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**RAISING AWARENESS OF
URBAN ENVIRONMENT
DEVELOPMENT IN
PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

ABSTRACT: In the past few years, excessive efforts have been made to increase the city's attractiveness and its international positioning. Also studies on the so-called city destination branding are on the rise. Theorists, as Ramirez (2001), Marzano and Scott (2009), among many others, are discussing different aspects of this complex process. Many approaches and strategies are dealing with the positioning of urban environments and city destinations, trying to provide at least some partial answers about achieving this objective. With proper marketing and branding, cities can do a lot to attract tourists and visitors. For successful city marketing and branding and for the successful long-term positioning of the destination in general, it is necessary to involve the key stakeholders and collaborate with as many as possible despite the fact that the branding of a city destination (or any destination for that matter) is a complex process. It is significant that all the stakeholders, who are always carriers of different interests, are invited to collaborate in the planning of the tourism development and tourism development strategies, from the government, the private sector, schools etc. It is also important to involve

the citizens, who can provide a valuable opinion about the environment they live in – what they like about their environment, what suggestion would they give to tourists about gastronomy, attractions, shops, events, etc. It is significant that citizens are proud of their urban environment, that they know their own environment, and that they have the motivation for the involvement in the process of improvement of their home environment (through projects, discussions, etc.). It is impossible to create attractive urban environments or cities if residents do not have a positive opinion about the place they live in. That is why it is essential for the education institutions at all levels, but especially for the institutions at the primary levels to educate children, toddlers, pupils, students, about the importance of urban environment development and create a positive learning environment, where children are able to develop as residents with a great understanding of the potential of the environment they live in. The paper explores the importance of raising awareness of the urban environment in primary schools from the theoretical, analytical and practical point of views. In the paper, we will examine whether

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primary schools in the city of Maribor, Slovenia educate children about their urban environment, if they are creating positive learning environments, where children can develop into proud citizens aware of the significance of the urban environment and its consequences for the quality of their lives. Further on, the curricula in chosen primary schools in Maribor is going to be analyzed. With the survey, we will try to identify the degree of children's awareness of their surrounding urban environment, the information they receive about their environment, and their attitude towards it. And finally, what is most important, we will try to show the extreme significance of the learning environment and the curricula for raising the awareness of the environment and growing into responsible adults who will also act responsibly towards their urban environments.

KEY WORDS: tourism, branding, literature, urban, environment, education, children

INTRODUCTION

In the past few years, excessive efforts have been made to increase the city's attractiveness and its international positioning. Also, studies on the so-called city destination branding are on the rise. Theorists, as Ramirez (2001), Marzano and Scott (2009), among many others, are discussing different aspects of this complex process. The understanding of the process of destination branding is important because the destination brand plays an important role in the building of the image of a tourism destination, and the industry spends a large amount of money in the creation of a competitive brand. Experts say that a part of branding is also the awareness of inhabitants of the urban area which is shown through quality of life measurements. According to Rapley (2003), despite the fact that quality of life is challenging to define, it is essential also

in the tourism industry, but it usually means socioeconomic security and the fulfilment of other non-material needs. Health and education, alongside an economic component (GDP), are indicators of Human Development Index (Mboup, 2014), the environment and infrastructure are often overlooked. Environment and infrastructure are as important as health, education and economic components, yet we don't classify them as primary indicators.

Many places nowadays are seeking to build and implement different strategies for their better position, differentiation and attractiveness, towards a variety of stakeholder, such as tourists, visitors, investors, students, skilled workers and also residents. According to that, many cities are putting a lot of effort in branding and promoting themselves for better visibility at regional and local levels (Aboulkheir, 2013). For successful city marketing and branding and for the successful long-term positioning of the destination in general and also from tourism point of view, it is necessary to involve the key stakeholders and collaborate with as many as possible despite the fact that the branding of a city destination (or any destination for that matter) is a complex process. According to authors Ma and Liu (n.d.), the complexity of branding depends on stakeholders' and target consumers' needs and is increasing with their diversity and conflicting objectives. That is why it is important that regulation bodies ensure that their desires reflect local community needs and expectations. Citizens are not sometimes aware of the importance of tourism for the city they live in and see it as frivolous or of little economic value, with a focus on the negative perceptions such as traffic jam, seasonal employment, low-wage jobs, etc. That is why it is very important, to build well-targeted and ongoing community relations, which can educate citizens about the potential positive impacts of tourism and overall influence on positive community perceptions (Vitcenda, 2011). It is significant that all the stakeholders,

who are always carriers of different interests, are invited to collaborate in the planning of tourism development and tourism development strategies, from the government, the private sector, schools, etc. With this in mind, it is important that citizens are proud of their urban environment, that they know their own environment, and that they have the motivation for the involvement in the process of improvement of their home environment (through projects, discussions, etc.).

