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**NOSTALGIA,  
COMMODIFICATION  
OF EMOTIONS AND  
SMALL-TOWN TOURISM:  
The Case of Vintage Vila**

**ABSTRACT:** Small urban environments face many issues in tourism; for example, how to position themselves in contrast to the larger cities and how to provide adequate tourist facilities for their guests. In the case of positioning, they have to choose something different and attractive. And in the case of infrastructure, small cities are primarily meant for their residents and have plenty residential buildings but lack of tourist accommodation buildings. The article attempts to reflect on specific contemporary form of “consumed nostalgia” (Cross, 2015) that is characteristic of the era of modern consumer society and offer an example of how its potential could be employed in tourism, particular in small urban environments with significant implications of preserving abandoned properties and thus existing architectural and cultural heritage. An analysis of Vintage Vila accommodation facility that is located in small city of Brežice, Slovenia, was conducted in order to acquaint the potential of a specific form of nostalgia tourism. After an interview with Vintage Vila founder, a review of their Facebook site and the responses of the visitors was made. Additionally the study of media coverage of Vintage

Vila was completed to understand the discursive construction of a unique narrative of the place. The basic objective of this paper is to describe this innovative solution for the preservation of architectural and cultural heritage of small urban environments. With the case study of Vintage Vila accommodation facility we hope to encourage other small cities to recognise their potential in abandoned buildings. Restoration of such facilities can open up new possibilities in tourism and may, together with thoughtfully chosen narratives that emotionally bound people to their material environment, contribute to a revitalization of small cities. What is more, tourism development grounded in vintage and nostalgia appeals should be considered as part of a call for sustainable growth, as it advocates and supports alternative consumer practices (such as recycling and reusing objects) and preservation of material culture in general.

**KEY WORDS:** nostalgia tourism, vintage, accommodation capacity, small urban environments, place as a narrative

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## INTRODUCTION

Small urban environments, especially smaller cities, have a distinctive position in tourist perception of the destination. They cannot be placed among big and exciting capital cities neither can they be regarded as natural heritage sites. Small cities must find their special niche tourism product to attract visitors. But when tourism positioning is completed, these small urban environments also need to provide essential tourism infrastructure. Among the basic is the provision of sufficient number of accommodation capacities. This issue is often difficult to address since small cities must take into consideration the lack of existing big hotels while building new ones is nearly impossible due to strict urban heritage legalization. As in the case of small town Brežice, where there are approximately only 120 beds in the town, two thirds of which are placed in hostels or private rooms, and only one third are in categorized hotels or apartments (Discover Brežice, 2016).

This paper takes into consideration two aspects of small city tourism positioning. Firstly, we address the niche destination image for these small urban environments. The proposed element of attractiveness is the usage of nostalgia with vintage style and references. Nostalgia is viewed as a personal drive to remember and once again experience past feelings, emotions, smells, tastes, sounds... The paper reflects on the contemporary form of “consumed nostalgia” as defined by Cross (2015) that took shape in the 1970s due to an increase in the turnover of consumer goods, the widespread trend towards the commercialization of childhood, and proficient marketing of nostalgic feelings. We argue that the cultural dynamics of consumed nostalgia could be of particular significance to modern tourism due to the attempt to evoke unique individual experiences.

The second aspect is the architectural aspect and urban planning of small cities. As noted before, small cities have a lack of larger number of

accommodation facilities. It is often impossible to solve this problem with the construction of a new hotel due to the limitations of preservation of material heritage. As in the case of Brežice, the city centre is protected as a heritage site by a decree and its measures must be implemented in urban planning (see The Decree of Declaring the Old Town Brežice a Cultural and Historical Monument, Official Gazette SRS (42/1988); The Act on Cultural and Heritage Protection, Official Gazette RS 16/2008; Professional Design of Cultural Heritage Protection for the Municipality of Brežice, Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage: 2008). But small cities like Brežice have another source of accommodation facilities. Throughout the city there are various buildings (some new and some quite ancient) that do not serve as family homes anymore. These abandoned properties can be transformed into tourist accommodation facilities. This is the case of preserving and revitalizing an existing urban architecture of a small city by bringing new people to enjoy its characteristics.

