

Charm of Traditions: The Role of 19th-Century Urban Houses in Promoting Tourism in Macedonia

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Abstract

Traditional house design frequently acts as a trigger for tourism promotions. The uniqueness of the external architectural appearance, along with the cultural identity of a certain time serves as a captivating motif for sightseeing and improves the visual tourism experiences. Simultaneously, souvenirs enable maintaining links with the past and creating individual and cultural meanings.

This paper examines the 19th-century traditional house in Macedonia that plays a prominent role in tourism promotion. Given its frequent usage as an iconic symbol in tourism, the house of Krapche (Kanevche) in Ohrid (North Macedonia) is used as a case study for in-depth research. The paper uncovers the architectural features of an urban house model and its influence on creating souvenirs as items for tourist consumption.

The research employs a three-stage methodology. Initially, a literature review investigates the significance of souvenirs as authentic reminders of travel and tourism experiences. Subsequently, data is gathered through participant observation and photo-based imaging, focusing on both the external appearance and design of the house of Krapche (Kanevche), as well as items that visually identify the house model, such as objects, souvenirs, and a business logo. Data processing involves discursive analysis and argumentation to interpret both textual details and contextual knowledge related to traditional urban house design.

The study reveals that the external appearance of the Krapche (Kanevche) house is acknowledged as a symbol of the cultural essence of Ohrid. Various forms of tourism souvenirs and items designed for brand visibility, reflecting Ohrid's traditional architectural identity contribute to and enhance tourism promotion. The insights generated by this research hold relevance for scholars and practitioners in cultural studies, tourism development, and related fields. This research invites those interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the relationship between traditional architecture and tourism development in North Macedonia.

Keywords: Traditional urban architecture, House model, Tourist souvenirs, Tourism promotion, Ohrid, North Macedonia.

Introduction

Being part of the collective cultural heritage, architecture possesses the power to aesthetically design buildings, harmonize elements, and embody the spirit of the past, the knowledge of the present, and predictions for the future. Over the years, traditional architecture has gained additional value due to its pivotal role in shaping the identity and appeal of tourist destinations.

Authentic traditional houses offer exceptional external visual experiences for tourists and visitors, with their remarkable designs captured as tourist souvenirs. These souvenirs may take various forms, functions, and representations, but are always associated with something specific and unique, such as a place, person, event, building, etc. Tourists become attached to souvenirs, often experiencing an endowment effect in terms of their valuation. Their perceptions are shaped not only by souvenirs' utility but also by their meaningfulness (Shtudiner et al., 2019).

Destinations possessing traditional authentic architecture that can be commercialized as gifts and souvenirs have excellent opportunities for tourism development (Lehto et al., 2004; Littrell et al., 1994). Conversely, tourism enables the preservation and promotion of authentic architectural buildings and heritage sites, supporting cultural continuity and destination development. Thus, the link between architecture and tourism is constantly present. In the case of North Macedonia, this connection has been explored by Ivkowska (2014), Namicev (2014), Namicev and Nestoroska (2023), Petrevska and Nestoroska (2023), and others.

The primary aim of this study is to underscore the significance of traditional urban house design and to provide a more in-depth exploration of its role in promoting tourism. Specifically, the study concentrates on the utilization of tourism imaging and visual experiences facilitated by tourist souvenirs as potent promotional tools. The paper features the author's illustrations of the 19th-century Krapche (Kanevche) house in Ohrid, North Macedonia, chosen as an exemplary urban house and an iconic tourism symbol of Ohrid. In addition, the paper contributes to existing literature by investigating how traditional architecture and the cultural identity embodied in a house model are incorporated into souvenirs, which serve as distinctive items for tourist consumption.

Theoretical Framework

Tourism scholars like Anholt (2007), Medica et al. (2010), and Morgan et al. (2003) highlight the role of traditional architecture in offering distinctive cultural experiences for tourists, acting as a powerful tool for destination branding. In response, certain destinations have incorporated architectural features into their tourism offerings, contributing to the visual appeal and positive design of places and environments, as emphasized by Gazvoda (2002) and Mazzotti & Morgenstern (1997). Specifically, Freeman & Buck (2003) and Hehl-Lange (2001) note that traditional architecture significantly contributes to enhancing the visualization of urban and rural landscapes, playing a key role in shaping tourism identity, and fostering development.

