Heritage as an Alternative Driver for Sustainable Development and Economic Recovery in South East Europe

Tourism development after the implementation of sustainable strategies in Neamt County

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Abstract

Several actions were put in practice over the last decade in order to support the global environment, the development targets and various strategic opportunities have been identified for the improvement of the territory. Unfortunately at local level they have remained only political challenges. The purpose of this paper is to identify the challenges that restrain the development of the cultural heritage of Neamt County and to draw some conclusions regarding the whole process of sustainable development. As a focus of the study, the present research brings in discussion the community and its involvement in the preservation and integration of the cultural heritage.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage; Sustainable development; Management; Tourism Neamt County.

1. Introduction

Sustainable development it is one of the most emphasized topics when talking about tourism. It is a multi-dimensional theme that emerged and it became prominent and on everyone's agenda after the Bruntland report from 1987, when it was defined as: ''development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability for future generations to meet their own needs''. According to Adams, 2006 sustainable development encompasses 3 aspects: the economic, environmental and social. The economic facet comprises several features like: stimulating the local businesses, by generating income and creating employment, therefore enhancing the multiplier effect and an equitable distribution of the benefits arisen from tourism activities in the local community. The second one raises awareness about the protection of environment while the social component fights against poverty, exclusion and promotes equality of rights. The social impacts can present negative effects when they try to stir up the local identity, family relationships, lifestyles, ceremonies or traditional activities Torrent, 2008. Swarbrooke, 1999 appreciates that the socio-culture impacts cannot be quantified for the most part and they are not that dynamic. They may have different impacts in changed environments but a balance between them is ought in order to yield a synergetic outcome.

Several researchers argued that cultural heritage represent the forth essential pillar of sustainability Duxbury & Mateus, 2012; Hawkes, 2001; Folke, 2006; Nurse, 2007. It is an important topic that is present for some time in the discussions about cultural identity, ownership and development of sociocultural. One fundamental aspect in the heritage conservation is the modality in which it is evaluated and how it is integrated in the present and contemporary beliefs. A sustainable development strategy for long term might offer a viable solution if it is combined with a participation and support of the local community (availability of resident advisory boards).

In Romania the national strategy for development of heritage stresses the fact that heritage represents an important factor in maintaining the national cultural values and the identity while the action plans proposed support a sustainable development, cohesion and social inclusion. The positive contributions in the Neamt County are thanks to the prepared human resources, performances in the research and the availability of investments while there are perceived as negative contributions: the low quality of the infrastructure and an inappropriate distribution of funds for the fields of intervention.

Alongside with the economic benefits that tourism brings in a region there are as well some negative effects that have an impact over the community of that region. Nistoreanu et al. 2003 argues that over the years it intervenes a shift in the values of the local population under the influences of tourists, a higher general cost of life a degradation of the environment and we add that sometimes it generates philosophical conflict.

2. Overview of heritage and cultural tourism

Cultural heritage is any aspect that holds an impact into the present or past upon its community and it is wanted to be passed on to future generations. Nuryanti, 1996 says that heritage is a part of any society and appreciates that the material culture is consisted of archaeological sites, buildings, monuments, museums, displays but as well literature, poetry, sports, performances and other. European Cooperation in Science and Technology defines the cultural heritage as a combination of material and immaterial evidence that are a part of the cultural identity of those populaces. Gorrod and Fyall, 2001 argue that heritage tourism is an activity carried on by tourists in area that presents historic artefacts.

The cultural tourism implies the cultural nature and the role of tourism that provides a set of practices long established in the pragmatic behaviour of societies that are transmitted through symbols, personal and collective identities different forms of art Robinson, 2006. Cultural heritages are divided in 2 directions the tangible and intangible, private and public Conway, 2014. Over the years, art and culture alongside heritage has received a greater attention from tourists in major destinations Zeppel and Hall, 1992.

Christou, 2005 appreciates two dimensions of heritage and cultural attractions, one in which for developed areas a specific category of tourists travel to particular sites, to visits museums or to assist to performances and another one where in the less developed regions they become involved in traditional religious practices and handicrafts.

Romania exceptional cultural heritage includes painted monasteries, medieval towns, fortified churches, memorial houses, archaeological sites, ancient Dacian ruins, the Danube Delta and cultural traditions.