Moreover, when combining both of the above presented aspects, small cities can comprehensively benefit while placing a unique tourism product on the tourism market – a vintage accommodation experience. As a result of the protected and revitalized urban heritage and the attractive vintage style of the facilities that is addressing emotions of nostalgia, the city will no longer be perceived as space, but as place. Namely, place is to be understood as more than just a location or space; it is thought to be accomplished through “affective attachments” in which people are emotionally bound to their material environment (Moore, 2012: 27). Place is a location/space made concrete, familiar and meaningful through practice. In this sense, it is ‘an experiential accomplishment binding people and environments’ (ibid.). Small cities themselves could become an interesting tourism story and could offer its place as a narrative to be constructed and experienced by visitors as well.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The basic objective of this study is to describe an innovative solution for the preservation of the architectural and cultural heritage of small urban environments. This solution is recognised in nostalgia tourism. The study attempts to reflect on specific contemporary form of “consumed nostalgia” that is distinctive of modern consumer society, and offer an example of how its potential could be employed in tourism, particularly in small urban environments with significant implications of preserving abandoned properties and thus existing architectural and cultural heritage.

The rest of the paper is structured in sections 3 to 7. Section 3 presents literature review of the concept of nostalgia and interrelatedness of tourism and memory. Urban environment and its limitations are described in Section 4. Further on, Section 5 contains a description of data sources and methodology used in a paper. Section 6 discusses the gathered data from a case study and offers an analysis of the results. And finally, Section 7 concludes the study by some suggestions of potential implications of the study findings.

### “CONSUMED NOSTALGIA”: MATERIAL OBJECTS AND A CONTEMPORARY FORM OF YEARNING FOR THE PAST

Nostalgia is a “sentiment of loss and displacement”, as defined by Boym (2007: 7) in an essay *Nostalgia and its discontents*. The term was devised in 1688 by Johannes Hofer by combining the Greek “nostos” (home) and “algos” (pain) in order to describe a malady brought on by being distant from one’s homeland (see Bonnett, 2016: 2). Today, however, nostalgia as experience of loss is more usually understood in temporal terms than in spatial terms. It appears to be a longing for a place, but it is actually a yearning for a different time, Boym argues (2007: 8). It could be considered as the valuing of the past, connected to a present sense of loss.

Fred Davis (1979) has sociologized nostalgia in his study *Yearning for yesterday*, arguing that nostalgia, despite its private or intimate character, is a deeply social emotion as well. Many claim that nostalgia is a by-product of modernity; that in societies, which experienced uprooting and fundamental changes in assumptions of ways of living, is where the past becomes an important site for ideological investment (Bonnett, 2016: 5). Nevertheless, nostalgia is not necessarily opposed to modernity, but “coeval” with it (Boym, 2007: 8). As a social emotion it reflects the distinction between modernity and non-modernity, of what it invented and what is authentic. In relation to this, what interests us here is not an individual condition (emotional conditions commonly stigmatized as ephemeral, self-indulgent or even conservative) but a specific socio-historical emotion that is being employed more and more in a commercial context as well.

Cultural industries and marketers not only present us with an engaging encounter of tangible possessions of past by reviving commodities from a different time, at the same time they also may offer a “reflective nostalgia”, as advocated by Boym, a contemplative nostalgia that helps us to think about ambiguities of change. “Reflective nostalgia cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space” (Boym, 2007: 15). It can be ironic and humorous; it reveals that longing and critical thinking are not necessarily opposed to one another in a way that affective remembering is not necessarily isolated from critical reflection. Each everyday object could be regarded as idiosyncratic place of subjective meaning, associated with personal memories, negotiating between past and present.

