

Postcards and Tourism Brands in Central Europe around 1900

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Abstract: The paper discusses the development of tourism during the Belle Époque in Europe, especially in the Austrian (Austro-Hungarian) Empire, in connection to postcards, a postal product specific to the period. The analysis of the images on the postcards that circulated during the era in question leads to the identification of actual “brands” of the cities and regions of the Empire. Those “brands” are iconic images that the general public and visitors in particular automatically associated with the depicted places. The present paper discusses the cases of Vienna and Budapest, the two capitals of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as well as the cases of cities like Bratislava, Cluj and Salzburg, spa resorts, places on the Adriatic Riviera, tourist places in Semmering and the Tatra Mountains, and those in the region of Tyrol.

Keywords: History of tourism, postcards, visual history, 1900, Austro-Hungary

Rezumat: Ilustrate și branduri turistice în Europa Centrală în jurul lui 1900. Articolul pune în discuție dezvoltarea turismului în Belle Époque în Europa, mai precis în Imperiul Austriac (Austro-Ungar), în legătură cu cărțile poștale, un produs postal specific epocii. Analiza imaginilor de pe cărțile poștale care au circulat în epocă duce la identificarea unor adevărate “branduri” ale orașelor sau regiunilor Imperiului. Aceste “branduri” sunt imagini iconice care devin asociate automat cu locurile respective, de către populație și de către vizitatori. În cazul de față, am luat în considerare capitalele Viena și Bratislava, orașe precum Bratislava, Cluj sau Salzburg, stațiuni balneare, stațiuni de pe Riviera de la Marea Adriatică, localitățile turistice din munții Semmering, Tatra și din Tirol.

Cuvinte-cheie: istoria turismului, cărți poștale, istorie vizuală, 1900, Austro-Ungaria

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In Europe and in the United States of America, one can speak of modern tourism starting with the second half of the 19th century. Among its very numerous specific expressions,¹ one can mention those referring to the *representation of territory* “delivered” to tourists for visiting. They include, for example, a great variety of depictions: maps, book illustrations, press illustrations, posters, commercials, plus the visual illustrations of travel books, especially tourist guides.

After the “printing revolution” of the 19th century (the development of modern typographic techniques, the reduction of production costs, the development of the press and of periodicals, the introduction of pocket books etc.)², the quality of the depictions increased, as revealed by even a brief overview of some of the era’s travel guides, such as those published by the famous Baedeker printing house that had launched dozens of guides, some in several editions, starting with the 1830s-1840s.³ The Baedeker guides have significantly contributed to the encouragement of traveling and, eventually, to the development of tourism. Furthermore, the tourist guides of the era played an important role in setting certain images and specific information associated with the places they refer to. For example, the Baedeker guide entitled *Southern Germany and Austria, including the eastern Alps*, printed in 1873, provides detailed information and good-quality colour maps for regions that became tourist destinations during that era: the Semmering Mountains in Austria and the Tatra Mountains at that time in Hungary,⁴ as well as cities such as Trieste on the shore of the Adriatic Sea, interesting from a tourist perspective through its history, its monuments, and the

¹ Pio Trippa, *Storia del viaggio e del turismo* (Edizioni DrawUp, 2015), 75-86, 97-105, 111-112. For Austro-Hungary and Italy, see Jill Steward, *Tourism in Late Imperial Austria*, in Shelley Baranowski and Ellen Furlough (eds.), *Being elsewhere. Tourism, consumer culture and identity in modern Europe and North America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 2001), 108-134; Andrea Jelardi, *La storia del viaggio e del turismo in Italia* (Mursia, 2012), 43-187. Also see Marina Soroka, *The summer capitals of Europe, 1814-1919* (Abingdon, Oxon, Routledge, 2017); László Kósa, *Badenleben und Kurorte in Österreich-Ungarn*. Übers. Albrecht Friedrich (Budapest, Holnap, 1999); Radu Mârza, *Cărți poștale și turism*, in *Istoria ca interogație: Mariei Crăciun, la o aniversare*, Carmen Florea and Greta-Monica Miron (eds.) (Cluj-Napoca: Ed. Argonaut, MEGA, 2020), 401-404.

² Rob Banham, “The Industrialization of the Book, 1800-1970”, in Simon Eliot – Jonathan Rose (eds.), *A companion to the history of the book* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2007), 273-290.

