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Rijeka's Maritime Heritage – Potential for Authentic Tourist Experience

Abstract

Through its history as a port city, Rijeka has the potential to create authentic stories for an authentic tourist experience. The effectiveness of storytelling in promoting Rijeka's maritime heritage is explored by examining the relationship between the authenticity of the tourist experience, storytelling about maritime heritage and sharing the tourist experience. An analysis of the content of the official websites of the destination management and tourism businesses of the city of Rijeka was conducted to examine the representation of stories about the maritime heritage of the city of Rijeka in public discourse. It was found that the maritime heritage of the city of Rijeka offers significant potential for the creation of authentic stories that can promote an authentic experience for tourists through the use of storytelling. Storytelling is underutilized in the promotion of maritime heritage and the city of Rijeka as a tourist destination. The revitalization of tourism storytelling by highlighting maritime heritage contributes to its preservation and creates opportunities for the promotion of the city of Rijeka as a destination with rich maritime heritage with the participation of tourists as co-creators of an authentic tourist experience and new technologies as a communication channel for sharing tourist experiences.

Keywords: tourist experience, authentic stories, maritime heritage, city of Rijeka

1. Introduction

Although the beginnings of tourism in the city of Rijeka can be traced back to the end of the 19th century, the city did not experience significant tourism growth during the era of mass tourism development that took place in the second half of the 20th century. However, lifestyles, patterns of tourist demand, and the way in which urban

space is used are subject to constant change. The global trend towards the popularization of urban destinations offers the city of Rijeka the opportunity to offer the tourism market a wide and heterogeneous range of cultural, architectural, business, natural and social resources. Accepting the challenges of tourism market trends, accommodation capacities in the city of Rijeka have increased almost four times in just one decade (from 2,029 in 2013 to 8,653 in 2023). The growth in the number of tourist arrivals and overnight stays reached an average annual rate of 17.3% between 2013 and 2023 [30]. The dynamic growth of the number of tourists in cities opens up discussions about the impact of tourism on their development. Tourism is becoming deeply embedded in urban life, questioning the effects and changes in the spatial dynamics, social, economic, natural and cultural environment of cities [42], which poses a challenge for creating a pleasant city tailored to its inhabitants. Therefore, it seems important to change the city's discourse in meaningful communication between tourists and the local community. Understanding the city helps to create a better city [32] for both tourists and locals. Storytelling plays an important role in this. Cities tell the story of people from the past, people in the present and people in the future. Through their activities, people coexist with the city and create a tangible and intangible heritage that 'lives' in stories and is passed on through time. Storytelling, known as the art of telling stories, has been around since ancient times as a means of sharing knowledge, experience, and tradition through narrative [24].

This cultural feature is common to all people around the world. It can be said that people's memories are made up of stories. They are more than just entertainment; they help listeners to see and think in the way that others do [3]. Storytelling occupies a central place in building identity [15], connecting people, creating communities and evoking emotions [18]. In the current trend of increasing interest in tourism demand for cities and strengthening competition in the tourism market, storytelling in tourism is seen as a tool for creating an authentic tourist experience that generates a sense of belonging of tourists to the destination they visit [3, 24]. Storytelling has been shown to be an effective technique to evoke memories in tourists and visualize stories told on a tourist trip [40] by connecting them to the destination they visited. Storytelling often opens a unique window into neglected parts of the city's history and beyond the typical tourist perspective [37].

This helps in creating innovative tourism products that not only aim to attract tourists but also influence their connection with the destination, contribute to tourism sustainability and create a local identity. Tourists are looking for authentic local experiences in the destination and the local community, based on which they create emotional connections and long-term relationships with the destination and encourage them to behave positively towards the destination, ultimately leading to destination sustainability [34].