Besides the connections between modernity and nostalgia, highlighted by many scholars and thus regarded as a “scholarly common sense”<sup>1</sup>, we suggest that our understanding of contemporary nature of nostalgia needs to be more complex. We turn to Cross (2015) and his concept of “consumed nostalgia”, a contemporary form

of nostalgia that stems from characteristics of modern consumer society. Cross argues that nostalgia in fast capitalism is not what it used to be. It is shaped less by a longing for the social customs and practices of the past or for family heirlooms handed down over generations and more by childhood encounters with ephemeral commercial goods. According to Cross (2015: 14), nostalgia today “binds together not communities or families but scattered individuals around seemingly ephemeral things that are meaningful to them personally”. It is therefore “rooted in special emotions linked to recovering memories distinctive to the object of modern childhood and consumerism” (ibid. 17). However, consumed nostalgia shares much with more traditional forms of memory, argues Cross (2015: 11). In all kinds of nostalgia the experiential quest is paramount. This phenomenon has given rise to communities of collectors and fans hoping to reclaim the feeling of lost childhood. According to Cross (2015) today’s nostalgia can be owned, collected and easily accessed, making it less elusive and easier to commercialize. The commercialization of nostalgia means that recollections of the most intimate sort could be evoked simultaneously in many by mere reinvention by culture industries and marketing.

A yearning for what is gone is a desire constantly fed and reinforced by change. Sometimes troubling, yet at the same time very persistent nature of nostalgia therefore inevitably reappears in today’s fragmented and fast-moving societies. As Boym (2007) claims, nostalgia exists in many. Unmasking the idiosyncratic character of modern nostalgia, in particular its narratives and uses, thus remains essential.

### “Memory tourism” and the commodification of emotions

Studies so far have confirmed that memory presents a significant aspect in tourism, be it in terms of motivation, destination choice, organizing of the journey, experience at the

destination or remembering one’s travel experience. Marschall (2012: 321) argues that the connection between tourism and memory manifests itself most obviously in the niche area of heritage tourism, where historical sites, artefacts, and cultural landscapes are preserved as “embodiments of collective memories and commodified to attract tourists”. However, she argues that the link between tourism and memory is far more multifaceted, maintaining that its investigation deserves more scholarly attention.<sup>2</sup>

What Bartoletti (2010) characterises as “memory tourism” is overlapping, yet distinct from “heritage tourism”. While heritage tourism revolves around the personal visit to tangible sites and preserved artefacts, memory tourism can be developed without the presence of such valued cultural objects and authentic remnants. Its resources are embodied memories. In other words memory tourism does not necessarily need “sights worth seeing”, as long as it provides “something worth feeling”, maintains Bartoletti (2010: 41). One example of memory tourism Bartoletti names is “Ostalgia tourism”, the utilization of nostalgia associated with life in East Germany before reunification. Ostalgia tourism is motivated by nostalgia for the familiar everyday life led in the former East Germany, “a sense of loss of a material culture that was relevant in constructing cultural meanings and personal identities” (Bartoletti, 2010: 38).

In line with Bartoletti’s argument and the idea of memory as a highly subjective and individualized phenomenon, Marschall (2014) elaborated a concept of personal memory tourism as a form of travel motivated by memories of one’s own past and focused on revisiting of sites and destinations associated with key moments in a person’s life or retracing of memorable previous journeys. It involves travelling to locations linked with important events or life periods (such as one’s former home or old school, childhood playgrounds or places of former employment); retracing earlier and particularly memorable journeys; revisiting a favourite childhood vacation spot or a honeymoon

destination etc. Yet, personal memory tourism is not always focused on recapturing happy memories, it may also involve the return to places associated with traumatic events, such as the site of an accident, the death of a loved one or other forms of personal suffering and loss (Marschall, 2014: 336-337; see also Marschall 2015 on the phenomenon of “homesick tourism”, well known in the German context).

Commercial projects addressing nostalgia, be it vintage-style clothing, retro furniture etc. have blossomed in recent years. When faced with the loss of a strong sense of “belonging” and the dissolution of traditional ties, modern societies must identify new strategies able to motivate individuals to participate in their processes of social reproduction, argues Bartoletti (2010). The commodification of nostalgia can indeed be considered one of these strategies and tourism is one of the most interesting areas where we could also observe this process of commodification of emotions. “Memory tourism”, understood as a form of commodification of emotions, is thus functional for the reproduction of both modern society and of the market (Bartoletti, 2010).