³ David Bruce, “Baedeker: the Perceived 'Inventor' of the Formal Guidebook - a Bible for Travellers in the 19th Century”, in *Giants of tourism*, Richard W. Butler and Roslyn A. Russell (eds.) (Wallingford, Oxfordshire; Cambridge, MA: CABI, 2010), 93-110.

⁴ Karl Baedeker, *Southern Germany and Austria, including the eastern Alps. Handbook for travellers* (Coblenz, Leipzig: K. Baedeker, 1873), 370, 474-476. Digital version: <https://archive.org/details/s/16840876.5294.emory.edu/mode/2up> (accessed March 2021).

entertainments it provided.⁵ Sometimes, the municipalities interested in attracting tourists, especially in the case of the spa resorts, published guides in very large editions and in several languages, some of which were distributed free of charge. Such an example is the work entitled *Karlsbad de odinioară și acum*, published by Ludwig Sipöcz and Josef Ruff in Karlsbad (present-day Karlovy Vary) in 1907,⁶ printed at the time in several languages, including Romanian. It was a 63 page-long brochure, small in size, containing numerous general information, as well as information targeted specifically at those visiting the spa in order to improve their health, in a simple, concise presentation accompanied by pictures and a detailed map of the town.

Taking advantage of the progress of typographic techniques and in the context of the development of tourism, another means of for the visual representation of the places that became tourist destinations became increasingly present towards the end of the 19th century: tourist posters,⁷ printed as such, but that could also be published as postcards, or included in certain publications (daily press, magazines). Some posters depict countries, regions or certain settlements, others illustrate and promote cultural events, sports events, or even hotels and restaurants. They are printed by state institutions, ministries, tourism promotion agencies, railway companies, private transportation and tourism companies, hotels, and restaurants. Starting with the second half of the 19th century, posters became, besides tourist guides, important tools in promoting certain travel and leisure destinations, employing images deemed representative for the places in question.⁸

Still, postcards were the most efficient tools in the development of tourism. They played a main role, as they promoted *images* that gradually entered public consciousness.⁹ I thus chose to use the term “brand” in the title of my paper in connection to the development of tourism during this era and to postcards, even if the use of the word might seem anachronistic for the period under discussion.

Postcards also took advantage of the “printing revolution” mentioned above. The “postal revolution” that allowed short written

⁵ Karl Baedeker, *Southern Germany and Austria...*, 396-399.

⁶ Dr. Ludwig Sipöcz, Med. Dr. Josef Ruff, *Karlsbad de odinioară și acum. Din însărcinarea consiliului municipal. În editura proprie a comunei Karlsbad*, 1907, 63 p.

⁷ Elizabeth E. Guffey, *Posters. A Global History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2015), 41-88.

⁸ See László Kósa's research on publicity used by spa resorts in Austro-Hungary, in the volume *Badenleben und Kurorte in Österreich-Ungarn*. Übers. Albrecht Friedrich. Budapest, Holnap, 1999 (Szeged, Szegedi Kossuth), 75-84.

⁹ Jill Steward, *Tourism in Late Imperial Austria...*, 124.

messages to be sent fast, cheaply, and over long distances¹⁰ during the final years of the 19th century, was also a major advantage: the *images* printed on one of the sides of these postcards increased their popularity during that era.¹¹

All the visual tools mentioned above have contributed to the development of tourism and, more specifically, to making specific destinations popular. The idea of making certain destinations popular for tourism is also the result of the economic, social, and transportation-related developments in the European (and North American) society after the middle of the 19th century and especially around 1900. One notes the interest of government and administrative institutions, down to the level of the individual municipalities, in encouraging tourism. They understood the benefices of tourism and of tourists: the economic development of certain regions (including those of the targeted cities) and, why not, the crystallization of certain *images*, even identities;¹² one can add the progresses in the field of publicity and printing. The case of Austria (Austro-Hungary) is, for certain, the most interesting. The central-European monarchy extended from Karlovy Vary to Braşov, from Krakow to Sarajevo and was extremely diverse from the perspective of its populations and spoken languages, as well as in the development level of its provinces. The Empire cultivated this multicultural image through literature, publications, visual depictions and events (such as the International Exhibition in Vienna in 1873).¹³

An analysis of the postcards from Austro-Hungary is thus worthwhile, as they can provide interpretative suggestions and answers to the above-mentioned topics. Jill Steward's article mentioned above is an excellent starting point and I will attempt to demonstrate the validity of her interpretations by turning to the visual illustration on postcards.