This paper explores the potential of storytelling as a tool for popularizing and preserving the historical and cultural heritage of the city of Rijeka. The research is organized around three research questions: first, in an attempt to understand whether

storytelling helps in the interpretation or reinterpretation of the city's historical and cultural heritage by presenting historical facts in a way that is attractive, entertaining and accessible to tourists and the local community; second, does storytelling trigger a different, authentic experience in tourists and creatively guide them to participate in sharing the 'story of the city' through the narrative of poetics?; thirdly, does storytelling about the maritime heritage of the city of Rijeka influence the authentic tourist experience and the sharing of the tourist experience, which is also the basis for effective promotion of the destination on the tourist market. With the use of new technologies, creative storytelling is becoming an effective destination marketing tool [34].

The aim is to explore the effectiveness of storytelling in promoting Rijeka's maritime heritage. Accordingly, it is necessary to identify stories from the cultural and historical heritage of the city of Rijeka that best outline and contribute to the understanding of the city and that have the potential to create an authentic experience. Cultural and historical facts, paired with a certain poetics and a new way of interpreting storytelling, have the potential to create a tourist experience that, with the participation of all stakeholders, can grow into a recognizable tourist product that tells the story of the city of Rijeka and its inhabitants. The tourist becomes a storyteller whose experience is shaped by a 'good story' and interaction with the residents. Accordingly, it is necessary to examine the attitudes of tourists towards the storytelling of the maritime heritage of the city of Rijeka and the authenticity of the tourist experience, as well as the relationship between the storytelling of the maritime heritage of the city of Rijeka, the authenticity of the tourist experience and the sharing of the tourist experience.

2. Theoretical background

This part of the paper provides a theoretical framework for examining the relationship between the storytelling of maritime heritage, the authenticity of the tourist experience, and the sharing of the tourist experience in the context of promoting maritime heritage, based on a review of relevant literature.

2.1. Authentic experience in tourism

The concept of authenticity in social research was introduced by MacCannel in the early 1970s for the purpose of understanding and evaluating the motivation and experience of tourists [21, 41]. Moore et al [23] point out that authenticity is a challenging concept that attracts researchers' attention in the elaboration of theoretical patterns and empirical studies of the evaluation of the tourist experience of a place and culture and the quality of the tourist experience. Coşkun [8] emphasizes the complexity of defining authenticity and authentic experience, and different interpretations of authenticity depending on the researcher's point of view. At the same time, authenticity is widely represented in tourism practice as opposed to the uniformity and standardization

of tourism offerings introduced by mass tourism. Wang [41] identifies two different aspects of the concept of authenticity in tourism: the authenticity of tourist experience or authentic experience and the authenticity of objects or attractions that tourists visit. He also proposed three categories of authenticity in tourism: objective authenticity, constructive authenticity and existential authenticity. Objective authenticity refers to the authenticity, originality, accuracy or truthfulness of physical objects in a destination, which may include life processes, activities, cultural heritage, etc. [5], thereby satisfying tourists' cognitive insights [10]. While Tiberghien, Bremner & Milne [36] point out that tourists are in search of authenticity and the opportunity to interact with locals, He and Timothy [12] state that authenticity represents a higher-order need and most tourists seek a balance between the search for authenticity and lower-order needs, especially adequate comfort. Based on the level of comfort and perceived authenticity, they claim that the optimal tourism product is the one associated with the 'desired authenticity'. Jamaludin et al [13] point out that staying in a household as a higher level of authenticity for certain groups of tourists who prefer to choose home stay accommodation rather than a hotel in search of authentic local culture. The result is an authentic experience that comes from staying in a local household as truly authentic.

However, authenticity, identified with real living conditions, does not always create comfort for tourists. In underdeveloped countries, tourists encounter staged spaces for tourist purposes and difficult living conditions of the local population characterized by poverty, non-existent communal infrastructure, etc. [12]. This also leads to the concept of constructive authenticity (staged authenticity). According to Wang [41], constructive authenticity is a revised authenticity through the interpretation that tourists and creators of the tourist experience project onto objects, places and events. For some tourists, such a tourism product is authentic, while for others it is 'manipulated' and inauthentic [12].

