

Heritage as an alternative driver for sustainable development and economic recovery in South East Europe

## Heritage tourism entrepreneurship and social media: opportunities and challenges

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### Abstract

Heritage tourism entrepreneurship is related to the development of businesses in the field of heritage tourism, meaning businesses oriented towards the cultural heritage of the locations. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, businesses have to face enormous challenges, induced by globalization and emergence of new information and communication technologies. More than ever, businesses have to assess consumer preferences, being more aware not just of their physical needs, but also of their aspiration. Social media comes with new challenges and opportunities for entrepreneurship in terms of developing the marketing mix and addressing to the preferences of visitors in tourism destinations. Consumers are now present on social networks due to the Internet development and thus businesses have to move on the on-line environment in order to be more close to the market. The answer to the question “Is this also available for Romanian heritage tourism?” seems positive and the paper will emphasize the role of social media in supporting the development of heritage tourism entrepreneurship in Romania.

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## 1. Introduction

The popularity of heritage tourism will increase in the coming years and the growth rates in this segment exceeds the world average, especially since it includes different sub-sections: archaeology, architecture, art, tours of churches and cathedrals, historic tours, museums, military history, music festivals, opera and pilgrimages. Europe has kept the treasure diversity and cultural heritage which remains an asset, important not only for tourism, but also to the attractiveness of the knowledge economy and in terms of inter-cultural skills useful in a globalized economy (European Commission, 2007).

Considering the large diversity of cultural and heritage products and the desire of entrepreneurs to attract more visitors they need to address new marketing instruments. Information and communication technologies such as Internet are becoming more frequently used by entrepreneurs, in order to develop their business and to improve their marketing mix, in order to address the desire and need of the heritage consumers. The investments in the use of new technologies have to be higher in order to improve the heritage packages, distribution channels, booking, promotion activities, and price policies.

Visitors will continue to use maps, and promotional publication, in order to collect information about specific heritage location, still the use of Internet for these purposes will increase and the websites are becoming more visual and attractive. Moreover, visitors do not want just to collect information via Internet, but they want to provide feedback from their previous cultural experiences, and this is possible in our days through social media like blogs, forums where there are various topic discussions about travel and tourism journeys. The next generation of heritage visitors will be more closely kept into communication technologies and the entrepreneurs need to be aware of these trends and to create appropriate messages, transmit them and develop efficient marketing tools for the interest of the next generation.

The preference of potential tourists for innovative e-services will enhance the tourism experience before, during, and after a visit to the cultural destinations (Strielkowski et al., 2012). Lange-Faria and Elliot (2012) appreciate that social media has become the *modus operandi* of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is particularly for young generation, but the question is if that this will be also true in the next decades.

The present paper aims to investigate the development of heritage tourism entrepreneurship as a result of the extension of information and communication technologies and particularly of the emergence of social media. Next section will present a general perspective of heritage tourism entrepreneurship in 21<sup>st</sup> century and the importance of consumer for businesses. Section three will discuss about communication and technological innovation in heritage tourism. Section four will discuss the role of social media in supporting tourism entrepreneurship. Section five presents the implication of social media in tourism heritage businesses for the case of Romania. The last section concludes the article.

## 2. Heritage tourism entrepreneurship in 21<sup>st</sup> century: from business to consumer

Heritage tourism offers tremendous economic and social opportunities for local communities in terms of supporting the development of entrepreneurship. Still, tourism should not be seen as a saviour or a paradigm for economic development of regions. The heritage entrepreneurs should be creative in order to find suitable solutions for financing different tourism activities starting with sponsoring events, grant funds, donations, also puts the financial pressure on foreign visitors (Timothy and Nyaupane, 2009). In exchange tourists seek to find quality services of tourism products and sites (interpretation), information for tourists, visitation services, diversification and upgrading of the heritage experience, etc.

During their holidays, visitors need the desire to experience new, authentic experiences through the participation to various events and rituals, interaction with local communities, acquisition of genuine handicrafts, honesty and opened interrelationships based on other lives and times. The opportunities for tourism

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