Literature Review

In the pursuit of meaningful experiences, authenticity plays a pivotal role in tourists' decision-making. Scholars such as Wang and Fesenmaier (2004) and Richards (2007) underscore the importance of comprehending authenticity in the context of tourism development, especially in the realm of cultural tourism. Wang and Djurica (2017) further delve into the significance of authenticity in vernacular architecture, elucidating its impact on tourists' perceptions and satisfaction as a nuanced and intricate concept. Highlighting the need for a delicate balance, Li and Cheng (2021) stress the importance of reconciling authenticity with the demands of tourism development when exploring the interplay between tourist satisfaction and traditional architecture. Furthermore, taking a comprehensive perspective, Ioannides and Debbage (1998) contend that there is a multifaceted connection between cultural tourism and the promotion of authentic experiences, particularly in less developed countries. Similarly, in the context of rural tourism, Richards and Marques (2019) along with Martin and Woodside

(2022) offer insights into various dimensions of authenticity. They conceptualize its framework, emphasizing the understanding of tourists' perceptions, expectations, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions.

According to scholars like Lehto et al. (2004), Littrell et al. (1994) and Masset & Decrop (2021), souvenirs are acknowledged as authentic reminders of impactful experiences. Specifically, Masset & Decrop (2021) underscore the power of souvenirs as authentic indicators of place, even interpreting them as carriers of ideological meanings. Wilkins (2011) views souvenirs as destination ambassadors and as conversation pieces with strong storytelling abilities. Anderson and Littrell (1995) observe that souvenirs highlight the distinction between daily routines and experiences, while Gordon (1986) describes them as material reminders serving as living messengers of extraordinary feelings.

Souvenirs, recognized as utility items, mediators, tuners, or artworks by Haldrup (2017), serve to remind tourists of something extraordinary, sacred, and unique (Masset & Decrop, 2021). They have become a substantial element in the tourism retailing system, significantly contributing to destination economies (Timothy, 2005). Hashimoto & Telfer (2007) note that tourists seek authentic souvenirs, defining authenticity through various aspects such as uniqueness, originality, cultural, and historical integrity. This is further argued by Littrell et al., (1993) who summarize that key components of a successful tourist experience include authenticity, a sense of location, and cultural heritage.

Tourists, as highlighted by Decrop & Masset (2011), Li & Ryan (2018), and Wilkins (2011), purchase gifts and souvenirs with various motifs, symbolically representing markers of their travel experiences as part of a travel ritual. The meaning of souvenirs has been extensively explored from different perspectives, with scholars like Baker et al. (2006), Decrop & Masset (2014), Love & Sheldon (1998), Masset & Decrop (2021), and Morgan & Pritchard (2005) generally regarding them as objects marking the transition from travel experiences to everyday home life.

Research Methodology

The study employs a three-stage research approach to comprehend how the external architectural design of the house of Krapche (Kanevche) correlates with tourist souvenirs in Ohrid.

In the first stage, a literature review explores the significance of souvenirs as authentic reminders of travel and tourism experiences.

During the second stage, data was collected throughout the summer tourist season (July-September 2023) in Ohrid, with a particular focus on the architectural features of the 19th-century traditional house model, namely the house of Krapche (Kanevche). The data collection methods included participant observation (Kawulich, 2005) and photo-based imaging (Holm, 2014). Two types of data were gathered:

- i) Observation and photography of the house of Krapche (Kanevche) to scrutinize its external appearance and capture perceptions of the house design.
- ii) Observation of local souvenir-artisan shops, involving photography of items related to the house model, such as objects, souvenirs, and a business logo, to specifically identify the house of Krapche (Kanevche) visually.

As additional background material, the research incorporates the author's illustrations of the house of Krapche (Kanevche) (Fig. 2) to provide scientific and analytical depth to the study and facilitate more profound conclusions.

The third stage encompasses data processing, discursive analysis, and argumentation. It involves the interpretation of both textual details and contextual knowledge concerning traditional urban house design. Besides the visual representation of sampled tourist souvenirs, conclusions are drawn from pictorial material. This interpretive approach unveils the cultural identity of the house model for tourism purposes.