It is important that different local strategy planning processes involve the citizens, who can provide a valuable opinion about the environment they live in – what they like about their environment, what suggestion they would give to tourists about gastronomy, attractions, shops, events, etc. It is impossible to create attractive urban environments or cities if residents do not have a positive opinion about the place they live in. That is why it is essential for the education institutions at all levels, but especially for the institutions at the primary levels to educate children, toddlers, pupils, students, about the importance of urban environment development and create a positive learning environment, where children are able to develop as residents with a great understanding of the potential of the environment they live in. The children are namely the optimal audience for raising the awareness of the environment they live in and so they can grow into responsible adults, who will act responsibly towards their urban environments and also aid the positive branding of the environment they live in (in general and from the tourism point of view). In long-term branding the awareness and pride of citizens are of significant importance; the fact that people believe in their city to be clean, sustainable, will impact the visitors. On a larger scale, tourism leans on the trends of environmental awareness and sustainability, which means that the incoming tourism in an urban environment, where the efficiency of infrastructure and environmental awareness is at a certain level, will rise.

METHODOLOGY

The main research question was whether primary schools in the city of Maribor, Slovenia educate children about their urban environment, if they are creating positive learning environments, where children can develop into proud citizens aware of the significance of the urban environment and its consequences for the quality of their lives. One of the chosen schools is in the centre of Maribor (the Slovenian second largest city) and the other lies in the suburbs of the same city.

According to the research question and the creation of the questionnaire, we first made a literature review and also analysed primary schools' curricula that are uniform at the national level and all available online data on the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports website. Analysis of Slovene primary school curriculum revealed that pupils are educated about tourism, about main local and city attractions, about local, regional and national history, urban environment, etc. as prescribed in the curricula. Obligatory subjects like Geography, History and Patriotic and Civic culture and Ethics do include related topics. Broader knowledge about this can be enhanced also through elective subjects, such as Tourist Education, Research of Domestic Place and Protection of its Environment, Environmental Education, Ethnology, Cultural Heritage and Ways of Life (MIZS, 2016).

Further on, we set two hypotheses; H1: Suburban and urban schools differ in the pupil's education about the city of Maribor, education about the tourist attractions of the city of Maribor and providing positive information about the city and H2: Education about the city of Maribor, education about the tourist attractions of the city of Maribor and providing positive information about the city impacts the ability of the city branding.

The research was conducted with the help of a questionnaire and was carried out at the end of spring of 2016.

TABLE 1. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTIC

	EDUCATION ABOUT THE CITY	EDUCATION ABOUT TOURIST ATTRACTIONS	POSITIVE INFORMATION
M	1,5516	1,7154	1,696
SD	,38895	,31003	,4574
Asymmetry	-,186	-,605	-,852
Kurtosis	-1,327	-,581	-1,274

TABLE 2. CORRELATIONS

	EDUCATION ABOUT THE CITY	EDUCATION ABOUT TOURIST ATTRACTIONS	POSITIVE INFORMATION
Education about the city	–		
Education about tourist attractions	,190*	–	
Positive information	,040	,204*	–

* $p < 0,01$

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The sample included 208 pupils, 112 of which were girls (55.2%) and 91 (44.8%) were boys. Five pupils did not give the information on their sex but the difference in number by gender was not statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 2,17$, $p = 0.141$. The average age of pupils was 12, 57 (SD = 0.89), the youngest was 11 years old and the oldest 14 years old. The questionnaire was distributed at two schools: One urban and one suburban. From the urban school, we got 73 (36%) questionnaires and from the suburban school 130 (64%) questionnaires. The difference in the number of completed questionnaires between the two schools is statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 16,01$, $p < 0,001$.

