

The durable development of cultural tourism in Timisoara and its surrounding area: capitalizing on the existing assets and resources

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Abstract. *The study focuses on some of the exiting assets and resources in the city of Timisoara and its surrounding area in order to identify various possibilities of developing cultural tourism. In this respect, we underline some definitions of cultural tourism and how they could be applied to the present case study. We also offer for consideration some clear examples of how authorities may capitalize on the existing resources so that foreign and Romanian tourists may be attracted to the studied area.*

Keywords: cultural tourism, cultural heritage, durable development, Timisoara, anthropic tourist attractions.

JEL Codes: L 83, Q 01, Q56

1. Introduction

The present study aims to analyze the historical, sociological, economic and managerial perspectives of the city of Timisoara, in relation to its cultural attractions. Although an economic and managerial view of the cultural heritage of an area is not always regarded as appropriate, we take into consideration the financial needs of a community and the necessity for sustainable development. Given the fact that mass tourism may bring both unique benefits and disadvantages to the exploitation of the cultural heritage of a community, the paper presents both sides of this issue.

Defining cultural tourism is a demanding task since this notion interferes with a large variety of domains and sub-domains. A further difficulty “arises from the apparently paradoxical union between culture and heritage, on the one hand, and tourism, on the other”, as pointed out by Percec and Caraivan (2012, 91). While heritage brings historical value from the past cultural tradition of a certain community, tourism is rather related to industry, services, markets, suppliers and financial benefits.

Nevertheless, we have chosen some definitions that are meant to underline the need to apply cultural tourism in a community where other resources are scarce. The case study we have chosen sustains the idea that cultural tourism is at present “one of the most marketable commodities worldwide, both in “classical”

venues and cultures and in less conventional and global locations and communities” (Percec and Caraivan 2012, 91).

2. Dimensions of cultural tourism: concept and definitions

Sava and Coroama (2011, 568) consider that cultural tourism may become a “strategic option that requires the establishment of specific objectives, target groups and appropriate activities”. In this respect, there are various components that should be taken into consideration: an initial evaluation (identification and selection of the cultural objectives), choosing a strategy for the valorization and development of cultural tourism, advertising and promotion, the launching of a pilot circuit and its practical implementation, initiating a net of public and private representatives interested in cultural tourism (tourist guides are included), and permanent assessment.

Promoting cultural tourism as a source of revenue requires a capitalization of existing assets and resources. As Priscilla Boniface points out (1995, 5), “tourism [...] trade[s] in the cultural and natural heritage of countries; it involves the inseparable combination of economic and socio-cultural problems and immediately raises the issue of development options.”

From an intercultural point of view, tourism could be regarded as a multitude of social spaces and times “in relation to particular formal and informal knowledge regimes accumulated through exposure to tourism packages and through the normative processes of socialization (Smith and Robinson 2006, 16).

Dulau and Coros (2009, 75) regard cultural tourism a component of cultural heritage: “cultural tourism is not only the key drivers of economic growth. The concrete discovery of cultural diversity, common identity and pluralism are equally important stakes for cultural tourism. It has a vital role to play in encouraging both a greater understanding of the rich diversity of the national and regional cultures of Europe and a greater appreciation of our common European heritage, roots and culture. Cultural tourism can therefore help further the cause of European integration and identity by fostering a better understanding between the peoples of Europe”.

Due to various economic, social and political reasons some destinations have been prioritized over others. Moreover, some communities stopped developing temporarily while the inhabitants have been continuing the struggle for survival. “Consequently, a common phenomenon is that of the uneven distribution of cultural tourism: many attractions suffer from visitor overload, while others are visited to capacity or less; there are cultural items intended to attract visitors, yet, they are not fulfilling that role, whereas, in many parts of the world, cultural tourism is only budding timidly. Other such cases include situations in which one part of a site is worn down, while other parts are deserted. This may also have to do with local people’s or the entrepreneurs’ attitude towards the respective sites: while some may run projects inviting more visitors, others are disinterested in this type of development” (Percec and Caraivan 2012, 93). This is the case of the city of Timisoara that witnessed an economic regression in 2009. Nevertheless, efforts have been made to start collaborations and projects in order to put Timisoara back on the map of Romanian tourism. Cultural tourism is the main form of tourism practiced in this area and it helps the city become a candidate for the title of European capital in 2021. In fact, “the recognition of cultural tourism as an economically beneficial activity is confirmation of its appropriateness as a development strategy especially suitable for aiding developing and least developed countries in their efforts at combating poverty and underdevelopment” (Ivanovic, 2008, 78).