I must mention that I was unable to find written sources regarding the policies of the printing houses that published the million postcards used during the envisaged period (such as lists of publications, number of copies etc.), but my research does have a quantitative dimension, based on the large number of postcards in circulation, printed in Austro-Hungary, that I am aware of, as a collector of such items. Out of the thousand postcards that I have held in my hand, I can draw certain conclusions regarding the settlements or regions most often subjected to this project of "imagining" through postcards.¹⁴

¹⁰ Radu Mărza, *Cărți poștale și turism...*, 404-405.

¹¹ Radu Mărza, *Cărți poștale și turism...*, 405-406.

¹² Jill Steward, *Tourism in Late Imperial Austria...*, 114-115.

¹³ Jill Steward, *Tourism in Late Imperial Austria...*, 110, 118.

¹⁴ The illustrations attached to the present paper are part of the author's private collection.

The problem resides not so much in identifying the settlements and the regions (provinces) that are most often photographed and printed on postcards, but in identifying the particular spots, the squares, the monuments, and in the case of regions - the envisaged landscapes. I shall henceforth focus on this aspect. I will briefly present several categories of settlements: the metropolises of Vienna and Budapest, large cities such as Bratislava, Cluj, Salzburg, spa resorts (Karlovy Vary), and seaside resorts (Abbazia). I shall discuss mountain tourist destinations together with the mountain landscapes they are inseparably connected to. I will use as case-studies the regions of Semmering and Tyrol in Cisleithania and the Tatra Mountains in Hungary (in present-day Slovakia).

From a quantitative perspective, the metropolises of the Austro-Hungarian Empire are the cities most often depicted on postcards, not only due to their political importance, but also because they had the highest traffic of people on the level of the entire Empire, from high-status state employees to the soldiers settled in various garrisons or day laborers working on the great construction sites of the two capitals. All these people sent postcards from Vienna or Budapest. The most often used pictures are panoramic ones: from Vienna, the postcards most often depict the Ring and the main sites and the monuments along it (the Opera, the Parliament, the University, the Burgtheater, and Maria Theresia's monument). Some postcards focus on certain segments of the Ring (Kärntner Ring, Opernring, Kolowrat-Ring, present-day Schubertring). Next in their frequency of use one can mention the postcards that depict St. Stephen's dome and the Baroque church in Karlsplatz.

In the case of Budapest, the images most often employed on postcards depict the iconic bridges that cross the Danube ("The Chain Bridge", Franz Joseph Bridge (currently called the Freedom Bridge, *Szabadsághíd*), Elisabeth and Margaret bridges etc.), as well as photographs of the citadel (The Royal Palace) in Buda, rising above the Danube and the Parliament, also by the river, but on the opposite bank, in Pest. These are spectacular images that have permeated the public awareness of Hungarians and visitors of Budapest alike, made popular through postcards and through other means. One also encounters images of the Ring (*Körút*) and especially of the large Andrassy boulevard (*Andrassy út*), named so in honour of Hungarian politician Gyula Andrassy (1823-1890). It was the representative road of Budapest, envisioned as a "royal way", an axis that was meant to start from the Royal Palace, to cross the Danube on the "Chain Bridge", to pass by St. Stephen's Basilica, to cross the Ring and to lead to the interesting

Oktogon Square and to Heroes' Square, where the monumental sculpture complex of the Millennium was erected in 1896-1906.

In the case of the two capitals, the postcards mentioned above show modern and beautiful cities with new urban and architectural developments. In both cases, the grand boulevards, squares, and palaces date to the final decades of the 19th century and the first years of the subsequent century; thus, at the time the postcards under scrutiny were printed and circulated, they depicted new, recent, and spectacular views. Those who sent and received the postcards (the public in general, both from the Empire and abroad) ended up associating Vienna with the Ring and the representative monuments along it; the same is true in the case of Budapest.

Out of the large cities of the Monarchy, I have selected three that are representative for the different parts of the country: Bratislava in Upper Hungary (present-day Slovakia), Cluj in Transylvania, and Salzburg in the Austrian land with the same name.

Bratislava (Hung. Pozsony, Germ. Pressburg) is an important city in the Hungarian historical consciousness, as it has acted as capital of the Hungarian Kingdom for more than two centuries, during the time of the Ottoman occupation and in the first century after the Habsburg Reconquista (1536-1783). The postcards depicting Bratislava contain a large number of representative images and one faces difficulties in ranking them.