We have created two new variables, namely based on hierarchical cluster analysis and substantive reasonableness. We have calculated average values of the arguments that are related to the experience

of raising awareness of the city of Maribor and its surroundings in relation to primary education. Thus, we acquired two new combined variables: *Education about the city* and *Education about tourist attractions*. We have created the variable: *Positive information* by taking into account the average value of the variable: In our school the teachers are telling us positive things about the city of Maribor. Table 1 shows that, on average, the pupils in school were more educated about the tourist attractions of Maribor than about general facts about the city of Maribor. Also, on average, they agreed on the fact that, in school, they got positive information about their environment. As can be seen from the coefficients of asymmetry and kurtosis, they are within the limits of ± 2 , so for the further analysis, we used parametric tests (Table 1).

With the Pearson correlation coefficient, we have checked the correlation of students' opinions on

their experience with the raising of awareness of the city of Maribor and its surroundings in regard to their school (as Table 2 shows). The results showed that there was a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) correlation between the pupils' opinion on the education about the city and education about tourist attractions, namely the connection was positive. That means that the more teachers teach pupils about tourist attractions the more they teach them about the city, and vice versa. Also, there is

a statistically significant correlation between the education about tourist attractions and providing positive information about the city, while there are no correlations related to the education about the city and providing positive information about the city. This means that the more positive information about the city teachers provide, the more they teach pupils about the tourist attractions and vice versa. But there is no connection to how much they teach them about the city.

TABLE 3. DIFFERENCES IN RELATION TO SCHOOL (URBAN OR SUBURBAN SCHOOL)

	PRIMARY SCHOOL	N	M	SD
Education about the city	Suburban	130	1,5631	,38896
	Urban	73	1,5210	,38736
Education about tourist attractions	Suburban	130	1,7675	,28858
	Urban	73	1,6168	,32819
Positive information	Suburban	130	1,661	,4699
	Urban	73	1,753	,4340

TABLE 4. INDEPENDENT SAMPLES TEST

		LEVENE'S TEST FOR EQUALITY OF VARIANCES		T-TEST FOR EQUALITY OF MEANS		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Education about the city	Equal variances assumed	,270	,604	,742	201	,459
	Equal variances not assumed			,743	149,807	,459
Education about tourist attractions	Equal variances assumed	,057	,812	3,397	201	,001
	Equal variances not assumed			3,277	133,998	,001
Positive information	Equal variances assumed	7,740	,006	-1,388	201	,167
	Equal variances not assumed			-1,420	159,442	,158

Differences regarding the school (urban or suburban school)

With a t-test for independent samples, we analysed whether there is a difference in the opinion of pupils about the experience with raising awareness of the city of Maribor and its surroundings according to the school, depending on the type of school the pupils attend. Table 3 shows differences in relation to school.

The results showed (see Table 4) that there is a statistically significant difference only in the education regarding tourist attractions, namely in the suburban school, where the teachers educate the

pupils more about them than in the urban school, $t(201) = 3.40, p = 0.001$. In providing positive information ($t(159.44) = -1.42, p = 0.158$) and education about the city ($t(201) = 0.74, p = 0.459$), there are no statistically significant differences.

Answers to the question: *What would students in Maribor recommend to tourists and friends from abroad?* were divided according to the type of school (urban, suburban). The results are shown in Table 5; calculating the chi-square values was not possible due to the multiple-choice questions. The largest differences were noticed during the variable: Visit to the city centre and Visit to Lent; namely, both of them would be recommended

TABLE 5. WHAT WOULD STUDENTS IN MARIBOR RECOMMEND TO TOURISTS AND FRIENDS FROM ABROAD?

RECOMMENDATION		PRIMARY SCHOOL		ALTOGETHER
		Suburban	Urban	
Visit of the city center	f	62	46	108
	f%	15,5	20,1	
Visit to Lent	f	83	51	134
	f%	20,8	22,3	
Visit to the shopping Centers Europark, Qlandia, Leclerc	f	47	28	75
	f%	11,8	12,2	
Visit to the City Park	f	63	37	100
	f%	15,8	16,2	
Trip to Pohorje	f	95	46	141
	f%	23,8	20,1	
Visit to the Pohorje foothills	f	39	17	56
	f%	9,8	7,4	
I would recommend them nothing, because in Maribor there is nothing interesting for tourists.	f	1	0	1
	f%	0,3	0,0	
Other	f	10	4	14
	f%	2,5	1,7	
Altogether	f	400	229	629

TABLE 6. WHICH PART OF THE CITY YOU LIKE VISITING MOST?