### URBAN ENVIRONMENT IN SMALL CITIES: FROM DILEMMAS TO OPPORTUNITIES

Urban environment according to the Institute for Spatial Policies refers to a city area with its near surroundings that differentiates from others areas by its higher population density, compact building area and a small percentage of rural population (Institute for Spatial Policies, 2016). Ever since the Grand Tour these urban areas have attracted tourists. The visited city could be regarded as a tourist city that is, according to Ashworth and Page (2011: 5), based on series of primary attractions and an infrastructure that is also utilised by non-tourists. However, coexistence of tourists and non-tourists is a delicate state that is often maintained with the

help of regulation and planning. Evans (2000: 307) states that interaction between city planning and tourism development processes has been limited and informed through conflict or bureaucratic authorisations such as planning permission (or refusal), building regulation, and conservation and parking restriction – the control of development. He suggests that more suitable policies and planning strategies should be based on social, economic, environmental and control rationales (Evans, 2000: 312) that simultaneously support and encourage tourism, provide the control on further tourism development and focus on local amenity for residents and on economic benefits from tourism.

One of the policies that strongly appeals to tourism development in small urban environments is the policy referring to land-use and design of new accommodation facilities. As in case of Municipality Brežice, the municipality released a decree on municipal spatial plan of the Municipality of Brežice (Official Gazette RS, 2014: article 78). Among different restrictions there is an article denoting the height of the objects. While the decree was released primarily for local residential buildings, it also refers to tourism facilities. Therefore the article also obliges tourism industry not to build any accommodation facility that could stand out from the silhouette of the town – it should not be significantly higher or significantly lower.

The decree on municipal spatial plan of the Municipality of Brežice was written on the basis of guidelines from cultural heritage protection legalization (see The Act on Cultural and Heritage Protection, Official Gazette RS 16/2008). There is a relevant reason for such ordinance because of the city’s rich history that is manifested in a typical spatial design and architectural heritage. The city developed back in 13th century as an important strategic point of the Habsburg monarchy. Through the past hundreds of years, it has got its characteristic image with the castle on the southern part, two parallel roads (one merchant and the other, narrower, craftsmen) with ancient,

up to three hundred-year-old buildings and the Franciscan monastery (today's high school) on the northern gate. Its specific ground plan is enriched by famous West facing cityscape and ancient Attems family gardens on the eastern part. The view of the town is supplemented with some characteristic buildings from the past century (water tower, German centre and Slovene culture centre etc.).

Cultural heritage dictates special proceedings in order to preserve its unique value (in accordance with The Act on Cultural Heritage Protection, Official Gazette RS 16/2008). The requirements of cultural heritage protection are included in the spatial planning with protection regimes.<sup>3</sup> There are also the arrangements for the protection of settlement architecture like its historic character, settlement design, spatially important natural elements (e.g. trees, watercourses), distinct position in landscape, natural and other limits of development, relations between the settlement and its surroundings, building type etc. (Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia, 2008: 8-9). Restrictions referring to all kinds of heritage are of high importance for the tourism development, particularly for the accommodation facilities development. A case that could be implemented in protected areas is the case of Vintage Vila that is presented in this article.<sup>4</sup>

## METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES

Addressed example of small urban environments revitalization with the vintage style accommodation was considered as a case study. Case study is an appropriate method that captures all the aspects of a single case. As Rolf Johansson wrote (2003: 2), the case study should have a "case" which is the object of the study. The "case" should:

- ☞ be a complex functioning unit,
- ☞ be investigated in its natural context with a multitude of methods, and
- ☞ be contemporary.

In this article the "case" is the Vintage Vila accommodation, which is by itself a complex functioning unit since it is an independent business. Vintage Vila was investigated with the use of semi-structured interview and a documentation analysis as presented below. And it is also contemporary since it is new on the market and unique in its space.

Basic data for addressing the case study was gathered in a semi-structured interview. Semi structured interview offers basic construction of interview questions while allowing some complementary questions and explanations (Knežević, 2010: 85). The interview was conducted with the Vintage Vila founder Andreja Petrovič on 6 September 2016 in Ljubljana. The interview took one hour and a transcript of the conversation is held by the authors of this article. Most of the information presented in the next chapter was gathered from the interview. The cases in which the information comes from another source are adequately referred to.