Through this integrated methodological approach, the research achieves a nuanced understanding of the connection between urban house architectural design and tangible souvenirs, enriching the overall findings.

Background: The House of Krapche (Kanevche) in Ohrid, North Macedonia

The concept of the Ohrid urban house draws from a centuries-old building tradition, utilizing various architectural styles tailored to local needs. This varied approach to spatial and construction design, emphasizing both environmental considerations and functionality, resulted in the creation of splendid, authentic houses that defined the city's unique character and significantly enriched the national architectural heritage (Cipan, 1955; Grabrijan, 1986; Krunic, 1951).

One of the notable exemplars of this heritage is the house of Krapche (Kanevche) (Fig 1 and 2), designated as a cultural monument and legally protected since 2010. In 2019, the local government of Ohrid, in collaboration with the Institute for Protection of monuments of culture and museum Ohrid, installed information boards on several buildings, all recognized as national monuments of culture by the Ministry of Culture. This effort aimed to inform visitors about the historical significance of these structures, facilitating a comprehensive understanding and making it easier for tourists to connect with the city's rich history. This initiative not only enhances cultural awareness but also promotes Ohrid's cultural heritage, fostering the development of cultural tourism.

The inscription of the board that is put on the west side of the house of Krapche (Kanevche) (Fig 1a) has the following text: “The Kanevchevi family, in the 19th century, has built one of the most typical facades found on the west side of the house, used as a model in making street lanterns that can be seen in the old part of Ohrid. The house is fully authentic and restored” (Fig 1b). The purpose of installing the board was to provide clear information to the numerous visitors, allowing them to easily understand the significance and essence of this landmark. By reading the information alongside some general details, tourists can comprehend the context better and create a memorable experience. Placing the board serves as an initiative to reinforce and promote Ohrid's cultural heritage, contributing to the development of cultural tourism in the region.



Fig. 1a: West side of the house

Fig. 1b: Information board

Fig. 1: House of Krapche (Kanevche), Ohrid

Source: Original photo of Petar Namicev (co-author)

The construction of the house was intricately adapted to the challenging hilly terrain. Emphasizing structural stability, elevation for panoramic views of the lake and surroundings, and aesthetic refinement of the facade, the house stands as a testament to architectural ingenuity. This is particularly the case with the facade in the west side of the house (Fig 1a and 2) which is the symbol of the house.

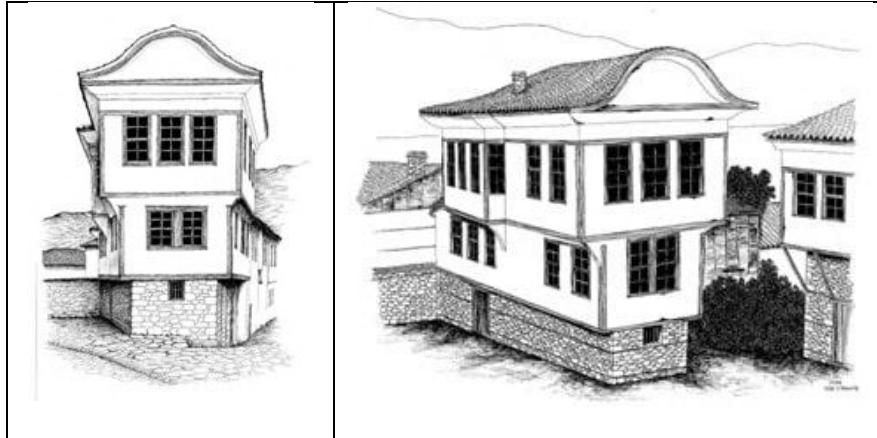


Fig. 2: The house of Krapche (Kanevche), Ohrid
Source: Namicev (2023: 55) Source: Namicev (2023: 26)

Notably, the integration of usable space with construction, environmental factors, family requirements, and broader architectural vision was a defining feature. Economic rooms, located on the ground floor, served for storing food, firewood, and tools, characterized by stone walls connecting to the yard's fence. Specific areas for work, storage, and winter residence were meticulously planned. Living spaces were situated on the first floor, with distinct zones for food preparation, sleeping, and living, each tailored to its function. Room sizes were determined based on function and spatial conditions, resulting in well-adapted and optimal solutions (Namicev, 2023).