Taking into consideration the fact that cultural tourism is a social and economic tool of community empowerment, we have to mention some elements of culture that are attractive to tourists arriving in

Timisoara and the surrounding area: gastronomy, traditions, traditional dressing and folklore, handcrafts, music and art (such as paintings, sculptures, concerts), history of this area – supported by visual reminders, architecture which gives the area a distinctive appearance, religion – and its visible manifestations, leisure activities. The case study focuses on these elements in order to point out the main tourist attractions in this area.

3. Durable development of cultural tourism: the city of Timisoara

Situated in the western part of Romania, the Timis County has a total area of 8697 square kilometers and 407 towns and villages. Despite the fact that this county has one of the most dynamic economies in Romania, being situated in a region with one of the highest ratings of foreign investment, it is not well-known for a sustained tourist activity. One of the main reasons is the scarcity of natural tourist resources (it is a region mostly positioned on the Western Romanian Plain) and the poor exploitation of existing anthropic tourist resources. The development of cultural tourism has significantly increased since the county became part of the Danube-Kris-Mures-Tisza Euro-region.

Timisoara is the capital city of the Timis County and, at the same time, one of the key economic centers in Romania. Situated in the south–east of the Pannonian Plain (or in the South of Western Romanian Plain), the city is bordered by the rivers Bega and Timis.

Timisoara, also called “Little Vienna”, was first mentioned in historical documents either in 1212 or in 1266. The controversy related to the year when the first buildings appeared in this area has not yet been solved. However, archaeological evidence supports the fact that this area was visited by Romans.

The city is easily reached by car, by train or by air.

Timisoara is a well-known space of tolerance and multiculturalism, as there are various nationalities living together: Romanians, Germans, Hungarians, Serbians, Bulgarians, Italians, Greeks and gypsies.

The main type of tourism practiced in Timisoara is business tourism. However, cultural tourism should also be taken into consideration as it is one of the forms that has great tourist potential. The development of cultural tourism in Timisoara and the surrounding area is related to the existence of valuable anthropic tourist resources which are definitely capable of attracting tourists.

Generally, tourists will choose cultural objectives that are within easy reach. The other tourist objectives which are situated within 75 kilometers from Timisoara are interesting if a tourist spends more than three days in the city or has a specific interest in a specific type of objectives such as castles and mansions. However, the city has a series of historical monuments, architectural monuments, museums, religious buildings and cultural institutions that are worth mentioning.

Thus, the most significant monuments and architectural ensembles are:

- Unirii Square, where visitors can find the Catholic Dome, built in 1754, the Serbian Orthodox Cathedral, the Serbian Diocese Palace (1745), the Baroque Palace built in the 18th century, the monument of Holy Trinity (1740), the Bruck Palace, built in 1910. All these monuments and buildings are built in the baroque style with some elements of secession and art nouveau;
- Libertatii Square, where there is the statue of Saint Nepomuk (1756) Rococo style, the building of the former City Hall (built between 1731-1734) which has elements of provincial baroque;
- Dicasterial Palace (19th century) and Dechan Palace (1802), the former built in the Renaissance style and the latter in neoclassic style;

