

# **An Analysis of the Risks Incurred by the Heritage Tourism in Romania**

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Preserving and managing heritage assets in a sustainable manner needs correlated long term strategies at national and regional level, as only in this way they will be kept undamaged for the new generations to come. Heritage tourism has potentially many advantages, as it strongly contributes to the regional social and economical development of communities and the research in the field shows that this is a form of tourism which is growing at a steady pace. However, in the same time, alarming reports indicate that due to improper care and due to excessive or inadequate tourism, many heritage assets are in a state of advanced degradation, or even worse, they are on the verge of their disappearance. Therefore, it is essential that specialists and the authorities responsible for the heritage management find the appropriate means for managing the assets themselves, as well as for managing the touristic flows, by taking into consideration all factors that may lead to heritage degradation.

Hence, starting from the scientific theories and research in the field, a qualitative research focus group based has been deployed in 2014, with the purpose of identifying the associated risks induced by the Romanian heritage tourism, as they are perceived by the specialists. The focus group was part of a series of workshops dedicated to sustainable regional development through tourism, and the members taking part in this qualitative research were participants with experience in touristic destinations management, regional development, urban planning and environment protection. Thus, the current paper presents the results of the research, namely, the aspects that may obstruct the sustainable development of a region through heritage tourism in Romania.

## *Heritage and tourism heritage*

Defining heritage tourism requires a very complex approach. The heritage can be regarded from a lot of points of view, such as the visiting experience (Poria et al., 2001, 2003), the demand and the offer (Apostolopoulos and Gayle, 2002) and the perception about social, natural and cultural history (Christou, 2005). The motivation of heritage tourists is underlined in the scientific literature (Poria et al., 2001) and their behaviour depends on their perception of their own heritage. Heritage tourism is also described taking into account tangible objectives and resources (Garrod and Fyall, 2001) and the intangible

experiences and cultural elements of a nation or of a social group (Timothy and Boyd, 2002).

The request for heritage tourism may arise, on one hand, from the mass tourism which ensures a great volume of tourists - although insensible to heritage, and, on the other hand, from the niche of cultural tourism which provides a smaller number of tourists, but better documented and educated, aware about the cultural value of heritage.

### *Advantages and disadvantages of heritage tourism*

Cultural and heritage tourism offers benefits to tourists and residents. First of all, cultural and heritage tourism has the role to protect historical, cultural and natural resources from the area and the region. Connectivity of community with heritage makes local people more prone to protecting the local resources and determines them to have an appropriate behaviour in respect with the heritage. Second, cultural and heritage tourism educates the residents and tourists about local and regional history and community traditions. Moreover, the effect of heritage tourism is seen in local strong communities, and in promoting the civil and economic vitality of region (Huh, 2002).

Compared to usual tourists, those who aim to visit, to learn and to enter in the atmosphere offered by heritage objectives by tourism spend more time and more money. Because all offered services (hotels, restaurants, clothing stores, souvenirs etc.) are associated with the visited heritage and because they are imprinted with the strong and unique identity of heritage, their value market is much higher. The quantifiable effects of heritage management on the economy of a country are reflected, first of all, in the number of the new jobs created in this domain (Grefe, 2004).

The economic impact may be measured both through a direct impact, as a result of direct incomes from tourists visits (accommodation, food, souvenirs, local transport tickets, access to heritage sites, etc), and through an indirect economic impact, given by "recycling" the revenue from touristic activities, by reinvesting them. Also, at the general macro level of economy, there is an induced impact, given by the fact that the staff involved in tourism activities and heritage management will spend the earned income in other business sectors (Nistoreanu et al, 2003).

Heritage management involves specialised workforce in restoration, protection and promoting the heritage, and also providing complex touristic services which will make possible the preservation of heritage historical tint, the cultural, traditional and the diffusion of unique emotions among visitors.

Considering these important issues: preserving the heritage, on the one hand, and valorising the heritage through tourism, on the other hand, the strategies that must be developed at national level need an organizational and functional legislative framework. In this process, both decision makers (the authorities responsible by strategies) and society (which needs to be aware that heritage will last as long as regulations regarding its preservation are obeyed) need to be involved.

Besides the advantages offered by the heritage tourism, literature review identifies also some negative aspects. Degradation of attractions and environment, increasing of pollution, excessive exploiting of natural resources, reduction and losing of cultural identity, undermining traditions and lifestyle, are just a few of that (Moreno et al., 2001).

To find an equilibrium between preserving and developing heritage is a real challenge. For maintaining this equilibrium is important to take into consideration, on the one hand, the maximization of heritage tourism economic impact and benefits for the “*host communities, as well as for financing the conservation and maintenance of sites and heritage values*” and, on the other hand, the minimization of tourism “*negative environmental impacts, allowing the preservation of site structures, landscapes and natural areas*” (Țigu and Furtună, 2011).

## *Research methodology*

The aim of this research was to find out what the main risks generated by heritage tourism in Romania are (Țigu & Furtună, 2011). The main objectives were taken into account:

- Identification of risks about heritage promotion through tourism
- Identification of the factors that lead to possible heritage deterioration
- Identification of the useful measures for preserving the heritage

This qualitative research was performed in May 2014, during a session of workshops dedicated to regional development projects through tourism. The event brought together persons with great experience in touristic destinations management, regional development, urban planning and environment protection. Eight specialists took part in this research, focus group based.

The group discussions started with presenting to the participants the main subjects that were going to be discussed (almost 5 minutes). In the next 15 minutes, each member of the group has presented himself. The middle part of focus group had a duration of one hour and twenty minutes and was focused on semi structured and open questions according to an interview guide.

