

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

Basis of heritagization and cultural tourism development

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Abstract

The importance of culture and heritage is becoming more and more obvious, both in regionalists and regional development. Cultural factors are important because they directly affect economic performance and development, and therefore the competitiveness of the region. This study gives an overview of relevant literature, aiming to introduce the complex relations between culture, heritage, geography, tourism, economy and experience economy. Furthermore, it offers a clear definition of each specific term, and defines the newest forms and trends in cultural tourism and experience economy.

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1. Definition and importance of culture

The term “culture” has no commonly accepted, universal definition. However, the majority of different interpretations seem to highlight the same concept: that culture is most often referred to as the relationship between the man-made world (including humans) and the world we are living in.

Beyond this, culture also means the totality of distinguishing features of nations and nationalities, including all their tangible and intangible values and assets. According to the scientific definition by cultural anthropology, culture is the totality of a society’s knowledge, ensuring the cohesion and survival of that human community.

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Culture provides a guideline about the general standards and values of everyday life. “Based on this broad definition, culture includes all social practices, arts and intellectual activities, and is equal to the life-long distinguishing systems produced by individuals and/or social communities.” (Husz, 2007). The definition of culture has gone through significant changes during the millennia: originally it referred to the term “cultura agri” (see Cato, around 160 B.C.), meaning “cultivation of the land”.

In 45 B.C., Cicero defined culture as “culture animi”, meaning “cultivation of the soul” in his work “Tusculan Disputation”. Today, in the 21st century, there are wider and narrower definitions of culture. The narrower meaning refers to arts, its producers and agents.

The wider concept includes places of community culture, education, customs, traditions, morals and even languages. (Kenyeres, 1986). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO defines culture as a set of assets added to nature by human kind. Among other things, culture includes the following factors: values, individual behaviour patterns, family relationships, safety, moral standards, expression on creativity, arts, handicrafts, traditions, rituals, community lifestyles, community bodies/organisations.

It includes not only arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs. (UNESCO, 1982). According to the newest concepts, the term “culture” consists of an inner and an outer circle, referring to a narrower and a wider definition.

The narrower circle includes arts (e.g. fine arts, music, dance, literature) and cultural heritage assets (buildings, monuments). In a wider interpretation, culture includes elements of lifestyle (customs, traditions, religion, gastronomy) and creative industries (fashion, films, entertainment industry, design). (WTO – ETC, 2005). In case of defining culture as an attraction, 3 main types are to be distinguished: (Mathielson&Wall, 1982. Dávid, Jancsik&Rátz 2007):

- inert culture (e.g.: buildings, architectural styles, artistic creations, personal goods);
- everyday culture (e.g.: leisure activities, lifestyles, gastronomy); and
- enacted culture (e.g.: festivals, carnivals, traditional events).

The importance of culture and heritage is becoming more and more obvious, both in regionality and regional development. Cultural factors are important because they directly affect economic performance and development, and therefore the competitiveness of the region. (Dziembowska, Kowalska&Funck, 2000). The term “cultural heritage” has no precise definition.

According to the definition of UNESCO, cultural heritage means monuments, building complexes and sites that carry universal historic, art and/or scientific value (UNESCO 1972). Actually, culture is the relationship between humans and the world created by their objectivations: the nature modified by mankind, the technical-productive processes, consumption, the structures of communities and societies and their lifestyle.

Moreover, culture also includes the knowledge, standards, symbols that serve as a base of the former, i.e. arts, morals, religions, beliefs and everyday human attitude and behaviour (Vitányi, 1997). This wide definition can be divided into two main groups: intellectual and material heritage. The former generally means the whole range of intellectual properties, values and relationships of a person or a group of people, including identity; the latter mostly refers to the relics and values of built environments (Hajdú, 2000).

Cultural heritage is a cornerstone of local, regional, national and European identity; and because it is one of the most important among cultural, environmental and economic resources, regional development should handle it with an integrated, complex approach. From the point of view of regional development, both the protection and sustainable development of cultural heritage assets are important.

Development projects should focus on the exploitation of resources, the completion of heritage values, and also on generating new heritage values. The conservation of cultural heritage, the completion of its values, and the regional enforcement of social identity are important factors of sustainability, because they are the keys of safeguarding the past and present values for future generations, hence ensuring the survival of local features of the region.

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