- Houses that were inhabited by: Prince Eugene of Savoy (1817), Count Mercy (1718-1734), the house with the iron tree (the house of craftsmen);
- Victoria Square where there are: the Opera house, the National Theatre, built in the Baroque style with classical elements, between 1872-1875, with a façade built in Brancoveanu style, Romulus and Remus statue (1926), a copy of „Lupa Capitolina” statue, which was a gift from Rome, the Lloyd Palace, built during 1910 and 1912, built in eclectic style with secession influences, the Orthodox Cathedral, built during 1936-1946 in Byzantine style with Romanian influences, Huniade Castle – built by Iancu of Hunedoara between 1443-1447 on the place of a former castle that belonged to Carol de Anjou. At present the castle is a museum of the Banat region;
- Traian Square where there are: the Saint Cross, the Bell of Sorrow, Saint George Square (1745-1755) built in Neo-roman style, the Serbian Palace (1895) built in eclectic style, Mercur Palace built at the beginning of the 19th century in secession style, the Catholic Church of the Millennium built between 1896-1901 in Neo-roman style, the Synagogue, built between 1885-1889;
- the Bastion – to be more specific - Maria Theresia Bastion built between 1730 -1735 and which has the parts of the former fortress of Timisoara;
- The Liberation Monument and the monument of the Romanian Soldier are sculptures that are also representative for the city.

The museums in Timisoara are mostly in buildings considered monuments:

- the Museum of the Banat region is hosted by Huniade Castle (at present, under construction);
- the Museum of Art is hosted by the Baroque Palace;
- the collection of religious art of the Romanian Orthodox Cathedral is hosted by the Orthodox Cathedral in the basement;
- the collection of religious art of the Serbian Orthodox Church is hosted by the Serbian Palace;
- the collection of religious art of the Catholic church is hosted by the Catholic Palace;
- the museum of Banat villages is situated in the Green Forest;
- the Military Room is situated in the Liberty Square;
- the museum of Public Transport “Corneliu Miklosi”;
- the museum of Revolution Timisoara 1989.

Apart from these museums, there is a series of art galleries where different cultural events are organized monthly.

Cultural institutions are also present in Timisoara:

- the Romanian Opera House, opened in 1946;
- „Banat” Classic Orchestra, first performance in 1947;
- National theatre „Mihai Eminescu” Timisoara, first performance 1947;
- “Csiky Gergely” Theatre Timisoara, a theatre in Hungarian language, first performance 1953;
- The German Theatre Timisoara, opened in 1953;
- Children’s Theatre “Merlin”;

- The Institute for Culture, Religious Affairs, and National Patrimony of the Timis county;
- the French Institute of Timisoara;
- the German Institute of Timisoara;
- the Intercultural Institute of Timisoara ;
- the Students' House of Culture and Performance;
- the Centre for Culture and Art of the Timis County;
- AUALEU–theatre.

Anthropic tourist attractions which are situated in the vicinity of Timisoara could become points of interests on a cultural tourist map and they may be options for the potential tourist trips. The research we have conducted shows that there are several villages or towns that would be more suitable for a tourist route in the Timis County.

Table 1 Towns and villages that have a cultural tourist potential

Name of town or village	Distance away from Timisoara (Kilometers)
Banloc	52
Birda	48
Buziaş	30
Carani	13
Cebza	36
Cenad	73
Ciacova	33
Comloşu Mare	60
Foeni	43
Gad	44
Gătaia	55
Hodoni	32
Jimbolia	44
Lenauheim	47
Maşloc	35
Periam	56
Rudna (Giulvăz)	38
Sănnicolau Mare	64
Şag Timişeni	15
Şemlacu Mic	56

Source: www.distanța.ro

The castles and the mansions which are declared historical monuments are:

- the Banloc castle built in 1793 by count Lázár Karátsonyi in Renaissance style, belonged to Queen Elisabeth of Greece, King Carol 2nd's sister. At present it is renovated by the Orthodox Church.
- Count Mercy's castle, in Carani (1733 - 1734), or the Hunters' House, it has elements of Turkish architecture;
- Mocioni Castle in Foeni, built in 1812 by Andrei Mocioni of Foeni;
- the Hatter's Castle in Periam, built by Ivan Korber, together with the City Hall and some craftsmen in 1892, for the hat factory which also works today;
- Nakó castle built in Sânnicolau Mare in 1864. At the moment it hosts "Bela Bartok" museum;
- Petala mansion is situated in Clopodia, built in 1840 by Nyeky Antal in baroque style. The owner, the general Vintilă Petala, was forced to give it away in 1951. Today it is private propriety;
- Manasz mansion in Hodoni, built in 1840, at present it is a restaurant;
- San Marco mansion, in Comloșu Mare (1840 - 1856) hosts the village school;
- Gudenus mansion in Gad, built at the beginning of the 19th century, in baroque style;
- Csekonits mansion in Jimbolia (18th century)
- Liptay mansion built by Liptay the baron in Lovrin, in 1820;
- Mașloc mansion (1855);
- Nikolić mansion in Rudna built in the 19th century by Baron Nikolić.