Findings and Discussion

The images presented below aim to visually illustrate the interconnection between the traditional urban house model and its cultural identity, strategically employed for tourism promotion:

- Objects resembling the model house with a representative appearance include street lanterns (Fig 3), a "welcome" model house (Fig 4), and ATM banking outlet (Fig 5).
- Tourist souvenirs (Fig 6) documented at local souvenir shops, such as magnets (Fig 6a), postcards (Fig 6b), and bags (Fig 6c).
- Logos of commercial entities (Fig 7).
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Fig. 3: Street lanterns
Source: Original Image of Petar Namicev (co-author)

The street lanterns (Fig 3) represent the architectural features of the Krapche (Kanevche) house and can be found in the old town of Ohrid. These candelabras serve as typical decorations along the narrow streets, designed to mimic the shape of the west facade of the house model. They significantly enhance tourists' experience of a memorable walk through Ohrid's cultural architectural heritage.



Fig. 4: “Welcome” model house
Source: Original Image of Petar Namicev (co-author)

A substantial house-shaped wooden model (4m x 4m) (Fig 4) installed at Ohrid's main entrance in 2013 welcomes visitors, emphasizing the uniqueness of Ohrid's urban architectural heritage. Surrounded by horticultural elements, it creates a warm and inviting atmosphere.



Fig. 5: ATM banking outlet
Source: Original Image of Petar Namicev (co-author)

In the heart of Ohrid's city center, an ATM banking outlet (Fig 5) was installed in 2023, designed to replicate the iconic 19th-century urban house of Krapche (Kanevche). By mirroring the renowned features of this house, the banking outlet provides a unique opportunity to

perpetuate the spirit of Ohrid's cultural tradition. This initiative not only enhances the city's cultural heritage but also contributes significantly to the promotion of tourism by showcasing the iconic shape of the house model.



Fig. 6a: Magnets

Fig. 6b: Postcard



Fig. 6c: Bags

Fig. 6: Souvenirs

Source: Original Image of Petar Namicev (co-author)

In line with Decrop and Masset's typology (2011), magnets (Fig 6a) and postcards (Fig 6b) are symbolic souvenirs due to their typical and emblematic nature, while bags (Fig 6c) are utilitarian as they serve a functional purpose. These souvenirs (Fig 6), often chosen as gifts, reflect tourists' sensitivity to the authenticity embedded in their memories, images, and photographs, associating them with the specific house model's cultural and historical value. Tourists associate the bought souvenirs with the specific house model, which holds cultural and historical value for them as highlighted by Littrell et al., (1994).

The availability of various local souvenirs featuring Krapche's (Kanevche's) house logo indicates a deep assimilation into tourists' perceptions and consumption experiences. This aligns with observations made by Pike (2010), emphasizing the tourists' connection with the authenticity of the architectural motif.

The findings underscore tourists' strong connection with the authenticity of the architectural motif, especially in souvenirs representing the house of Krapche (Kanevche). These items serve not only as symbols of Ohrid but also as powerful reminders of something unique and beautiful. Tourists are drawn to the originality and exceptional architectural design of this particular urban house, leading them to willingly purchase souvenirs associated with its meaningful cultural and historical significance. In essence, these souvenirs commercialize the local tradition.



Fig. 7: Commercial logos

Fig 7 showcases commercial logos incorporating the distinctive motif of the Krapche (Kanevche) house. In this instance, the exceptional design serves as a corporate emblem, emphasizing tradition, culture, and historical values. By integrating this iconic architectural feature into their logos, businesses not only establish a visual connection with Ohrid's rich heritage but also communicate a sense of authenticity and local pride to their audience. This strategy not only aligns them with the city's cultural identity but also fosters a deeper sense of community engagement. These logos act as more than just symbols; they become storytellers, narrating the city's history and legacy to both residents and visitors alike.