A documentation analysis was performed to gather further data. Media presentations were found in media reports of Vintage Vila that were published in Slovenia in 2015 and 2016. An official Vintage Vila Facebook site was examined to capture guests' feedback. To examine data about tourism in Brežice, the hometown of Vintage Vila, a secondary analysis of data was performed. Data were collected from the database of Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia and from the database of Municipality Brežice.

## MATERIAL CULTURE AND THE EVOCATION OF PAST EXPERIENCES: THE CASE OF VINTAGE VILA

### Tourism in Brežice

Brežice is, regarding to statistics (SURS, 2016), one of the most important tourist municipalities in Slovenia. Depending on the number of overnight stays in Slovenian municipalities (634,540 in

2015) Brežice holds the 4<sup>th</sup> place, behind Piran, Ljubljana and Bled. The percentage of foreign tourists in the Municipality of Brežice is almost the same as of domestic tourists (49 % of foreign and 51 % of domestic tourists). Approximately 95 % of all overnight stays were made in the largest Slovenian natural spa Terme Čatež (personal communication with M. Gerjevič, director of the Brežice Institute for Entrepreneurship, Tourism and Youth, September 2016). On the other hand, Brežice is trying to develop alternative tourism contents with an emphasis on the development of city centre and on the sustainable tourism products in urban and rural areas. In this manner the municipality follows the trend of the modern tourism demand, which is oriented towards a high quality boutique offer as one of the essentials of sustainable tourism.

### General facts about Vintage Vila

As an example of sustainable tourism this paper presents the Vintage Vila accommodation facility. The building of Vintage Vila was built in 1941 by Germans who used it as a railway company office, since it is positioned near the train station Brežice (Kapetanović, 2016: 4). It was later bought by Zorko family, who turned it into their family home. After the parents moved to a retirement home, the house remained abandoned, and except one-year lease, no one lived in it. After the death of its previous owners, the ownership moved to the daughter Marinka and her brother.

But the true story of Vintage Vila started three years ago with Marinka's daughter Andreja Petrovič. After some challenging personal experience, Andreja recognised the potential of a new business opportunity in this abandoned house – the house could be turned into an attractive tourist accommodation facility with the help of Andreja's rich experience in interior design. In November 2013 she declared room renting and one year later she hosted her first guests. Now she is renting the house for 5 months a year and beside room renting she also offers place for organizing

events in the garden like weddings, birthdays and others. Vintage Vila has no employees; it is a private project of Andreja Petrovič, which she enthusiastically runs with the help of her mother. The current income does not allow any additional expenditure – it is all invested in maintaining the house comfortable and liveable.

The house itself offers all necessary amenities and equipment for an agreeable and convenient stay (Vintage Vila, n. d.). It contains three bedrooms, a living room, a dining area, fully equipped kitchen, bathroom and a large, fenced backyard with parking. The house has plenty of useful utilities that make guests feel like home (e. g. iron and ironing board, grill, basic food supply etc.).

### A visit to grandma: place as a narrative

However Vintage Vila is not only a place, it is a place with a unique style and a distinctive story. Its founder designed the house in vintage style (this was the drive for the name for the house), which she combines with rural and some modern items. The name also has a second meaning – the word "Vila" in Slovene means fairy and Andreja presents herself as vintage fairy, a fairy that helps you decorate your vacation, your celebration or your life in vintage style.

But the true story of the house comes with its subtitle. It is called: At grandma's in Brežice. Andreja often visited her grandparents when she was young and she fondly remembers her childhood years back in the 80's and early 90's. She remembers the homeliness and cosiness that she experienced. The house represents a magic time of her life and with the house's new life she wanted to share some of that feeling with her guests. At Vintage Vila Facebook site (Vintage Vila, n. d.) she describes the house:

*If you want to travel in the past, experience a vintage vacation or just rent a place for party or vintage wedding this is the place for you! Vintage Vila is a true retreat from the bustle and bustle of city life, yet only minutes from the town Brežice in*

*Slovenia. [...] Get cosy with your honey/friends/family in this country style home and feel the stress of your daily life melt away.*

