

Marketing the German Hotel in the Interwar Period

Visual imagery played a key role in both the expansion of the tourism industry as the formation of the tourist imagination and cultural horizon. In the early part of the nineteenth-century artistic travels were encouraged by an entrepreneurial print culture in which publishers, printers and booksellers across Europe collaborated in the production and circulation of printed images. Later on, the circulation of photographic images, illustrated magazines and travel books familiarized the general public with the best-known travel destinations and the tourist infrastructure. The use of illustrations by the commercial press turned it into one of the most important vehicles for the circulation and dissemination of place-images while the tourist industry itself rapidly developed its own in-house journals to communicate with potential customers. As the tourism industry and infrastructure evolved and developed, so did its marketing strategies. Whereas at the beginning of the nineteenth-century the publishing of lists with prominent visitors by resorts was the most accepted marketing scheme, local tourist offices, initiated and run by local businessmen and hoteliers, produced and disseminated publicity, publishing posters and guidebooks. By disseminating a large number and variety of articles, brochures and advertisements, the modern hotel, which gestated around 1900, sought actively to attract their desired clientele.¹ This source offers insight into marketing practices in the tourist industry in the interbellum, which were a crossroads in both the history of tourism as in the history of marketing in Germany.

This book should be placed in the context of the early phase of the acknowledgement in German of tourism as a vital economic and cultural phenomenon in academia and other sectors of societies. Under the new discipline *Fremdenverkehrswissenschaft*, geographers, economists and sociologists sought to analyse tourism as a social phenomenon and its economic relevance.² During the interbellum, the tourist industry was 'rediscovered' as a source to regenerate the German nation both economically and politically, as an instrument to ameliorate the cultural image of the nation. According to a doctor C.E. Schmidt, who was affiliated to the Verkehrsamt Berlin, who contributed to a conference on the promotion of tourism in Berlin the potential of advertisements for fostering tourism and consequently international mutual understanding could not be underestimated: 'Etwas Idealeres lässt sich kaum denken: die Werbung als Mittel zum Eindringen und Vertiefen in die Eigenschaften und Eigenheiten, überhaupt in das ganze Kulturmilieu des anderen Landes, seines Staatswesens und Volkslebens.'³ This plea for the professionalization of

¹ Habbo Knoch, 'Life on Stage: Grand Hotels as Urban Interzones around 1900', in: Martine Hessler and Clemens Zimmermann ed., *Creative Urban Milieus. Historical Perspectives on Culture, Economy, and the City*, 137-157, 143.

² Hasso Spode, 'Tourism Research and Theory in German-Speaking Countries', in: Graham Dann and Giuli Liebman-Parrinello ed., *The Sociology of Tourism: European Origins and Developments* (Bradford, 2009), 65-93, 65-68.

³ HAT FV-A/929/ADL C.E. Schmidt, 'Verkehrswerbung', in: Anonymus ed., *Fremdenverkehr* (Berlin, 1929), 484-521, 487. See also: Hasso Spode, 'Die Aufstieg des Massentourismus im 20. Jahrhundert', in Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Claudius Torp ed., *Die Konsumgesellschaft in Deutschland 1890-1990* (Frankfurt and New York, 2009), 114-128, 120.

the advertisement sector was echoed in various other channels. After the First World War, the advertisement sector professionalised, was institutionalised and extended. Based on the example of the American advertisements industry, principles of scientification and rationalisation were applied, in tandem with market and consumer research.⁴ Marketing and the relation between psychology and marketing became established academic subjects, while a corpus of practical guides offered guidance for conceiving, designing and disseminating advertisements.

In the weekly published journal *Verkehr und Bäder. Zeitschrift für das deutsche Verkehrs- und Bäderwesen*, the organ of the *Reichsarbeitsgemeinschaft für deutsche Verkehrsförderung*, which was the central organisation for promoting tourism to and in Germany, the need for a centrally organised marketing strategy is continually stressed.⁵ The publications contain a varied body of information: from discussions of new marketing media, like light shows beautifully illuminating key sites in the city to major promotional films.⁶ The journal contains many articles which offer insights into the American marketing industry: reports of doctors, affiliated to spa's, who undertook study trips to America to gain insight in the newest developments of the business.⁷

This publication certainly sprouts from this discourse. As noted above, marketing was an intrinsic component of the hotel business. However in the Interbellum, a growing body of literature admonished hoteliers to professionalise and rationalise their marketing strategies, transforming posters and luggage labels in calculated advertising vehicles, signs of distinction and lifestyle objects.⁸ According to the writer advertisements were for the travel industry what respiration was for the body: a dire necessity. Especially since the Great War had fundamentally altered the travel public in Germany: the middle-class, which predominantly had sought accommodations, had been dramatically impoverished and the new class that was the current target audience lacked the cultural know-how of travelling. The tourism sector in the interbellum was indeed marked by a limited social democratisation and diversification, as predominantly female white-collar workers were increasingly able to purchase a holiday.⁹ The traditional methods of advertising, building a select clientele by ways of word-to-mouth advertising, were inadequate according to cope with the perceived dramatic shift in the

⁴ Correy Ross, 'La professionnalisation de la publicité et de la propagande dans l'Allemagne de Weimar', *Vingtième Siècle*, 101 (2009), 9-26., Ingo Köhler and Jan Logemann, 'Towards marketing management. German marketing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries', in: D.G. Brian Jones and Mark Tadajewski, *The Routledge Companion to Marketing History* (London and New York, 2016), 371-386, 374-376. and Peter Borscheid, 'Agenten des Konsums: Werbung und Marketing', in Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Claudius Torp ed., *Die Konsumgesellschaft in Deutschland 1890-1990* (Frankfurt and New York, 2009), 79-96, 87-92.

