’s proximate environments and ‘home regions’. A gradually growing number of urban and rural festivals, for instance, may prove affirmative in the ‘touristic’ perception of the near environment and the seemingly everyday. Linked to this observation, tourism has long since gained ‘aesthetic reflexivity’ in the way that visitors and hosts are becoming increasingly skilled in questioning and evaluating problematic issues of i.e. environmental changes or socio-cultural transformation processes within regions (Cohen, 1995; Hennig, 1999).

In order to summarize these tendencies, tourism challenges the very perceptions of ‘region’ as a geographically, culturally bounded territory as well as notions of 'regional identity' among locals as well as visitors. Likewise, it addresses the role of institutions, opinion makers and administrators who are in charge of the (re-)generating of symbolic regional orders and mainly economically driven ideas of identity.
The Hohe Tauern National Park and the cultural 'symbolic reservoir' of the alpine region

Although, remarkably, Austria has established no less than five new national park projects over the past ten years, the Hohe Tauern NP with its 1.786 square kilometres is the country's first and largest reservation area and even ranks among the largest protected areas in Europe and within the alpine region. The fact, that the national park encloses a territory in the south west of the country which is shared by the three Austrian provinces (Länder) Carinthia, the Tyrol and Salzburg may partly explain the area’s rather complex and contested genesis:

Due to three different federal constitutional laws/ constitutions and diverging structural visions for the region’s economic future the realisation took place in three steps. Although there has been a first common declaration about the creation of a national park region between the three federal states already in 1971, the project could only be officially realised in 1991 when the Tyrol finally and fully joined its two neighbouring regions which had implemented the declaration agendas in 1981 (Carinthia) and 1984 (Salzburg). Due to this federal separation, the Hohe Tauern National Park features three different administration units one based in each province.

It can be summarized that the national park's rather complicated history is additionally characterized by severe conflicts between interest groups of a rising ecological movement in Austria since the 1970ies and opposed, mainly federal interest groups which considered the region among Austria's highest mountain ranges providing the ideal prerequisites for the erection of hydroelectric-power stations (concrete dams), which promised lucrative business as well as the creation of job-opportunities in this remote area which was at that time characterized by increasing unemployment in the agricultural sector. At the same time the region's touristic potential for the implementations of grand glacier ski resorts - an auspicious summer tourist format in the 1970 and 1980ies was heavily advocated on local and federal levels but was finally rejected after amendments in the federal 'Naturschutzgesetz' (natural protection law) designated glaciers as an important drinking water resource for future generations in 1990.

In this fervid situation, the ‘Austrian Alpine Club’, which was an influential landholder in the area played a significant role and tried to mobilize people to 'adopt' the area by symbolically selling 'National Park square meters'. The proceeds of this very successful campaign were in turn used to support various pilot-projects in the future National park region and to 'safeguard' a unique natural and cultural alpine landscape in the name of ecology and a sustainable (‘soft’) alpine tourism development.

Additionally and despite of the fact that from the very beginning local land owners were encouraged to get involved in the National Park planning process, many of them feared the constriction of old-established autonomies and rights connected with the transformation of their agricultural area into protected zones.

In terms of tourism, the area which has become the Hohe Tauern National Park region can be characterized by the co-existence of highly developed winter ski resorts in Salzburg and a more stagnating summer tourism segment based on private room rent in local bed and breakfast or/and farm accommodations made up by families and hiking tourists and regular guests mostly from Germany, the low countries and more recently from the ‘Eastern European’ countries.

Following recent prognoses, the preservation and mediation of cultural identity and heritage for tourism purposes in national parks will be of significant importance the following years (Boyd, 2004). This emerging tendency certainly affects an increasing number of European protected areas which over the past few years have apparently started to emphasise and market their ‘cultural landscapes’ more rigorously (Boyd 2004).

Apart from the simple notion that genuine ‘natural’ landscapes are fairly rare in Europe, this development may also be related to the fact that alongside with the United Nation’s Rio- and Johannesburg summits a ‘sustainable global development’ was explicitly formulated as a worldwide future key issue. This ‘global awareness’ of sustainability resulted also in the actuality that ‘cultural landscapes’ have been designated as a distinct category being part of a ‘shared global heritage’ by the UNESCO in 1992.