The view most often employed depicts the city in its surrounding landscape, with the Danube in the foreground and the castle (*Hrad*) and the city in the background, with the tower of St. Martin's dome visible. These photographs were taken from the opposite bank of the Danube and sometimes include steam boats on the water. The Hrad is sometimes photographed from other angles, sometimes in the background of the city *corso* (at that time called the Kossuth Lajos square), that is another frequently employed image. The latter houses the building of the City Theatre (today the National Theatre), that is often depicted on postcards as well. One can also mention the monumental statue of Maria Theresia, erected by sculptor János Fadrusz (1897) (the one who created the monumental complex dedicated to King Mathias Corvinus in Cluj), that was blown up in 1921.

In the case of Cluj (Hung. Kolozsvár, Germ. Klausenburg), the image that surpasses by far all others in frequency out of the entire production of analysed postcards between the end of the 19th century and 1918 (though the same is also true for the Interwar period!) is the view of the Central Square, with the monumental complex dedicated to King Mathias Corvinus in the foreground. The older postcards, printed before

the unveiling of the monument in 1902, show the square with St. Michael's parish church in the foreground. But the martial, equestrian, bronze image of King Mathias has remained associated with the city of Cluj to this day, as it was used on book illustrations, product labels, cultural or commercial posters, as well as part of the logos of companies and associations. Another frequently employed image of Cluj is the city panorama, photographed from the top of the Cetățuia hill that became the favoured place for a stroll for both locals and visitors after the interventions of 1890-1900, as it provided an admirable view of the city from high up.

Salzburg, a city included in the Austrian Empire only in 1861, already had a tradition of tourism.¹⁵ The image that dominates the postcard production during the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and subsequently, during the Interwar Period, is that of the fortress (*Hohensalzburg*), located on a tall spot, looming over the city that is marked by the contours of the numerous towers of the Gothic or Baroque churches. The photographs are most often taken from the opposite bank of the river Salzach, so that they also capture one of the bridges leading to the old town that embellish the panorama.

A distinct category of cities, directly connected to the tourism of the Belle Époque in Austro-Hungary, are the spa resorts.¹⁶ They are scattered throughout the Empire, from the north-western corner of Bohemia (Karlovy Vary, Germ. Karlsbad; Mariánské Lázně, Germ. Marienbad; Františkovy Lázně, Germ. Franzensbad, currently in the Czech Republic) to those in Hungary (Trenčianske Teplice, Hung. Trencsénteplic; Piešťany, Hung. Pöstyén, both in present-day Slovakia), Transylvania and Banat (Băile Herculane), or Austria (Bad Ischl, Bad Gastein, Bad Sauerbrunn and others). Karlovy Vary (Karlsbad) is the best known of these spas, not only in the Empire, but throughout the world. It has attracted thousands upon thousands of visitors throughout time and became especially popular after it was connected to the railway network of the Empire and of Europe (around 1870). For all these reasons, thousands or likely tens of thousands of postcards depicting the town were printed and used in the period under discussion. The most popular ones show the spa city from one of the surrounding hills, while others depict one of the famous colonnades, present in all of the spas that were comparable to Karlovy Vary in importance. Most focus on the colonnades of the thermal springs known as Mühlbrunn and Sprudel.

¹⁵ Jill Steward, *Tourism in Late Imperial Austria...*, 117.

¹⁶ See László Kósa, *Badenleben und Kurorte in Österreich-Ungarn...*

The first seaside resorts by the Adriatic, the only sea of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, were created during the second half of the 19th century. Among the numerous cities on the shore of the Adriatic with rich history, culture, and economic prosperity (Trieste, Pola, Rijeka, It., Germ. Fiume; Zadar, It., Germ. Zara; Split, It. Spalato; Dubrovnik, It. Ragusa), one notes the town of Abbazia, Croat. Opatija. It became the main tourist destination on the Austro-Hungarian Riviera, in direct connection to the construction of the great southern Vienna-Trieste railway (*Südbahn*) and of the derived line that led to Rijeka (completed in 1873),¹⁷ in close proximity to the seaside resort. One should also mention the fact that the Ministry of Railways, with responsibilities in the development of tourism as well, invested in the construction of hotels in the emerging tourist areas, in Abbazia as well as in Semmering.¹⁸

Most postcards show panoramic views of the resort, sometimes details of the *corso* along the seashore or scenes from the settlement's tiny harbour. They construct images that create the "brand" of the Austro-Hungarian Riviera that was so popular at the time. It is interesting to note that despite the particular image of Abbazia, the types of images that depict it do not differ much from those of other neighbouring seaside resorts (such as Lovran, Ičići, Volosca, Porto Re, Croat. Kraljevica; Crkvenica).