In our present research the focus is on the Neamt County where the cultural heritage consists of 3 national parks: Ceahlau National Park, Cheile Bicazului Hasmas National Park and Vanatori Neamt Natural Park and according to the 2010 rapport of the Culture and National heritage Ministery the Neamt County numbers 537 historic monuments.

The main governmental institution in charge with the conservation, protection and implementation of present and new projects related to cultural heritage is The Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs. The budgets allocated for the conservation or restoration of cultural, religious and historic sites represent a small part of what in reality is needed. For that purpose the local decision makers, hence local councils have the responsibility of deciding the priorities or the division of the funds. Other public institutions that contribute with different policies and have an impact in the development of sustainable cultural heritage are the Ministries of Public Works and Agriculture, Forest and Rural Development and the Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism.

3. Neamt County

The focus of this study is the Neamt County that is located in North East region of Romania, with a population of 452,900 residents and which occupies a 2.5% of the area surface of the country, Comisia judeteana pentru recensamantul populatiei si al locuintelor, Judetul Neamt, 2012. One of this county's characteristics is that 65,3% of the population is rural. The earliest traces of human habitation in current territory of Neamt County dates from the Upper Paleolithic (about 100 thousand years BC), being particularly highlighted the Bistrita Valley, where there were found numerous archaeological sites. Neamt County consists of two municipalities: Piatra Neamt and Roman, three towns, 78 communes and 344 villages.

The economic activity in tourism in the Neamt jurisdiction is directly connected with the number of tourists' visits. Table 1 show the number of national visitors and international visitors from 2008 to 2012 and we can observe that the number of visitors has a negative trend as from the beginning of the financial crises in 2008, when the number of tourists has decreased. It is a consequence that affected the local business in the community and delays future investments. . Compared with 2008, the number of total overnight visitors has decreased by 7% and that of foreign overnight visitors by 26% in 2009. In 2012, the number of foreign visitors has declined by 53% and that of total visitors has declined by 9% compared to the reference year 2008.

Table 1. Visitors in Neamt county 2008-2012

Neamt County	Total visitors	Foreign visitors
2008	160049	23034
2009	148840	16823
2010	130971	13230
2011	133229	16318
2012	146218	10854

Source: Adapted by authors on INSS dates, Tempo on-line platform

We can observe that the majority of tourists are Romanians and as mentioned before the drop in the number of visitors from 2008 to 2010 was triggered by the crisis. One other aspect that influenced the decline from 2010 can be associated with the changes made by the government in the fiscal policies: more exactly a 25% reduction in the wages sector and the increase of VAT rate to 24%.

The accommodation capacity in the Neamt County has maintained a slight increase in 2006-2013 period and for the year of reference 2013 the statistics show a number of 6506 thousand places per day which represents 9.5% from the total available at national level (Directia regional de statistica Neamt). The total number of accommodation establishments for 2013 is 126 units, out which the hotels hold a 39.7%, agro touristic pensions 26.9%, while the other accommodation structures hold a 33.4% share (Directia regionala de statistica Neamt). According to the National statistics (2014), the cities ranking regarding the number of tourists for 2012 is the following: Piatra Neamt with 40959 tourists and with an average length of stay 1,62 nights/tourist; Roman city with 13958 tourists and an average length of stay of 1,66 nights/tourist; Bicaz city with 9054 tourists and 1,28 nights/tourist average length of stay while Targu Neamt city records 6446 visitors and an average length of stay of 1,44 nights/tourist. The very short period of stay indicates that preponderant the type of tourism in the region is one of transit or business and it affects consistently the profitability of the local operators and their activity.

For enhancing cultural tourism in the Neamt County one imperative condition is the existence of a continuous activity of the museums through organization of various exhibitions and invitation of renowned guests. At national level the North East region in which the Neamt county is an administrative unit, occupies the forth place after South West Oltenia, Bucharest-Ilfov and Centre. According to the national research study Barometru of Cultural Consume (2013), the answers of the respondents came to sustain the need of news stall-68%, copy centers -57%, bookstores-53%, stationery stores 53%, libraries 49%, cultural houses 49%, heritage objects(historical monuments, monasteries, archaeological sites, strongholds)- 46%; museums-42%, theatres-41%, opera theatre, operetta philharmonic

orchestra 32%. In Romania, the most visited cultural attractions are the fortresses/strongholds- 26% followed by archaeological sites and churches -16,1% while museums -4,9%, traditional handcrafts shops 6% and artistic workshops -9% are at the bottom of the list in tourist's choices.