Thereby it is also globally argued that mountain regions such as the Alps are considered among the foremost sensitive and fragile biospheres and often serve as a referential role model for developing future, ecologically and culturally sustainable tourism models. This notion was notably expressed in the UN’s international ‘Year of Mountains’ campaign of 2002 which at the same time was declared a ‘Year of sustainable tourism’. With the emblematic and unifying slogan 'we are all mountain people' the UN also re-emphasised the significant role of ‘indigenous people’ as well as the protection of their ‘cultural identity, traditional knowledge and practices in ecologically fragile environments, already articulated in the Rio principles (UN Report 1992, Principle 22).

The ‘Alps network for protected areas’, for example, has reacted to these tendencies by developing special programmes for the preservation and promotion of alpine cultural landscapes for the purpose of a sustainable
tourism development including “the protection of traditional architecture and landscape elements, the preservation of folk customs and the enhancement of cultural products etc.” (Alps Network for Protected Areas Report, 2001)

Likewise, the promotion of distinctive ‘alpine identities’ and ‘cultures’ has become a European cultural political issue. Reinhold Messner, the prominent former mountaineer, 'adventurer' and representative of Italia’s green party in the European parliament emphasised the cultural potential of the alpine regions. In an interview for the German weekly newspaper Die Zeit he stated, that the alpine areas should increasingly focus upon a collective outward representation whereas internally they should accentuate and define themselves through their cultural autonomy. In his vision, the Alps should become a ‘Flickenteppich’ (the alpine counterpart to ‘patchwork’) in that it’s different ‘cultures’ highlight a genuine 'alpine savoir vivre' and likewise their distinct identity markers such as folk dress, cuisine, architectural stiles etc. (Die Zeit, No. 44, 2000).

Initiatives and statements like these which are emphasising distinctive and bounded alpine identities echo the 'longue durée' of essentially modern and compensational perceptions of remote alpine spaces, which can be traced back to the romanticisms of the 18th and 19th centuries. This history of an emotionally ‘internalized’ wild alpine nature equipped with an equally unspoilt culture in touristic, political, idealist-ethical perceptions is well documented and will not be stressed here (e.g., Stremlow, 1998; Tschofen, 1999). However, landscapes like the Alps are never value free but comprise ideological dimensions and reflect specific value systems which can assemple or can be stored in ‘collective’ memories. The nation-building processes of explicitly ‘alpine’ countries such as Switzerland and Austria, though periodically and contextually diverging, refer to the significance and dominance of ‘archetypical’ landscapes in the formation of distinct ‘identities’ through images and myths (Kaufmann and Zimmer, 1998). In this sense, seemingly ‘backward’ romantic images of an authentic mountain identity and culture can become constitutive parts of what Kos (1995) called ‘political landscapes’.

This can be observed in an Austrian nation building process, where romanticised and conservative iconographies of an idyllic 'mountain peasant culture' were employed in various times and political contexts and have become substantial components of the country's popular culture and self-representation. Postcards, exhibitions, picture- and schoolbooks, tourist brochures, films etc. from the 1930ies onward give evidence of these ideologically fuelled and long lasting images of an 'eternal alpine identity', rooted in nature, rich folklore traditions and 'heimat' (Pfoser and Renner, 1984; Faber, 1995; Kos, 1995).

**The 'symbolic economy' of the National Park region**

The Hohe Tauern National Park exhibits an image of an unspoilt alpine area and emphasises the conservation and mediation of both, its natural and cultural landscape and heritage. According to this preservation policy the area is divided in so called ‘core zones’ (Kernzonen) which depict the relatively ‘untouched’ because mountainous inner terrain whereas ‘exterior zones’ (Aussenzonen) are designated to preserve the region’s ‘cultural landscape’ characterized by cultivated mountain pastures and/or agriculturally used farmland which is adequately equipped with ‘typical landscape elements’ of a historically developed and ‘traditional’ built environment. Additionally, the National Park acknowledges valuable 'archaeological' and 'historical sites' as further categories.