Unfortunately, the majority of these mansions are in a real state of decay.

Around the city of Timisoara there are ruins of some fortresses, such as:

- ruins in Cenad (11th century);
- the dungeon or „cula” in Ciacova (13th century) built in Roman and Gothic style;

Memorial house are also situated in the surrounding area of the city of Timisoara:

- Memorial house "Nikolaus Lenau", hosted by a house built in 1775, where the poet Nikolaus Lenau was born (1802), in Lenauheim;
- Memorial house "Dr. Karl Diel"(former surgeon, born in 1855) in Jimbolia;
- Memorial house "Stefan Jäger"(painter, born in 1877 in Cenei) hosted by a house in Jimbolia, where the painter spent most of his life;
- Memorial house “Dositej Obradović” (Serbian writer) opened in Ciacova, where the writer was born (1742);
- memorial exhibition „Bela Bartok” (composer, born in 1881) hosted by Sânnicolau Mare;
- „Nichita Stănescu” exhibition hosted by Teremia Mare, as an homage for the poet.

The museums that are established in this part of the Timiș County are as follows:

- Museum of Media “Sever Bocu” in Jimbolia;
- Historic and ethnographic collections in Ciacova;

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- Buziaş Spa Museum;
 - Museum of Folk Art „Iulia Folea Troceanu” in Buziaş.
Monasteries could also be a point of interest for tourists:
 - Cebza monastery, near Ciacova (1758);
 - Săraca monastery, in Şemlacul Mic, built in the 12th century;
 - Timișeni monastery, in Şag Timișeni, built in 1944;
 - Sfântul Gheorghe monastery, Serbian orthodox monastery, in Birda, built in 1623;
 - Morisena monastery in Cenad (2003).

Moreover, annual events that take place in the towns and villages that we have mentioned are also meant to attract visitors. Here are just a few examples of such events:

- Ruga Bănăţeană in Timisoara, organized in September;
- Romanian Theater Festival in Timisoara, organized in May;
- Festival of Hearts, Timisoara organized in July;
- International Festival “Musical Timisoara”, organized in May;
- “George Enescu – Bela Bartok” festival; organized in September;
- Master of Puppets’ Festival - Buziaş, organized in June;
- Musical festival - Buziaş, September;
- Paprika Festival, Wine Festival - Buziaş, October;
- "Kerwei" – celebrating folk and German dressing in the villages inhabited by Germans (Lenauheim, Lovrin, Buziaş, Jimbolia, Sănnicolau Mare);

“Rugile” are folk celebrations related to church traditions and they take place in all Romanian towns and villages.

All these possible manifestations of cultural tourism are promoted by local authorities, economic entities, and tourism agencies. They could easily become points of interest for tourists arriving from Romanian or from foreign countries but also for the people who live in Timisoara.

4. Conclusions

Cultural tourism attracts annually a significant number of tourists in Europe. European capitals have developed cultural tourist packages for weekend offers or for longer stays. The European Union sustains the durable development of cultural tourism, and as part of this project the title “Cultural European Capital” is given annually to one European city.

Timisoara is a city with a lot of tourist potential. It aims to win or even gain this title by restoration of its buildings, promoting its cultural life and cultural objectives.

The area surrounding the city of Timisoara also has valuable tourist resources which could be included in a cultural tourist circuit. However, the implication of local authorities for the rehabilitation, restoration and promotion of some of the cultural objectives is essential.

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