We can assess that in Romania the support and interest for creation and reflection of cultural identities lies in tourism spaces, churches, archaeological sites and museums. It is advocated that for tourists, the level of interest in such activities can increase at a higher level if serious issues are brought in discussion by museums or heritage sites so that, afterwards, they are challenged to bring in question and disseminate social relations and economic structures (Chappell, 1989). As they are the cultural resources that attract tourists, the tourism destinations should strive for valorisation of these resources accordingly to the profile of tourists. Distinctive service and marketing strategies should be planned for tourists, as various characteristics such as age, sex, educational qualifications and monthly income puts them aside. Several studies have argued that the motivations for visiting cultural objectives are: education, information, pleasure of viewing, relaxation, entertainment/social as well as exercise and in some cases it is considered a part of their own heritage (Prentice, 1993; Moscardo, 1996; Swarbrooke (1994). One negative aspect is that in Neamt County the population with higher education in 2011 represents 9.4%.

Table 2. Activity of cultural artistic units in Neamt County

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Museums and public collections	28	28	28	29	28
Visitors	427470	625758	609825	378153	400630
Total number of cultural assets	459381	430342	398567	367056	368946
Total area of exhibition facilities (in sq.m.)	19005	19876	19934	20659	20564

Source: "Activity of cultural artistic units", INS 2008-2012, Tempo on-line platform

4. Sustainable heritage strategy

Several conditions varies from a region to another making it difficult for a unique strategy of heritage management to be successful and to represent a catalyst for economic growth. In what economists call collective public goods or common property resources there are classified historic or environmental assets in which each member has an equal interest Ostrom, 1990. It becomes a sensitive subject when preparing a strategy for a region, the resources can turn out to be over-used, in some cases even destroyed and therefore a set of restrictions and practices is necessary to be constructed.

When talking about community, a suitable definition that sums all the characteristics is: "Community…refers to people who live in some spatial relationship to one another and who share interests and values." Significant characteristics for a community are: the attachment for the place in which they live or had some experiences, the emotional bond that connects them to that surrounding, the social connection with the members Kyle et all, 2004.

Several authors explored the involvement of the community in the development of tourism appreciating this as the social exchange theory Gursoy, Rutherford, 2004; Nunki, Ramkissoon, 2011. The residents of a community decide to become involved in the development of tourism after they analyze the welfares and costs of all the process that is envisioned. Tosun, 2006 emphasized that the role of the residents it is not simply an instrumental one and that their active participation warrants the community with: future employment opportunities, future investments in conservation of the local resources and a positive attitude in the mentality of locals.

The role of the community is important as they address issues and differences which were not totally resolved in the past and affect the present and the future. It is effortless to appreciate that a group organization can bring serious input in developing a strategy and its management as with communication and consensus the final goals can be reached much easier Hodges and Watson, 2000. Over the years the role of community in the development of tourism has been explored and several factors have been pointed out: the attitudes, supposed effects and benefits anticipated connection and association with the community Lee, 2013.

Cohen, 1988 advocates that in order to a have an effective sustainable heritage management it is necessary to take into account the preparation process, the public participation, public and private proposals, cultural and economic requirements and a maintenance from the public to openness during the decision-making process. The 2008 strategy of Neamt County represents a complementary action to the Master Plan for Development of national tourism 2007-2026 and where the restoration of heritage objectives with touristic potential occupies an important priority. There were proposed actions that would enhance the proper improvements for the heritage sites and to put them in value; creation and identification of special locations for relaxation and amusement nearby the museums or the cultural objectives and an improved interpretation of exhibits for visitors alongside additional linguistic materials.