The park’s natural features are made accessible and tangible to visitors by the implementation of themed routes, guided tours or information centres where natural/ biological processes are pedagogically explained and illuminated. Likewise, the seasonal and cultural landscape-shaping work of the local mountain farmers is depicted on boards along hiking-trails and retold via multi-media presentations in the park’s information centres. In addition, the area's archaeological sites and valuable historic landscape elements such as prototypical farm-ensembles, water- and sawmills, chapels etc. are designated and added with the appropriate information for potential visitors. Although this guided representation of the natural and cultural environment is appreciated by most tourists, critiques addressing the ‘museumised’ character of the surrounding nature and culture arose among locals as well as individuals who have been visiting the area for many years as regular guests. (Kremser, 2003)

The area’s ‘cultural landscape’ and ‘heritage’, upon which I shall focus here, are medially expressed in a distinctive ‘mountain peasant culture’, which - as a ‘culture of the little man’ (NPHT, 2000) has over the centuries formed, cultivated and sustained this formerly rough and inhospitable but now recreational landscape so popular among the area’s visitors and tourists.

Like in numerous regions elsewhere the ‘cultural heritage’ of the farming population is formatted for tourists by clearly identifiable ‘tangible’ and ‘intangible’ markers such as traditional alpine architecture, handicrafts, religious and profane customs and festivals, foods, music or dialect. These components are being marked as
authentic features which had developed almost independently from external trends and modernisation processes due to the region's rural and very remote position within the Austrian Alps.

In this representational policy, the image of a genuine rural ‘alpine culture’ in the National Park’s promotion media reflects a rather romanticised, ‘backward’ and even pre-industrial image of the local population, its working environment and material culture. In throwing a glance at representational images in the national park’s touristic media such as brochures or booklets, we encounter the rural protagonists seriously concerned and working for the maintenance of the cultural landscape. Stereotypically, we see ‘him’ mowing the steep mountain meadows, repairing wooden fences, barns and stone walls with traditional working tools or he/she is involved in profane and religious customs, etc. Alongside with these iconographies, which, again, do not greatly differ from those of numerous other rural tourist destinations, the park’s mountain farmer’s culture and its traditions are frequently described and narrated as having evolved ‘naturally’ over the centuries, being ‘rooted’ in their environment or living in the state of ‘companionship’ ‘symbiosis’ with their surrounding nature.

Authentic cultural heritage as identity-marker

Romanticised natural purity coupled with cultural ‘backwardness’ and historicity as potential genres of ‘authenticity’ remain leading themes and paradigms in tourism promotion, practice and analysis. Boissevain recognizes this long tradition of the authenticity-promising coalition between nature, culture and historicity in the progressing development of various forms of ‘special interest tourism' which is more often complementing ‘sun, sand and sea’ with ‘culture, nature and traditional life’ (Boissevain, 1996) and has developed from a niche market to a profit yielding travel business over the last decade or so. This tendency can also be observed in touristic ‘re-enactments’ of a bygone everyday life in thematically ‘revived’ cultural heritage/archaeological sites and ‘living history’ museums which are surrounded by unspoilt nature and where visitors can experience ‘traditional’ life by primitive cooking, dressing and working.

Svensson observes the trend that more often people are trying to overcome the deeply modern separation between culture and nature in their ‘role’ as tourists. Throughout modernity, a primordial and unspoilt culture has been constructed ‘authentic’, as the ‘significant other’ or as the prerequisite for a ‘better’ life, where people lived in harmonic co-existence with nature. In that sense the consumption of an authentic cultural heritage embedded in a likewise unspoilt natural environment may also function as aesthetic prerequisites for a subtle and ecologically motivated social critique referring to a present state of the world which assembles ‘artificiality’, the ‘loss of values’ or ‘in-authenticity’ (Svensson, 1998).