Vergopoulos [38], developing a discussion on (in)authentic tourist experiences, states that there can be no inauthentic tourist experiences, but only a tourist experience of the inauthentic; for example, the experience that fictional stagings project on the tourist, regardless of whether they are legitimately staged or not, cannot be a simulacrum. Studies also warn of the fluidity of authenticity, whereby something that was inauthentic at one moment is authentic at another [10, 29]. Authenticity often depends on the tourist's perception, belief, attitude, imagination, etc., so that even quite obviously constructed authenticity can be perceived as a high level of authenticity. For the needs of tourism (and modern society), supposedly ancient traditions are often constructed, which soon become accepted as part of the local or national heritage [10]. Belief introduces authentication processes that are imaginative, as well as the act of performance itself [20].

Therefore, authentic experiences begin to be seen as the production of personal history and knowledge, social processes, and destination [23]. Existential authenticity implies authenticity to oneself, as opposed to objective and constructive authenticity, which is focused on the authenticity of the object itself. Existential authenticity is a particular source of true experiences in tourism that are experienced through personal

or intersubjective emotions evoked by the boundary process of tourism activities [7]. Tourists may have a heightened sense of authenticity and self-expression in relation to their everyday lives. However, this feeling is a reflection of the extraordinary activities and not the authenticity of the visited object. This is a potential state of existence actualized by a tourist experience. During their stay at the destination, tourists seek self-actualization and the expression of their own creative potential, they are looking for the moment when they will initiate a unique experience and liberation [10]. This can be any form of creative act, e.g., dancing, playing, learning about the history of the local people, participating in the creation of local crafts, cooking experience with elements of local gastronomy, etc.

The perception of authenticity of stories is subjective and is influenced by a combination of different goals of the person creating the story, the interpretation of the tourists, and the created connections of tourists with the object through the story. Authenticity therefore depends on the tourism policy and the goals that are to be achieved. Destinations make extensive use of cultural and historical heritage to portray the authenticity of the destination, including the local community and traditional values of the area [18]. Storytelling enables the interpretation of history, legends and myths as intangible heritage and creating an authentic tourist experience.

2.2. Storytelling in the function of preserving and promoting maritime heritage

In order to differentiate themselves from the increasing competition in the tourism market and gain a competitive advantage, most destinations are trying to incorporate storytelling into their promotional strategies to increase their own value and ability to attract potential tourists. Cultural and historical heritage is particularly important in storytelling [2]. In coastal areas, where the majority of tourism activities take place, cultural heritage is closely linked to activities related to the sea and the coast and maritime traditions [33]. Coastal and maritime cultural heritage is a reflection of the past and the present and a vision of the future related to the activities and interactions that take place in coastal and marine areas [27]. The development of tourism has often changed the values of coastal destinations and influenced the marginalization of traditional activities and the separation of the local community from its heritage. By relying on cultural heritage as a marketing tool to achieve competitiveness, many places have been transformed into tourist attractions. Intensive tourism, however, has caused irreparable damage to the local community. The challenge is the long-term preservation of cultural heritage and sustainable development.

Maritime cultural heritage is sensitive to the challenges of tourism trends and at the same time has great potential to face them. According to Auwera and Schramme [1], cultural heritage has the knowledge of how challenges were faced in the past and can be a space for reflection on how challenges can be met in the present and future. Storytelling as one of the most commonly used tools in creating tourist experience is

also increasingly important in creating identity [14] and preserving cultural heritage [16]. The fact is that cultural attractions often fail to arouse interest in visitors who are not familiar with the local community, values, local traditions, customs, past and present. In addition, descriptions of historical facts are mostly dry, without arousing visitors' interest in the historical heritage.

Storytelling uses narrative, anecdotes and personal experiences to convey knowledge about past events, customs and values of a destination [19]. It includes not only the verbal narrative genre, folktales, etc., but also non-verbal means of contemporary communication, such as films and dramas, related to the destination as a system in which all stakeholders in the destination together with tourists and locals create, experience and share the story of the destination. An important theme of these stories is the cultural and historical heritage that enables the creation of authentic stories and an authentic tourist experience. In destinations with a maritime tradition, shipwrecks attract special attention which are used as the subject of short and exciting narratives, preferably with treasure [4].