The warmth and friendly feeling in the house is represented by many objects that refer to Andreja's personal experience of visits to her grandma. In this case the consumed nostalgia is represented by following consumer goods. Kitchen itself is a good example of second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century kitchen. Typical kitchen cabinets are preserved, old wood burning stove is still there and the place is dominated by an old radio "Planica" that grandma used to listen to all the time. There are also many small objects that bring nostalgic feeling to the guests. Ceramic tea cups with specific pattern, dotted enamel dishes and decorative objects. The backyard is also full of memories. There is a henhouse and a rabbit house for the animals with which Andreja used to play and there is her old bike "Kekec", a favourite among 80's Slovenian children. She and her cousin learned how to ride a bike on it and it is a precious memory. The bike is still functional and guests' children can ride it. Beside the house there is grandpa's old carpenter's workshop with his old tools. And every tool has its own story – like the planer with which grandpa carved the wooden ceiling that is the significant mark of the living room. Other rooms are also full of meaningful objects. There is an old sewing machine "Singer" and grandma's sewing kit, Andreja's mother homemade prom dress and her childhood books, Andreja's uncle's chest of drawers and his sports magazine "Sportske novosti" from 1977 that is now framed and placed on the wall.

Vintage Vila seems to offer a comforting familiarization with everyday objects from tourists' childhood, thereby providing a collective script for individual longing and imagining the past. It seems to be grounded in an alternative marketing frame that considers place as a narrative, that is as a set of meanings, rather than a mere product with a set of attributes (see Lichrou et al., 2008). Framing of places as products namely overlooks the cultural context and leaves out the experience

of place, thereby contradicting two basic tourism-marketing assumptions. First, the concept of a tourism product is a process rather than an outcome, which additionally implies that its consumption (or the tourist experience of place) is inseparable from its production. Consumers, as much as marketers, take part in the (co-)creation of a place and its meaning. Second, there is a view that the dreams and fantasies of consumers are a defining characteristic of tourism and in this sense a crucial marketing concern is the understanding of the processes through which such intangible constructs are formed (see Lichrou et al., 2008: 31).

The place itself is a narrative of a life that happened approximately 30 to 20 years ago and it all comes back with the help of everyday objects. These objects are either old, used at the house or bought at the flea market. Or they can be new and designed to fit into the house style. Many objects come from neighbours or friends who wished to give a second life to their own worn out furniture. This kind of sustainable practice is the story behind two old closets, which were found deserted in a barn of Andreja's family friends. She and her mother restored the closets and placed them into the bedroom. The family friends still come to visit Vintage Vila and the closets, admiring again and again the new look and life of their old furniture.

### **"An idealized life of more than 20 years ago": guests' experiences**

Andreja Petrovič does not use internet portals as Booking or Trip Advisor yet, so she cannot gather guests' feedback in this manner. She rather communicates personally with her guests since, as she noted, they actually become friends. Guests are impressed by the warm feeling they are surrounded with and they feel like they come home. For them it is like coming home to their grandma's or to their older relatives. They express enthusiasm over objects that remind them of their past. There are comments like: "How nice, I have not seen this over hundred years!" or "This is



just like my aunt used to have, I feel really nice here.” or “I had exactly the same object as this!” Guests are also introduced into the house story at the beginning of their stay. Andreja gives them a tour of the house and guests are usually taken in the story of life at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some of them also comment that one or another item comes from the 70’s or from the 80’s or from the 90’s and this observation comes from their personal experience, since the majority of the guests are 30 to 50 years old.

An interview with a guest Iztok Humar in the TV show “Tednik” (Brajović Hajdenkumer, 2015) is especially expressive. He is enthusiastic about Austrian mentality of using 300-year-old furniture in their facilities as this was not the case in Slovenia, where everything had to be new. So Vintage Vila is an opportunity to see vintage motives that bring associations that connect one with the past. This touches one’s deeper emotions not only visual. Further he states that Vintage Vila takes you to the heart of an idealized life from more than 20 years ago. So this was probably not how it happened but how we wish to remember it. And he also added one more aspect of using vintage style – it is environment friendly and reduces pollution as old objects are not thrown away and new ones are not needed.