The national park’s self-understanding and representation towards an ‘authentic regional culture’ may be described as significantly and consciously opposed to the popularized image of an alpine tourism ‘industry’ which is still critically linked to ‘mass’, ‘folkloric’ and ‘staged’ tourism events mainly associated with Austrian busy winter-sport resorts. According to the region’s planning officials and representatives, cliché-laden “Tyrolean evenings” – folkloric animation performances with music and dance - are dismissed and so is, for instance, architecture, which fuses ‘traditional’ alpine elements with concrete and flashy paint resulting in ‘tasteless’ and hybrid outcomes (Kremser, 2003). Instead, a ‘lived’ and vivid but at the same time traditionally developed culture is heavily promoted. Tourists should not simply gaze upon heritage but are invited to actively participate in local festivals and rural life. Moreover, people should experience the aura and atmosphere of the local cultural heritage, which might be sensed, for instance if somebody enters a century-old farm house (Kurzthaler 1997). On the other hand, the national park committees is trying to sensitize the region’s inhabitants towards their own traditions and ‘cultural identity’ in that locals are invited to join special national-park evenings and -weekends where old people narrate stories from the past, folk costumes are exhibited or authentic folk music is provided (NPHT, 1999).

This understanding of an 'authentic heritage' is most evidently reflected in the 'natural' materiality of local artefacts. A few years ago farmers in the region were encouraged to introduce agricultural and handcrafted

"Synbiosis"
products made from traceable local materials for the regional souvenir market. Interestingly, this attempt failed because most tourists favoured familiar, rather ‘commonplace’ and not least cheaper artefacts such as hiking badges, postcards, Tyrolean hats etc.

Turning to region’s historic built environment as another example, it can be observed, that the application of natural, traditional and therefore ‘authentic’ materials such as stone and wood is not only meant to reflect the inhabitant’s intimate and traditional connectedness to nature but should also aid to safeguard this attractive landscape by meeting demands of sustainability.

It is in the name of sustainability that the national park’s officials legitimize the preservation of this built environment which is supposed to fulfil multiple functions such as the energy-saving application of regional raw materials, the pedagogic value in terms of environmental education for children and even social functions in that, for example, the old farmer is handing over his skills to an interested younger generation (Kremser and Lainer, 2003)

In this context, farmers in the National Park are obliged to and are financially recompensed for the thatching of roofs with wooden clapboards, the re-furbishing and rebuilding of alp-barns, wooden fences in traditional design or for manually mowing the steep mountain meadows which are often characterised by difficult accessibility. One running meter of traditionally erected fence, for example, is recompensed with eight to eleven Euros, depending, however on the specific design of the fence. It is interesting to note, that the production of wooden clapboards for the thatching of buildings has developed to a small sideline business for farmers in some parts of the reservation area. Meanwhile, some locals have specialized in the production of clapboards automatically and sell it on inquiry to others.

However, this policy may be criticised as ‘museumization of landscape’ (Overdick, 1999), a further evidence for a ‘heritage industry’ (Lowenthal, 1986) or a mere building and refurbishing policy for the ‘tourist gaze’ (Urry, 1990). This becomes evident, when seemingly practical issues are being replaced by the aesthetic functions of the surrounding built environment. Practically, farmers favour handy and more transportable electro-fences in the oftentimes steep environment and the refurbishment of alp-barns becomes almost obsolete because adequate personnel is oftentimes lacking.

The German tourist analysts Beck and Welz (1997) have observed a similar conservation policy in a farming tourism region in Cyprus. According to them this sort of heritage preservation is equivalent to and nurtures a process of ‘naturalization of culture’ which characterizes the destination promotion in an increasing number of peripheral areas, which see heritage-, agricultural and/or organic tourism as a promising format for regional development. Places and regions are thereby made ‘visible’ by aesthetically mediating culture as something which has always been there ‘naturally’ and remains unchanged and unquestioned over time.

Likewise, tradition is not interpreted as something socially constructed or ‘invented’ but is believed remaining unmodified over generations. The result is, what they critically term the subjugation of a ‘social time’ under a ‘monumental time’ in that region and regional culture is defined monolithically and pinned down to a single ‘temporal horizon’, which in turn reduces the variety of open possibilities for socio-cultural change, limits the space of subjective memories and excludes alternative perceptions of the local’s proximate and every-day life world.

The contested role of mountain farmers

Turning to the regional actors at this junction it should be mentioned that the national park’s heritage policy had continuously to face critiques which were addressing the function of the mountain farmers as ‘cultural landscape protectors’. Emblematic catchwords such as ‘landscape gardeners’ or ‘environmental servants’ were cynically employed by critics who referred to the overall passive position of the mountain peasants in the reservation area (Ruptisch, 1995).