Topics related to the sea that describe human adventure are inextricably linked to philosophy and literature, as well as the relationship between man and nature. In a kaleidoscope with historical facts, they have the potential to enrich the public life of the local population by educating the population about their own history. They give destinations the opportunity to develop their own effectiveness by creating an opportunity for a tourist experience using storytelling as a fundamental structure [25].

2.3. Storytelling in sharing the tourist experience

In the literature, a link between storytelling and the tourist experience has been identified [34]. Kim and Fesenmaier (2014) refer to different approaches to defining tourist experience in chronological order of changes in researchers' attitudes. Recent studies emphasize the multiphase nature of the tourist experience [9] due to its presence in all phases of the tourist trip (during planning and preparation of a trip, staying in a destination and after tourists return from the trip) and the spillover effect between the experience of everyday life and the tourist experience [22]. Vergopoulos [39] observes tourist experience through the variables of space and time that determine a tourist trip and social interactions that occur between tourists and locals on a tourist trip. Everyday life of local population flows into the tourist experience. Tourists in destinations also have the opportunity to create and tell stories derived from their experience, shape their own stories and tell stories to others, and promote the destination. Stories thus become the central theme of tourism from the perspective of the system rather than the perspective of the individual [25].

Storytelling is used as a promotional tool in presenting the attributes of a destination, stimulating the imagination of tourists and influencing their expectations and attitudes about the destination [38]. Storytelling strategy is actively used in creating

a destination brand and improving competitiveness [3]. The place and role of stories in the tourism system is presented in Figure 1.

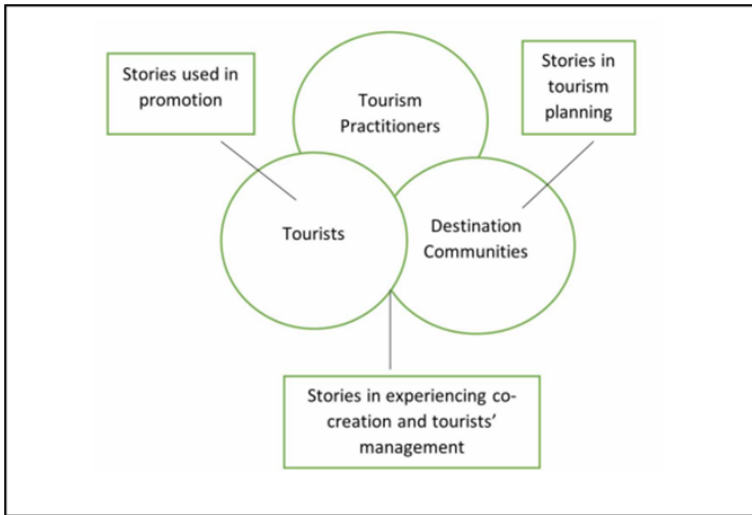


Figure 1. Stories in the tourism system

Source: (Moscardo, 2020).

Digital technology has contributed to the transformation of traditional storytelling. By combining traditional narrative techniques with modern technology, digital storytelling enhances and redefines the tourist experience [14]. Digital storytelling is especially significant in storytelling historical events. It brings history to life by making the exploration of the past more accessible and engaging.

Digital technologies enable stakeholders in tourism destinations (destination management organizations, destination marketing organizations, tour operators, commercial accommodation holders, local residents, etc.) to create interactive and unforgettable experiences for tourists. They also allow tourists to share their tourist experiences during their stay in the destination, as well as to remember and communicate those experiences after returning from their trip. Studies confirm that tourists want to share their experiences with family, friends, colleagues and other tourists using digital technology in the form of texts, images and videos [26, 28]. By creating content through digital media, tourists become intermediaries in the dissemination of tourist experience and participate in the promotion of the destination.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Storytelling of the maritime heritage of the city of Rijeka in public space

The Maritime and History Museum of the Croatian Littoral Rijeka has a significant collection of historical and cultural maritime heritage of the city of Rijeka, as well as the stories that accompany the exhibitions. The authenticity of the tourist experience in museums is unquestionable, but the question is whether they meet the needs and demands of the modern tourist. Museum facilities are significant resources that, due to their peculiarity, can be the subject of interest of visitors and have tourist potential [11]. However, only some of them are part of the cultural and tourist product. The exhibition moves beyond the museum facilities and becomes accessible to the general public in the very center of the city.