Other guest responses can be gathered from Vintage Vila Facebook site (Vintage Vila, n. d.), where visitors commend the place as perfect, cute, great discovery, nicely decorated, with a fairy-tale garden and so on. The Facebook page has 1,867 likes and there are regular posts of vintage style items photographs that get many likes themselves. As Andreja noted, her guests become her friends and even if they come to stay at grandma’s place and experience her nostalgic story, they come home from Andreja’s home and are taken over by Andreja’s own story.

Vintage Vila therefore sets itself up as a culturally meaningful entity. It is determined by the assumption that tourist places are not static,

objective or a priori phenomenon (McCabe and Stoke, 2004). Numerous retrieved everyday objects, seemingly ephemeral things, as signs of past make the site familiar to tourists. Such “density of representations” (Frow, 1991: 4) signifying shared cultural meaning and collective memory provides a simulacrum for a lost past world. It is the culture and symbolic meanings that play the key role in the construction and experience of Vintage Vila. The place itself is staged in a particular way in order to evoke the established patterns of interaction with objects and personal memories which characterise them. It engages the guests on sentimental level and leaves them to re-live their own personal stories around retrieved everyday objects from their childhood. In this sense guests are seen as active in their appropriation and use of material objects or consumer goods available in Vila. In such a participatory manner they use their imagination to reconstruct a lost “home”. It is a process by which knowledge of objects precedes and informs experience of a place, to paraphrase Frow (1991: 4).

It goes without saying that without colonizing such pre-existing guests’ familiarity with objects, the nostalgic experience of place would not function. It is within the context of tourists’ own cultural framework of knowledge, expectations and fantasies, as well as perceptions and representations that the identities of tourism sites are created with. From this perspective, as Lichrou et al. (2008: 32) note, “culture cannot be viewed simply as a part of the place-product sum or as an asset/resource of the destination product, but rather as a dynamic context within which destinations are produced and consumed”.

### **Reconstructing a lost “home” in the media**

Vintage Vila has gained considerable media attention relative to other small business tourism initiatives in Slovenia. The examined media reports about Vintage Vila illustrate the intensive discursive construction of a distinctive narrative

of the Vintage Vila that supports and promotes its concept. Firstly they all present the process of creating the Vintage Vila concept. As written on the web page siol.net (Nared, 2015) it all started with Andreja's 30<sup>th</sup> birthday party for which she decorated the house and as all guest like it, she started to develop her business idea. Then siol.net presents the facilities and other possible events that can be arranged at Vintage Vila. Furthermore, there are some suggestions about how to experience the surroundings of the house and this part can be considered as a tourist promotion of the region. The article concludes with the future perspective of Vintage Vila. But through the whole article there is a red line which refers to nostalgia – it describes the feeling of grandma's house, objects Andreja used and facilities where Andreja spent her childhood vacations. The article is supported with some pictures of Vintage Vila.

Article in a magazine "Pomagaj si sam" (Do It Yourself) (Kapetanovič, 2016) also presents the establishment of the Vintage Vila but it goes further into the past to the very construction of the house itself. It also highlights the personal story of its first owners and Andreja's life story. Through these life stories the article introduces the Vintage Vila beginnings. Further on there is a presentation of Andreja's mother, Marinka and her contribution to maintaining and running the Vintage Vila. The next paragraph states some suggestions about how to experience the surroundings of the house (this can also be considered as a tourist promotion of the region). In the conclusion there is a short explanation of the meaning of Vintage Vila (as a style and as a fairy) and Andreja's wishes for future development of the concept. This article is much more personally oriented and it inspires the nostalgic feelings through personal stories. This is also characteristic for the accompanying photographs that present not only the house but also Andreja and her mother.