Although, on a broader scale, these phrases can be traced back to an overall European agricultural crisis in the 1970ies, they reappeared in the early 1990ies, when Austria’s admission to the European Union was on the agenda and anxieties arose, which fuelled a pessimistic scenario regarding the future of the country’s mountain farmers. In these discussions, however, farmers were viewed as mere subjects to an exceedingly liberalized European market and their passive role as receivers of direct payments from the Union was predicted. Thus, the mountain farmer was viewed as a ‘slave of Europe’s large agricultural complex’ and the sustainment of the ‘cultural landscape’ was viewed a shallow alibi disguising the loss of self-confidence and auspicious future prospects among the rural farming population (Ledermüller, 2002).

Observers of Austria’s current agricultural development witness the mountain farmers finding themselves in a predominantly pessimistic and sceptical position which is mainly due to frequently changing agricultural policies over the last years on a national as well as on a broader European scale (‘multi-functional’ agriculture, the ‘eco-social’ way, etc.). These fluctuations and the ongoing European enlargement process are seen as the main reasons to fuel uncertainty among the farming population in Austria’s mountain areas. This perception is still tangent to the National Park and remains dominant in spite of the fact, that positive
socio-cultural problems which among other things find their expression in generation-conflicts, difficulties in family-structures, 'naturalness', 'religiousness' or the 'awareness of tradition', which fail to address actual dependency and passivity, is thereby viewed similar to external urban and media-perceptions such as 'intact preservation although this perception has become a popular 'image' within the public opinion and is likewise study has shown that farmers do not necessarily identify with their responsibility of cultural landscape pastures in some alpine parts of the country over the last twenty years (Hanisch, 2002). Alongside these initiatives, the National Park’s LEADER-consortium has successfully joint venture with the functional' and multi-purpose agricultural policy, which sees one of its core objectives the safeguarding of the development of genuine alpine cultural landscapes as a primary base for other substantial uses (local industries, tourism etc.). In that sense the asset for local development in mountain areas has received higher priority on a national and European scale over the last years (Dax, 2004). The new strategies, which try to combine the various regional sectors are represented by national programmes for the development of peripheral mountain areas and are connected to a current European ‘Agenda 2000’ rural policy, which continues to establish and sustain agro-tourism developments by programmes such as Leader+, of which the large parts of the National Park became part a few years ago. Alongside these initiatives, the National Park’s LEADER-consortium has successfully joint venture with the organic label 'ja!natürlich' ('yes!naturally') which is part of an internationally well established business/supermarket business and tour operator (REWE-group). As a consequence of this bottom up-cooperation, the company promotes farm holiday in the National Park region. With slogans like 'Experience the roots' or 'Encountering the Origins' the company stresses the already well established ‘image’ of the national park region as a naturally/culturally ‘authentic’ landscape. Likewise, the slogans refer to a marketing technique which DeLind described with 'overcoming of distance' between producers and increasingly reflective consumer cultures via ‘emotional’ narratives (DeLind, 1997). This was (among other things) supposed to re-establish the consumer’s confidence after Europe’s grave agricultural crisis, most prominently 'BSE', in previous years. In the attempt to bring consumers as close as possible to the producers, excursions to organic farms are organized where tourist can temporarily switch the role by trying out ‘how it feels like to be an organic mountain farmer’. Likewise, guests in the farms are invited to fabricate their own souvenirs of traditional materials such as felt or hey and are encouraged to participate in courses and activities such as bread baking, weaving etc.