The last part of research, that lasted 20 minutes, was used by the moderator for presenting the main conclusions following the discussion with interviewed persons.

## *Analysis of qualitative research results*

Heritage management and preservation in a sustainable manner requires long time strategies that must allow the new generations to benefit further on from the heritage. It is therefore essential that heritage sites are well managed, taking into account all factors leading to their possible deterioration. At this point, the group identified several categories of factors that may endanger the heritage assets. Almost all respondents agreed that human factor is one of the

most important threatens for heritage. Violation of the strict laws regarding preservation and conservation of heritage in the area, irresponsible authorization for building construction and infrastructure in heritage areas, tourists ignoring the elementary rules when visiting the heritage, are a few of negative aspects linked to human risks.

Besides the cultural value, heritage objects often have a high material value, and as such, the temptation of their stilling and taking out in the black market may be a risk, as it was mentioned by two participants.

The natural factors, such as the temperature, the light, the air, the wind, the salinity, the pollution may affect the outdoor construction, the monuments and the museums. Also improper conditions such as the humidity may affect the indoor objects from organic material. The oxygen affects almost all metal objects, except gold, as stated by one participant. Natural disasters (earthquakes, floods) are other risks, unfortunately uncontrollable, which may affect the heritage.

Referring to the associated risks brought by development and promotion through tourism of heritage assets, the participants acknowledged the fact that heritage resources are unique and irreplaceable so they need conservation and good management.

There were identified a lot of risks regarding promotion of heritage through tourism, the main categories referring to:

- Heritage tourism could destroy the heritage assets if there are too many tourists
- Devastation of the natural landscapes if infrastructure is required to ensure the availability of the heritage site
- Perturbation of the day to day customs and habits of heritage area local residents
- Pollution in the area due to the touristic traffic and touristic facilities development
- Loss of traditions and local identity
- An increase of prices given by tourists flows affecting the local community

Linked to these risks, measures for the preserving of heritage assets against deterioration were spotted by participants. Thus, for preserving the different heritage sites, first of all it is important to identify the heritage place and make a specific documentation about the state of its preservation. Regarding the immaterial heritage (traditions, oral expressions, rituals and social practices, craftsmanship, etc) all respondents agreed that it is vital that they are reintroduced in the daily life of the community, governmental funds or projects for this purpose being a necessity.

Research and inventory, for identifying and classifying the features of heritage sites to be protected are also mentioned. IT technologies and software which make possible an efficient management (GIS technology, informatics application, etc) was mentioned only by one participant, having the experience of being involved in an abroad heritage rehabilitation project. Taking into account the always updated information which reflects the level of degradation of a heritage place, one can proceed to restoration and renovation.

In respect to this point, linked to GIS technologies and software, most of the participants were unfamiliar with the generic term of "GIS". However, when giving examples of GIS applications such as Google maps, mobile maps, interactive tours etc, all participants proved to know what the concept was about. Therefore, when asking about their opinion about the utility of GIS applications in touristic destination management, in promoting and in preserving the heritage assets, all participants agreed that Geographical Information System (GIS) applications became a necessity in touristic domain. The growth of Web-GIS applications made possible for users to access much more easily all information about a touristic destination. Heritage tourism, which involves promoting natural heritage (monuments, archaeological sites, museums, collections, landscapes) and cultural heritage (the traditions and national values), must be made known more to the potential tourists. Virtual domain and GIS applications make this mission much easier.

When the group was asked about the measures that would be useful for preserving the tangible and intangible heritage, most of the respondents agreed upon the importance of preserving the traditional architectures, of elaborating architectural guides for the specific destination and of realizing and maintaining a proper infrastructure. Also, the rehabilitation and restoration of heritage through projects aiming to introduce heritage into touristic circuits would be an appropriate measure. Furthermore, participants to focus group considered that the specificity of heritage may protected through: fostering socio-cultural entrepreneurship to preserve and transmit crafts and traditions; developing and sustaining the cultural services from the area; creating the collective brands and selling those; supporting the initiative and information campaigns for promoting and preserving the heritage; supporting the preservation, the restoration and the promotion of the monuments and protected areas; infrastructure improvement for visiting the archeological sites; preserving the buildings with cultural value.

## *Conclusions*

All identified risks from research underline the necessity of a sustainable tourism, maximizing the benefits and minimising the risks. The research deployed reveals that heritage tourism, although offers a lot of benefits, may have negative aspects that have as a result the deterioration or even the destruction of heritage assets. It was noticed that almost all participants to this qualitative research – key factors, people that have important positions in institutions responsible for decisional process in terms of regional tourism policies, as well as people involved in local industries, in heritage management, considered that it is a priority for the Romanian heritage to be protected through a more drastic specific legislation. Also regional development must take into account the heritage areas. Among the factors that conduct to heritage degradation the focus group revealed the negative action of the human factor and of natural factors. Heritage assets promotion through tourism is generally perceived as beneficial for local and regional community and for economy, but it involves certain risks. These refer to a potential deteriorations of environment given by uncontrolled development of touristic facilities and infrastructures, disruption of local community, oblivion of some traditions and local habits. In

order to preserve and to prevent destruction of heritage, focus group participants have indicated that the use of information and communications technologies (and also applications of Geographical Information System) will bring obvious advantages and vital information about the heritage state of conservation and about the proper moment of restoration. Also, by building complex databases, these applications will be useful in heritage management representatives decisional processes.

National and regional authorities in collaboration with community representatives must create long time strategies that will take into account all factors that have an influence upon sustainable exploiting the heritage through tourism. These strategies must ensure the perpetuation of heritage assets in the best conditions to future generations.

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