RECOMMENDATION		PRIMARY SCHOOL		ALTOGETHER
		Suburban	Urban	
Lent	f	51	26	77
	f%	17,1%	18,4%	
Pohorje foothills	f	49	7	56
	f%	16,4%	5,0%	
Pohorje	f	65	17	82
	f%	21,8%	12,1%	
City Park	f	33	36	69
	f%	11,1%	25,5%	
Shopping Centers Europark, Qlandia, Leclerc	f	77	49	126
	f%	25,8%	34,8%	
Other	f	23	6	29
	f%	7,7%	4,3%	
Altogether	f	298	141	439

by pupils from suburban schools in a higher percentage in comparison to pupils of urban schools. Students from suburban schools would recommend the Visit to Pohorje and Visit to the Pohorje foothills in a higher percentage than pupils from the urban school.

To the answer *Other*, we got 14 replies - pupils would also recommend the following sites and attractions to tourists and friends from abroad: the visit to Hotel Habakuk, the Football Stadium Ljudski vrt, Zoo Ljubljana, the Postojna Cave, the central park, a hike to Piramida hill, adrenalin activity Pohorjet, the visit to the local ice cream shop Ilich, the visit to a museum and the visit to the world's oldest vine in Lent.

Answers to the question: *Which part of the city do you like visiting most?* were divided according to the type of school (urban, suburban). The results are shown in Table 6; calculating the chi-square values was not possible due to the multiple-choice

questions. Children from the suburban school like visiting Pohorje and its foothills to a greater extent, while children from the urban school like visiting the City Park and Shopping centres (Europark, Qlandia, Leclerc) in a higher percentage.

Based on these results, we can conclude that there are differences in visiting and recommending areas of the city of Maribor regarding where the primary school is located, as pupils repeatedly visit and recommend the places that are geographically closer to them. Pupils in the suburban primary school are also more educated about the tourist attractions in the city than pupils in the urban primary school. Hypothesis 1 is therefore confirmed.

The impact of education in primary schools on the “branding” of the city

With the hierarchical regression analysis we examined whether the education in the primary

TABLE 7. THE IMPACT OF EDUCATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS ON THE “BRANDING” OF THE CITY

MODEL	STANDARDIZED COEFFICIENTS Beta	t	p	R ²	ΔR ²
Education about tourist attractions	,167	2,438	,016	,03	,03
Education about tourist attractions	,184	2,629	,009	,04	,01
Education about the city	-,085	-1,222	,223		
Education about tourist attractions	,173	2,418	,016	,04	< ,01
Education about the city	-,085	-1,222	,223		
Positive learning	,054	,777	,438		

school has an influence on how pupils are able to recommend the tourist attractions of Maribor to their friends and foreigners. Therefore, we created a new variable, in which we counted the number of sites (attractions) and parts of the city they would recommend to friends or foreigners.

The results showed (Table 7) that the number of recommended attractions is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) influenced only by the teachers' education about tourist attractions (this variable explains the 3% dispersion of the dependent variable). Thus, education about the city, and also providing positive information, does not affect the number of attractions pupils will recommend. For branding of the city, it is therefore important how much and how teachers educate pupils about all the city tourist attractions. Based on this results, hypothesis 2 is rejected.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed the following statistically significant conclusions with respect to the raising awareness of urban environment development in primary schools:

☞ There are differences in visiting and recommending areas of the city of Maribor regarding where the primary school is located, as pupils repeatedly visit and recommend the places that are geographically closer to them.

☞ Pupils in the chosen suburban primary school are more educated about the tourist attractions in the city than pupils in the chosen urban primary school.

☞ Education about the city, and also providing positive information, does not affect the number of attractions pupils will recommend to their friends and foreigners.

☞ For branding of the city, it is important how much and how teachers educate pupils about all the city tourist attractions.

Further analysis of Slovene primary school curricula revealed that pupils are educated about tourism, about the main local and city attractions, about local, regional and national history, urban environment, etc., because these topics are included in the curricula of obligatory subjects in Slovene primary schools. It can be concluded that education about pupils' environment is a significant part of the primary schools' curricula; moreover, teachers

in the chosen schools strive to educate pupils about their local environment and provide positive information about it. As shown in the previous analysis, on average, pupils agreed on the fact that, in school, they got positive information about their environment.

In this study we analysed only one aspect of raising awareness of urban environment development in primary schools, which is an obvious limitation. However, complete data was acquired and statistically analysed, so in our further research, we will upgrade our research results with other aspects that have a significant impact on this topic. Besides primary schools' and teachers' influence, we will analyse how media, family and friends and municipality influence pupils' awareness of urban environment development.

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