In the promotion of farm holidays, authentic gastronomy and seasonal agro-tourism festivals, the National Park’s cultural and natural heritage is heavily emphasised by the investing company, which describes itself being in a ‘godfather’ or ‘protector’ position for maintaining and safeguarding the region’s ‘cultural identity’. This philosophy is literally expressed on every milk carton to be found in supermarket shelves, where consumers can trace back the product to the producer, are invited for holiday and are encouraged to read about the ethical responsibility the company holds for the protection of the region’s continuity. According to this rhetoric and to underline the company’s credibility, the mountain farmers have not only conserved traditional knowledge but have at the same time always and consciously resisted the major and misleading trends of mass production within European agriculture and an ongoing globalization process. As opposed to global/ European overproduction/ ('milk-lakes' and 'meat-mountains') etc. the local peasantry remained intimately ‘connected with nature' and always felt responsible i.e. for the sustenance of old-established regional farm animals and agricultural-plants, which now supply the leading products for the supermarket company: ‘[i]n this sense the company sees itself to represent foremost the people who live and work and the region and who do not consider themselves ‘producers’ and their land a mere ‘nutrient’ but rather a ‘body’ where plants and animals are not ‘assimilated’ but have their natural ‘heimat’ (ja!natürlich, 2000)

Additionally, farmers are attributed with the features of self-esteem and pride and the formerly negative-image of the mountain peasant as a passive receiver of direct payments and ‘landscape-gardener’ are addressed and clearly inverted.

**Culture? yes naturally! – interconnections between agriculture and regional tourism**

The combination of cultural and natural heritage with tourism meets current interests and notions of a 'multi-functional' and multi-purpose agricultural policy, which sees one of its core objectives the safeguarding of organic label 'ja!natürlich' ('yes!naturally') which is part of an internationally well established business/supermarket business and tour operator (REWE-group). As a consequence of this bottom up-cooperation, the company promotes farm holiday in the National Park region. With slogans like 'Experience the roots' or 'Encountering the Origins' the company stresses the already well established ‘image’ of the national park region as a naturally/culturally ‘authentic’ landscape. Likewise, the slogans refer to a marketing technique which DeLind described with 'overcoming of distance' between producers and increasingly reflective consumer cultures via ‘emotional’ narratives (DeLind, 1997). This was (among other things) supposed to re-establish the consumer’s confidence after Europe’s grave agricultural crisis, most prominently 'BSE', in previous years. In the attempt to bring consumers as close as possible to the producers, excursions to organic farms are organized where tourist can temporarily switch the role by trying out ‘how it feels like to be an organic mountain farmer’. Likewise, guests in the farms are invited to fabricate their own souvenirs of traditional materials such as felt or hey and are encouraged to participate in courses and activities such as bread baking, weaving etc.

In the promotion of farm holidays, authentic gastronomy and seasonal agro-tourism festivals, the National Park’s cultural and natural heritage is heavily emphasised by the investing company, which describes itself being in a ‘godfather’ or ‘protector’ position for maintaining and safeguarding the region’s ‘cultural identity’. This philosophy is literally expressed on every milk carton to be found in supermarket shelves, where consumers can trace back the product to the producer, are invited for holiday and are encouraged to read about the ethical responsibility the company holds for the protection of the region’s continuity. According to this rhetoric and to underline the company's credibility, the mountain farmers have not only conserved traditional knowledge but have at the same time always and consciously resisted the major and misleading trends of mass production within European agriculture and an ongoing globalization process. As opposed to global/ European overproduction/ ('milk-lakes' and 'meat-mountains') etc. the local peasantry remained intimately ‘connected with nature' and always felt responsible i.e. for the sustenance of old-established regional farm animals and agricultural-plants, which now supply the leading products for the supermarket company: ‘[i]n this sense the company sees itself to represent foremost the people who live and work and the region and who do not consider themselves ‘producers’ and their land a mere ‘nutrient’ but rather a ‘body’ where plants and animals are not ‘assimilated’ but have their natural ‘heimat’ (ja!natürlich, 2000)

Additionally, farmers are attributed with the features of self-esteem and pride and the formerly negative-image of the mountain peasant as a passive receiver of direct payments and ‘landscape-gardener’ are addressed and clearly inverted.
Conclusion