The exhibition in public space created a new social value and tourist content of the city and created an authentic tourist experience with authentic stories. In addition to the exhibitions, tourist guides play an important role in sharing the stories of Rijeka's maritime heritage, who, together with the free city tours (Rijeka Free Tour) during the summer months, bring the history and culture of Rijeka closer to the population and tourists through interesting stories and anecdotes.

The initiative was launched by the Association of Tourist Guides of Kvarner and the City of Rijeka Tourist Board in order to contribute to improving the quality of the tourist offer [31]. Storytelling is a way of spreading local knowledge, which the local population can further transmit and shape their own stories. Accommodation service providers thus contribute to the authentic experience of tourists and the sharing of the destination experience.

Storytelling was also organized through interactive benches placed on the Andrija Kačić Miošić Promenade in 2021, as part of the How to Read the Neighborhood project, part of the Kortil Live project and part of the Sweet and Salty, Rijeka 2020 – European Capital of Culture program, which introduces visitors to the history of the city of Rijeka. Six stories were staged: A Tale of Two Cities, The First Port of Rijeka, Traditional Maritime Heritage, Upstream to Hartera, Along the Rječina Ružičeva, and Along the Rječina Vodovodna. QR codes are placed on the backs of the benches, which lead the listener to the content available live on the website of the Croatian Cultural Center Kortil [6]. The use of public space creates new cultural and tourist facilities in the city of Rijeka, and authentic storytelling content contributes to enriching the tourist offer of the city of Rijeka and creating an authentic tourist experience.

In addition to the initiatives implemented in the public spaces of the city, maritime heritage in the wider Kvarner region has been valorised through The Kvarner Maritime Heritage brand [17]. This initiative, launched by Kvarner Tourist Board, enables the systematic promotion of maritime heritage through cultural and tourism-related products. It reflects a structured approach to interpretation and promotion, including the establishment of 24 maritime heritage itineraries, 90 interpretative boards and signs,

restoration of 16 traditional vessels, organization of five major maritime events, and the development of four maritime heritage interpretation centers.

Maritime events such as Kvarner Festival of the Sea and Maritime Tradition (Fiumare) in Rijeka, Festival and regatta of traditional sailing boats Mala Barka in Mošćenička Draga, Krk Sails in the town of Krk, Fisherman's week in Crikvenica and Losinava at Lošinj contribute to the public visibility and revitalisation of local traditions. At the same time, interpretation centers located in Mošćenička Draga, Krk, Malinska and Mali Lošinj provide a permanent institutional framework for the presentation and mediation of maritime heritage.

Such an approach demonstrates the capacity of maritime heritage to function as an integrated cultural-tourism product grounded in local traditions and identity, rather than as a series of isolated storytelling initiatives.

3.2. Digital media as storytelling, communication channels of Rijeka's maritime heritage

Digital media, including the Internet, social networks, streaming platforms and mobile applications, are widely used in tourism, creating new forms of cultural heritage promotion and tourist storytelling. They provide the ability to create user-generated content in any form, video, blog, discussions, digital images, etc. The fact is that an increasing number of tourists are using online services and digital storytelling is becoming an important segment of the destination's promotional strategy and creating a tourist experience.

The website of the Rijeka Tourist Board (visitrijeka.hr) invites visitors to an experience and also offers the opportunity to participate in various experiences during their stay at the destination. Visitors are offered various stories that tell the history of the city and its curiosities, including the story *Titanic-Carpathia-Rijeka*, which points to the connection between Rijeka and the ship Carpathia and the importance of the port of Rijeka in the migrations of the Europeans at the beginning of the 20th century. Examples of storytelling of the maritime heritage of Rijeka are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Examples of the representation of storytelling of Rijeka's maritime heritage on digital media.