The next places depicted as "brands" on postcards used around 1900 are those from the mountainous regions of the Empire. I have selected several spectacular regions that are at the same time representative for both halves of the Monarchy.

The first is Semmering, in the present-day Austrian land of Styria, a rather restricted mountainous region that became popular for its leisure resorts and the practice of winter sports. It also benefited from being close to Vienna (100 kilometers) and being connected to the railway network. Semmering is located on the route of the southern railway (*Südbahn*) and travellers were able to reach it by train from Vienna, starting with 1854. One should also mention the fact that the construction of this mountainous segment of railway that crosses the mountain of Semmering was very difficult for the period and required great human and technical efforts; in fact, the railway of Semmering is considered the first iron road in the world to cross a mountain massif.¹⁹

¹⁷ Cf. *Enzyklopädie zur Eisenbahngeschichte des Alpen-Donau-Adria-Raumes: Pivka-Bahn* (Elmar Oberegger, 2006): <http://www.oberegger2.org/enzyklopaedie/rijeka.htm> (accessed March 2021).

¹⁸ Jill Steward, *Tourism in Late Imperial Austria...*, 115. See also László Kósa, *Badenleben und Kurorte in Österreich-Ungarn...*, 54-57.

¹⁹ Günter Dinohobl, *Die Semmeringbahn. Eine Baugeschichte der ersten Hochgebirgsbahn der Welt* (Böhlau Verlag, Wien, Köln, Weimar, 2018); Désirée Vasko-Juhász, *Die Südbahn. Ihre Kurorte und Hotels* (Böhlau Verlag, 2006).

The era's postcards are illustrated with general views, panoramas of the mountain massif, capturing by necessity the railway or even one of the numerous works of rail art scattered along the route. This suggests that the Austro-Hungarian state and the printing houses that produced the postcards in question wished to promote a spectacular image of the natural landscape that was nevertheless crossed by the great victory of man that was the railway of Semmering (included in the UNESCO heritage in 1998).

The image that dominates the postcards depicting Tyrol is that of a massive mountainous region, with peaks taller than 2000 meters, forming wild natural landscapes, but with traces of human presence. People or human settlements are rarely absent from these postcards... The standard image revealed by these postcards is a row of tall and rocky mountains with the picturesque village of Tyrol at their feet, the omnipresent steep roofs of the church towers. The villages are surrounded by sunny pastures and possibly interconnected by railways. Many of these settlements developed during that period precisely because of tourism and especially due to the railways (built in this region starting with the 1860s-1870s) that allowed tourists from all across Europe to arrive in Tyrol. This region might be the best example of an *image* ("brand") constructed at the end of the 19th century that is still working today...

In Transleithania, the Hungarian part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Tatra Mountains are a region that became a tourist destination in the end of the 19th century (currently on the territory of Slovakia and, partially, of Poland). The region, where tourism was also practiced during the previous decades, became more interesting after it was connected to the railway around 1870-1872 through the great railway of Bohumín (Germ. Oderberg) – Košice (Germ. Kaschau, Hung. Kassa),²⁰ that brought an increased number of visitors. The Hungarian state made efforts to promote the region and to develop it from the perspective of tourist infrastructure, along with the various tourism promotion associations,²¹ and the era's postcards reveal these efforts. Like in the case of Semmering, the postcards depict wild and impressive mountainous landscapes, but unlike in the previous case, human presence is minimal in the lot under discussion. The illustrated natural landscape shows few traces of human intervention, sometimes the electric or rack railway or several hotels. During the Interwar Period and especially during the Communist Era, the images of the Tatra Mountains painted by postcards

²⁰ Peter Michael Kalla-Bishop, *Hungarian railways* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1973), 43-44.

²¹ László Kósa, *Badenleben und Kurorte in Österreich-Ungarn...*, 45-48.

changed, now with a particular emphasis put precisely on the human presence in the landscape...

I believe the illustrations of the present research convincingly support the initial idea, namely the fact that these sources helped create the public image of certain cities or regions, as a result of the efforts made by state or private institutions, as well as of that printing houses, with the purpose of making them popular through postcard depictions. The success that postcards enjoyed and the great number (possibly as high as hundreds of thousands) of postcards printed, sold, written, send by post, received, read, admired and even collected have contributed over time (long after the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire) to the creation of certain images or "brands" that we still enjoy today.