This paper has shown that tourism is an important factor to create a representational 'regional identity'. It was attempted to outline that 'identity formation' in this context is mainly achieved and nurtured by aesthetical/symbolical means. The narration and depiction of a 'backward' 'alpine peasant culture' is certainly no recent tourism phenomenon but corresponds with historical imaginations, which have been shaped over time by various actors and have become part of the 'memory' of a specific area embedded in a specific, i.e. national context. Until now, images of a pure alpine landscape cultivated over centuries by the local farmers are symbolically employed in popular national media and political rhetoric when conflicts appear, which are tangent to the country’s position within global networks and/or the European Union. It is thus that the unspoilt alpine nature, the traditional farm houses and peasant work are being stressed with ostentation when transit traffic is about to increase as a consequence of European trade and mobility-liberalization, when the sovereignty over the country’s water recourses is challenged or when parts of the national constitutional laws are questioned from 'outside' (Tschofen 2002). In this sense, a themed 'region' such as the Hohe Tauern National Park can serve as a playground and aesthetic reservoir which can be used to channel (national) interests and ideologies and is therefore in position to map out new 'symbolic borders'. Although 'tourism micromarketing' may suggest the invention of 'new' symbolic orders for places and regions, we have to acknowledge, that images of 'regional identity' are seldom 'ready made' and symbols have always an ambiguous history.

At the same time, iconographies of backwardness (re-)shaped by tourism help to articulate and develop seemingly shared visions of 'sustainable authenticity' (Cohen, 1995) towards consuming or tourism cultures, which are believed in a state of increasing reflexivity towards environmental or cultural issues in post-modern conditions. This is certainly true for the ‘invention of an organic consumer tradition’ which is interconnected with seemingly familiar and romanticised perceptions of peripheral regions. In this marketing strategy, the ‘culture’ of a product is more often valued with 'emotional narratives' which, like in the National Park, may suggest the protection of the 'identity' of a specific region and/or cultural landscape.

Regional image - equated with 'regional identity' may thus serve for aspiration of dominant groups and reflects the values, lifestyles and expectations of potential investors and tourists. Regions marked as cultural landscapes can thus be spaces added with codes and clues leading us back in romantic and 'better' times as tourists/consumers. They are at any rate powerful and symbolically charged spaces with an ability to channel important values such as 'identity', 'authenticity' and 'authority'. In this context and with their 'prerequisites' of natural and cultural closeness and peripherality, the alpine regions may (once again) serve as a representational role model for the development of politically and ecologically 'correct' agricultural and tourist products. What may be circumscribed with the 'acculturation' of the agro-tourism sector here certainly refers to the fact that 'conventional' agents/ institutions of identity-mediation have long since been replaced by or fused with other interest groups, firms and organisations. In this context it becomes evident that the symbolic use of (regional) ‘identity’ has become more 'informal' in the way that various actors apply this concept on different scales and for different purposes.

The example of the Hohe Tauern National Park may show, that regional images are constituted both through discourse - as in marketing campaigns, promotional brochures and tourist advertising - and by more concrete means, including the transformation of the built environment through conservation work and 'sustainability'-promising redevelopment programmes. Such interventions may alter a community's material and symbolic capital, and therefore have an impact upon collective representation and identity formation. "[W]hile human intent and actions inscribe meaning and transform space into experienced places, places in turn structure human values and actions. [...] People's associations with and consciousness of the place where they live constitute vital sources for cultural identity construction, a point of departure where people orient themselves in the world." (Broudehoux, 2001)

Landscapes which are to be used for a specific purpose - 'themed' for tourism experience or adopted for attempts at ideological persuasion may also rule out surprises, 'dreams' or 'fantasies' (Frykman, 2002)

Tourism is not the only but certainly a vital agent which is not only in position to affirm authentic images and symbols for regional identification but also to create 'new' -and not always necessarily 'virtual' regional spaces. By 'conserving' and fixing their 'cultural identity' in remoteness and bygone times it might also confine their capacity for the creation of new directions and connections, new productive forces, growth and cultural development.
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References


DAX T. (2004), The impact of EU policies on mountain development in Austria. Online paper presented at the Regional Studies Association's International Conference: "EU Regional Policy, Peripherality and Rurality”.


The development of European identity requires the construction and refinement of communication between the constituent groups. Translation is always to some extent interpretation, and genuine translation from one language to another requires a real appre. The areas of education and language policy are particularly relevant in this context. Two quite diverse projects fall under the heading of this European identity dimension: CRIC and LINEE. citizen); EuroBroadMap (The European Union and the world seen from abroad); EURO-FESTIVAL (Art festivals and the European public culture); EUROIDENTITIES (The evolution of European identity: using biographical methods to study the.