Stakeholder	Social media	Story
Rijeka Tourist Board	https://visitrijeka.hr/en/titanic-carpathia-rijeka/	The Titanic-Carpathia-Rijeka story
Botel Marina	https://www.botel-marina.com/history/	The story of the history of the Marina from its construction in Frederikshavn, Denmark to the present day.
Croatian Cultural Centre	https://hkd-rijeka.hr/galerija-kortil/kortil-uzivo/	Story Traditional maritime heritage... guc, gajeta, pasara... and how to tell them apart (live on YouTube) The story of the first Port of Rijeka... You have to sail... Forever (live on YouTube)
Virtual museum Mala barka	https://muzejmalabarka.com/	The stories about maritime heritage of the northern Adriatic, presented through several categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Architecture related to the maritime heritage ◇ Objects of maritime signalization ◇ Museums, interpretation centers, collections and visitor centers ◇ Monuments and memorial plaques with maritime titles and motifs ◇ Cultural-historic heritage on the shore and in the sea ◇ Cultural landscape ◇ Vessels ◇ Equipment related to maritime activities ◇ Exhibitions with maritime theme ◇ Audio-video, library and archive records ◇ Toponyms of maritime-related localities ◇ Maritime linguistic heritage ◇ Traditional activities, crafts and skills related to maritime transport ◇ Public administration, companies, services and institutions related to maritime transport ◇ Organizations related to maritime transport ◇ Manifestations and ◇ Water sports.

Center for Industrial Heritage Rijeka	https://www.rijekaheritage.org/	The project focuses on the digitalization of cultural heritage in the city of Rijeka and includes more than 90 diverse stories about Rijeka's cultural heritage, some of which address its maritime heritage.
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Source: Authors.

A review of the Internet through the Google search engine points to only a small number of websites that use storytelling of Rijeka's maritime heritage in the promotion of the accommodation facility or the destination itself.

A positive example is the stories told as part of the project How to Read the Neighborhood.

Table 2. Overview of storytelling of Rijeka's maritime heritage on YouTube.

Storytelling	Number of subscribers	Number of views	Date of upload	Language
How to Read the Neighborhood: traditional maritime heritage	771	641	November 12, 2021	Croatian
How to Read the Neighborhood: traditional maritime heritage	771	101	November 12, 2021	English
How to Read the Neighborhood: the first port of Rijeka	771	3.419	February 25, 2021	Croatian
How to Read the Neighborhood: the first port of Rijeka	771	168	February 25, 2021	English

Source: Authors.

The effectiveness of the promotion of Rijeka's maritime heritage through digital media was made possible only by reviewing the content published on YouTube. An overview of YouTube users' reactions to the storytelling of Rijeka's maritime heritage does not indicate a greater effectiveness of promotional activities of maritime heritage.

4. Conclusion

The paper gave an insight into the potential of maritime heritage in creating an authentic story for an authentic tourist experience through questioning the presence of maritime heritage in the public space of the city of Rijeka and digital media as a channel for the promotion of maritime heritage. Based on the attitudes of tourists who visited the city of Rijeka and were shown a video about the storytelling of the maritime heritage of

the city of Rijeka, the relationships between the authenticity of the tourist experience, the storytelling of the maritime heritage and the sharing of the tourist experience were explored. The results of the correlation analysis indicated a statistically significant and positive but weak influence of maritime heritage storytelling and authenticity of the tourist experience on sharing the tourist experience through digital media. The city of Rijeka has an interesting maritime heritage that can be translated into an attractive story and can enhance and authenticate tourist experience using digital technologies. The revitalization of tourist storytelling by highlighting maritime heritage contributes to its preservation and creates opportunities for the promotion of the city of Rijeka as a destination with rich maritime heritage with the participation of tourists as co-creators of an authentic tourist experience and new technologies as a communication channel for sharing the tourist experience.

The limitations of the research can be seen in the short time period of data collection, the small sample size and the low level of participation of the Z-generation respondents given the generation gap in the use of digital technologies, which raises questions for future research. Storytelling evokes emotional connections between tourists and the destination, which contributes to sustainability and the preservation of maritime heritage. Therefore, it is important to increase the effectiveness of storytelling in promoting Rijeka's heritage by using new technologies as a tool for the promotional strategy of the City of Rijeka in the tourism market.

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