The integration of heritage into contemporary corporate imagery not only promotes local culture but also enhances brand identity, creating a harmonious blend of tradition and modernity in Ohrid's business landscape. This approach reflects a city valuing its past while embracing its future, creating a compelling narrative resonating with all who encounter these logos.

Conclusions

The research provides significant insights into the relationship between a representative 19th-century urban house model and tourism promotion in Ohrid. The city's distinctive urban layout, particularly in the old town, boasts numerous examples of historical architecture that form the core of its cultural identity. Preservation efforts by local authorities have safeguarded these structures, highlighting the authentic charm of Ohrid's heritage.

This research focused on the house of Krapche (Kanevche) that possesses distinctive local characteristics and reflects an innovative approach to urban architecture, making it a symbol of its kind. It stands out as the most advanced architectural model of residential construction in the 19th century within the region. The discursive analysis of the visual representation showed that the house of Krapche (Kanevche) is recognized as a symbol of Ohrid's traditional architectural identity. This symbolism is vividly portrayed through various forms of tourism consumption, including souvenirs and brand visibility. The house's external appearance has become a cherished symbol, representing the cultural essence of Ohrid.

Tourist souvenirs featuring traditional architectural symbols play a pivotal role in promoting and enriching the destination's tourism offerings. Having in mind that urban traditional houses are an integrative part of the cultural heritage, needs a commercial valorization as one way in which it may be protected and preserved. However, it is crucial to emphasize that the preservation of traditional architecture, like the Krapche (Kanevche) house, goes beyond economic benefits. It is a matter of cultural preservation and sustainable development. It is a tourism brand image which must be taken into consideration to preserve its authenticity in combination of evoking harmony, charm, and uniqueness. Only preserved heritage with authentic cultural identity may ensure long-term viability of tourism imaging. Preservation of traditional architecture in North Macedonia is an issue already vastly discussed (Ivkovska, 2014; Mitkova-Petrovska & Blaževska, 2020; Namicev and Nestoroska, 2023; Petrevska & Nestoroska, 2023; Ristevska & Tuntevski, 2020).

The research highlights that preserved traditional architecture is capable of enriching tourism supply and thus supporting overall tourism development. Tourists' expenditures on

souvenirs featuring urban house images contribute positively to the economic growth of the destination. Therefore, Ohrid, as a tourist destination, can utilize the 19th-century Krapche (Kanevche) house as a role model in shaping and bolstering its tourism sector. However, this can only be achieved if the city adheres to sustainable development principles, ensuring a balance in economic growth, safeguarding traditional architecture, and prioritizing the residents' quality of life. The logo featuring the house symbol serves as a driving force in promoting the destination. By strategically placing informational materials, Ohrid can craft a compelling narrative in the tourism market. Coordinated promotional efforts at the local and national levels can establish Ohrid as a testament to its rich cultural heritage, inviting the world to witness its timeless splendor. This approach not only enriches the city's tourism offerings but also ensures the preservation of its unique cultural legacy for generations to come.

The framework used in this study to support the use of traditional architecture to promote Ohrid as a tourist destination is its main strength. This contributes to better understanding of tourist souvenirs as powerful promotional tools particularly of interest to marketers and retailers. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of continually promoting Ohrid through its picturesque urban architectural heritage while simultaneously urging the need for creating a more effective tourism promotion strategy. However, its weakness lies in its concentration solely on a particular case study, potentially restricting its broader relevance.

This research possesses several limitations that open avenues for future studies. Primarily, the case study focuses solely on the house of Krapche (Kanevche) as a representative urban house model. Therefore, the analysis does not comprehensively cover the entire spectrum of traditional urban architecture's role in tourism promotion. Additionally, the research relies exclusively on photographic data of a few mass-produced souvenirs (magnets, postcards, and bags), which might not be adequate for generalizing the findings. Future research could explore a wider range of souvenir types for a more comprehensive understanding.

However, despite these limitations, the study significantly contributes to strengthening the connection between traditional architecture and tourism. It achieves this by delving into a real case study, providing valuable insights that can serve as guiding principles for conceptualizing urban architecture in tourism promotion. These findings pave the way for more in-depth investigations, potentially exploring diverse architectural models and a broader range of souvenirs, thereby enriching our understanding of the relationship between heritage architecture and tourism.

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