Roman City has elaborated a local strategy for the 2010-2018 period in which the two main directions are the creation of a regional environment for innovation and opportunities and for making tourism a driving force. In the first 4 years several achievements were realized and those that interest our present investigation are the rehabilitation and modernization of the heritage objectives. One of the priorities of the local community was the rehabilitation of the central street that represents a heritage for the city by grouping alongside several important historical monuments: the Costache Mortun House, the Military Hospital, the Roman Rail Station which dates from 1869, the edifice that houses the Trade School for Machinery Building, the Water Tower (1890), the Swiss House, Cristea Stefanescu House, Nita House, Branisteanu House, ITM Headquarters Neamt, Romascani House and one of the gathering places for the community in the past, the Romascana House. For more than ten years the area was in deplorable state, with little capacity for the existing buildings to withstand earthquakes. Due to the crumbling earth and the structural characteristics, i.e. existence of cellars, the traffic was banned for cars in the downtown area. The street called The High Lane was the main commercial road in Roman in the past and, since 1975, its Northern part (consisting of houses, some of them with distinctive architecture that are largely preserved as they were in the early twentieth century) is being protected as a historic landmark called "The urban historic center". The lack of funds and good administration put this part of the city in a shadow for many years. Becoming a priority for the community in several debates and meetings over the years the solution and rehabilitation came after accessing European funds.

This good practice shows that communication between different stakeholders can invigorate the regeneration of the city, can promote the identity of the city by restoring and maintaining the historic buildings, can offer the platform for tourism activities and represents an example that can be duplicated in other parts of the region. We appreciate that the reasons that impeded an earlier action and delivery in rehabilitation of the street might be the role and the lack of importance given to the place by the local authorities, the government and their surrogates, employees from many city departments (cultural, technical, business, environment).

We asses that other key factors which embody a driving force for future local management strategies, for heritage and tourism are governance and education. In this particular case the degradation of the heritage was produced primarily by natural factors, poverty and aging structures, while in general other factors such as local pollution, climate change, commerce, disputes and wars are the factors that interfere in the conservation and preservation of the sites. For the same area there are possibilities of accessing other funds under the structural funds –priority axis 1- Urban development and priority axis 5– Tourism development -5.1.Restoration and sustainable valorisation of cultural heritage and setting up/ modernization of related infrastructure. Unfortunately, one negative aspect regarding the promotion among tourists in Roman and in the region is the lack of a center for tourist information and promotion. The present strategy 2014-2020 proposed for Roman city, has invited the local community (professionals with various backgrounds, professors, entrepreneurs, NGO etc.) to debates before putting it to a vote in the local council. As the axes that are considered a priority for a sustainable development of the community need serious fund allocations a consensus is required.

Concerning the sustainable heritage management in Roman City, the proposed strategy fails to include and to propose a new reuse of the historic buildings and their integration in tourist itineraries. By adapting the historic places, the 'constructive conservation' is achieved. According to English heritage, the England government statutory adviser on the historic environment, finding a new purpose for the restored buildings and by giving a new cultural purpose is an evolved step and an innovative practice that keeps alive the heritage. There are not yet envisioned opportunities for training the local residents in different topics related to cultural tourism activities but a notable step of improvement is the desire of creating a web-page dedicated to tourism in the municipality and a section where the cultural activities are listed. There are no signages of the heritage buildings and consequently for the non-locals it is hard to make an idea about the history in the region.

5. Conclusions

It is proposed for a future investigation a qualitative research with the help of interviews of the key stakeholders and community members and a survey about how the restoration should further be made. One of the limitations of this study is the analysis of only one particular site and that a future research should include several sites in order to see if there is a linkage between them. A good strategy for sustainable heritage management offers a support for actions that have an impact on the future generations and educates the public even if said actions are not fully translated into practice. Sustainable tourism development is confronted with several impediments such as the priorities of the national economic policy, the structure of public administration and the interconnectivity between different ministries. As there are no statistics for trip expenditures for cultural and heritage visitors, our research analysed only the cultural attractions that represent heritage values. We can conclude that even though the principles of sustainable tourism development are valuable and beneficial their enactment and transfer into practice is a task that involves substantial financial costs that are very difficult to fund and cover while maintaining a balance between the community members and political decision makers. If a transversal approach is addressed, the community can understand better some of the management practices and operations and in this manner the projects can find empowerment and animation from the local residents.

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