⁵ HAT ZSF-070.

⁶ See: *ibid.* 'Werbe mit Licht. Bilder von Licht-Werbetagen deutscher Städte', *Verkehr und Bäder. Zeitschrift für das deutsche Verkehrs- und Bäderwesen*, 4 January 1928. and 'Der Deutschland-Film in Amerika', *Verkehr und Bäder. Zeitschrift für das deutsche Verkehrs- und Bäderwesen*, 4 April 1928.

⁷ P. Hildebrandt, 'Ein Besuch im Büro der German Health Resorts in New-York', *Verkehr und Bäder. Zeitschrift für das deutsche Verkehrs- und Bäderwesen*, 8 February 1928.

⁸ Habbo Knoch, *Grandhotels. Luxusräume und Gesellschaftswandel in New York, London, und Berlin um 1900* (Göttingen, 2016), 337-338

⁹ Spode, 'Die Aufstieg des Massentourismus im 20. Jahrhundert', 122.

clientele of hotels. The rejuvenation of the industry could only be effectuated with a new approach towards marketing, based on the American model of advertising. In the recent decades the stance towards advertising had completely reversed: where active marketing had been traditionally regarded with suspicion, virtually every company observed the newest developments in the marketing strategies of their American peers avidly, in order to adopt those strategies they saw fit for their own policy.¹⁰

Nitsch covers a broad spectrum of various media and channels, in order for hoteliers to adopt an adequate image policy and reinvigorate their business. Interestingly, Nitsch covers hotels from every stature, from 'Bürgerlichen Gaststätte' to 'mondaine Luxushotels'. The main goal of advertisements was according to Nitsch the establishment of a direct association with a certain hotel and place: by ways of a suggestive visual and textual message, which imprinted the hotel in the mind of the consumer. Visual advertisements in newspapers and increasingly posters in public space had become a conspicuous feature of everyday life and culture in the city as the consumer society gradually expanded. In tandem with general German discourse on marketing, Nitsch judges advertising mainly by artistic rather than purely marketing criteria.¹¹ The aesthetic qualities of the advertisement functioned as the main selling point. An exquisite and remarkable image, executed by a true artist, should literally catch the eye of the customer. A true 'mit Suggestionskraft wirkendes Inserat' should be complemented by a short text, which by way of key words and a direct personal style, which would interest the broadest strata of society, should penetrate the psyche of the reader.¹² The poster should capitalise even more on these principles of 'Blickfang und Augenblickswirkung'. However, matters of distinction and taste dictated that the 'vornehme Hotel', whose selling points were exclusivity, discretion and distinction, and could not resort to this medium unconditionally, as a diffusion of public space would not do not much good for the reputation for the hotel and would displease its future guests.¹³ This rhetoric of the advertisement as a piece of art is to be found in the section on the luggage label too. The luggage label was a form of cultural capital, which should be proudly displayed by the tourist. In this sense it was a crucial form of representation for the hotel in question. Marketing-wise the potential of the luggage label was great, as it should incite readers/viewers to travel. In order to reach this two-fold goal, the luggage label should be a true little piece of art, executed by a professional artist, and should feature a romanticised and evocative scene of the hotel and the local scenery.¹⁴

Apart from advertisements whose effect hinged on their direct visual appeal, another important form of marketing for some hotels was the feuilleton. These short literary sketches, which could be published in newspapers in magazines, were according to Nitsch, important vehicles for the active image building of, especially, fashionable hotels. Key to their success and potential was their originality, personal note and their implicit appeal to marketing. By employing the hotel in question as the literary scene,

¹⁰ HAT FV-S/926/NIT Harry Nitsch, *Die Reklame des Hotel- und Gastgewerbes, der Kurorte und des Fremdenverkehrs* (Vienna and Leipzig, 1926), 13.

¹¹ Corey Ross, 'Visions of Prosperity. The Americanization of Advertising in Interwar Germany', in: Pamela Swett, Jonathan Wissen and Jonathan Zatin ed., *Selling Modernity: Advertising in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Durham and London, 2007), 52-77, 59-60.

¹² Nitsch, *Die Reklame des Hotel- und Gastgewerbes*, 32-40.

¹³ Nitsch, *Die Reklame des Hotel- und Gastgewerbes*, 134.

¹⁴ Nitsch, *Die Reklame des Hotel- und Gastgewerbes*, 138-142.

hoteliers could highlight the modern interiors and facilities or a specific type of guests, like nobles, to convince a specific public, for example as Nitsch proposes, a 'mondänes Haus mit snobistischem Zuschnitt', or 'a hypermodernen Sporthotel in einem von Grossstadtpublikum besuchten Wintersportplatz.'¹⁵ This book is in short an interesting example of the renewed interest in marketing and its relevance to tourism.

Vorbildliche Hotelwerbung

Following their successful Ocean-Flight
Clarence Chamberlin
Charles A. Levine
took recreation at the
„STEPHANIE“ Baden-Baden Black Forest and
wrote:

June 13./27

It was worth the flight
across the ocean to
spend a few days in
Baden-Baden at the wonderful
Stephanie Hotel
"Auf Wiedersehen
Clarence Chamberlin.
Charles A. Levine"

Das Hotel Stephanie in Baden-Baden wirbt psychologisch geschickt in seinen Prospekten mit dem hier abgebildeten Faksimile der beiden Ozeanflieger Chamberlin und Levine.

An excellent hotel advertisement. HAT ZSF-070 Verkehr und Bäder. Deutsche Verkehrsblätter. Balneologische Zeitung, 8 February 1928.

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¹⁵ Nitsch, *Die Reklame des Hotel- und Gastgewerbes*, 78-96 and 102-113.