A reportage in the TV show "Tednik" (Brajović Hajdenkumer, 2015) presents all aspects of the

Vintage Vila as reported in other media. There is a story of Vintage Vila beginnings, its previous owners, Andreja's life and the first birthday party at the house. There is also an extensive presentation of nostalgia references like furniture, grandma's recipe for traditional cake, sewing kit and prom dress. All this is supported with many scenes of actual objects from the house. Furthermore, this reportage highlights the problem of abandoned houses, which are no more than a burden to their owners. Vintage Vila is presented as an example of good practice and an opportunity for tourist development throughout the country. An addition to this reportage is the interview not only with Andreja and her mother (as in other media) but also with Andreja's friend and with a guest. This gives an insight in thoughts and feelings of the Vintage Vila target group. The reportage closes with a wish to maintain the good energy and the guests of Vintage Vila.

Media representations of Vintage Vila with its distinctive yet also highly conventional and personalized communicative style described above engage the audiences and bring about their nostalgic sentiments. By valuing the "good old days" from earlier in one's life such personal descriptions discursively feed on the existing cultural dynamics of contemporary nostalgia. The more familiar, meaningful and typical for certain times the material objects in Vila appear to be, the more authentic they are perceived. Together they organize a narrative of Vintage Vila in which notions of past childhood and a lost home are affirmed in ways that induce enchantment in the audience by involving them sentimentally.

## CONCLUSION

"Modern nostalgia is mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an 'enchanted world' with clear boundaries and values" (Boym, 2007: 12). Vintage Vila provides a dynamic context of social interaction, shared cultural meaning

and collective memory by enabling tourists the appropriation and use of material objects from past that are meaningful to them personally. It simulates the existence of a mythical home or the past, through invention and reconstruction, as stated by Bartoletti (2010: 25). However, as Marschall (2015: 345) claims, “memory and meaning are never inherently attached to objects or lodged in spaces; they are inscribed and maintained through communication and performative action”. It occurs that just as tourism is a socially constructed phenomenon, the active practice of remembering or so-called “memory-work” of each Vintage-Vila guest is equally constructed and permanently mediated by the memory of cultures and societal norms from which guests emanate. Vintage Vila as tourist accommodation could be thus seen as a node of reiterated performative acts of remembering and confronting personal memories by reliving earlier experiences by appropriating material objects from the past.

We propose that small cities can comprehensively benefit by placing such a unique tourism product on the market that positions itself as providing a ritual of remembering and recalling one’s memories. By that and with a particularly unique nostalgic narrative, they may, to some extent, contribute to effective protection of the cultural heritage while facilitating appropriate spatial arrangements in the context of sustainable development and integrated conservation of heritage. While our discussion has remained largely within the field of the conceptual, we believe it holds insights, which can be put to pragmatic purpose by city planners and tourism practitioners. For instance, tourism development grounded in vintage and nostalgia appeals advocates and supports alternative consumer practices (such as recycling and reusing objects), preservation of material culture and the promotion of sustainable growth in general. Our nostalgic imaginings will affect the shape of our future, to conclude with the words of Davies (2010: 262).

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<sup>1</sup> A cornerstone in studies of nostalgia is a contrast between “restorative” and “reflective” nostalgia made by Boym (2001).

<sup>2</sup> According to Marschall (2012: 322) the scarcity of scholarly literature on tourism and memory is surprising for at least two reasons: first, the two phenomena are closely intertwined in practice; second, the respective bodies of literature in the separate fields of memory studies and tourism studies have increased in the last decades, exploring ever more specific niche areas, while the tourism–memory nexus has remained neglected.

<sup>3</sup> General regimes (Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia, 2008: 7) dictate that:

- Cultural heritage, in principle, is protected and preserved in situ;
- Appropriate size of the area around the heritage must be preserved in order to prevent direct or indirect negative impacts on heritage;
- Interventions or modalities, which would affect the protected values and their material substance, are not allowed;
- Interventions and spatial solutions that contribute to the permanent preservation of heritage or increase its value are possible.

There are also some special regimes, which depend on the type of preservation of each heritage. By the architectural heritage (e.g. buildings) there are preserved (Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia, 2008: 8):

- Dimensions;
- Structural, exterior and internal design;
- Infrastructure and connection to the surrounding area;
- Spatial context, the incidence and cityscapes.

<sup>4</sup> The Vintage Vila accommodation could also be studied from the aspect of scattered hotel concept (see an example of Robidišče hotel, Iz hiše na Robidišču, n. d.).

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