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Cultural Heritage as a Potential for Connecting Settlements along the Danube River - Case Study

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Abstract

The aim of the research is to identify potential that cultural heritage (both tangible and intangible) has on the connection of different settlements and countries along the Danube River. It is considered that the same historic and cultural backgrounds are not always necessary to develop great connections among people and to provide visitors to recognize local values of different locations. Recognition and preservation of cultural heritage can be generating elements to connect different places and cultures in a unique framework that can include tourist attractiveness and distinctiveness. With improvements of the visibility of cultural heritage and creation of comprehensive spatial and cultural network, connection of communities along the river Danube could bring benefit not just on local level, but also to the whole region.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage; Settlements; Cultural Network; Spatial Network; Danube.

1. Introduction

The issue of sustainable development of the local environment, but also of the entire region, is increasingly being raised in a transdisciplinary context, in which cultural heritage plays a very important role in fostering local values, improving culture, encouraging tourism, and therefore the economic development of the community. The Danube River represents a very important natural resource for the countries through which it flows (Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, and Moldova), but also a spatial framework that carries numerous common heritages of the past and challenges for the future of communities along the river. The research on the possibilities of fostering together heritage and connecting communities along the Danube River has been implemented through 3 different EU-funded international projects: Interreg Danube Transnational Programme DTP 1-1-249-2.2 DANURB - Danube Urban Brand - a regional network building through tourism and education to strengthen the Danube cultural identity and solidarity, Interreg Danube Transnational Programme DTP3-1- 359-2.2 LIVING DANUBE LINES - Valorising cultural heritage and fostering sustainable tourism by LIVING the common heritage on the DANUBE LINES as basis for a Cultural Route and ERASMUS + PROGRAMME: Innovative Teaching for Inclusive Development in Small and Medium Sized Danubian Cities – DANUBIAN SMCs, 2019-1-RO01-KA203-063878. Thematic research frameworks were formed in accordance with the needs for coherent and balanced development of the entire Danube region. Although the spatial framework of the project implementation is extremely broad and comprehensive, which has therefore brought numerous differences between settlements through different Danube regions, especially in terms of socio-economic inequality, all regions have equally participated in the activities and implementation of results, to better improve the level of development at the local and regional level.

The basic assumption of the research refers to the existence of common values that are recognized in the wide fund of cultural heritage that is characteristic in the entire Danube region, but which also possesses the specifics of individual settlements. It is assumed that through a combination of various activities that are organized jointly, through the participation of several settlements and states with institutions that are from the sphere of public administration, tourism activities or the private sector engaged in services of a tourist character and service activities, cultural heritage can be emphasized in a new form of tourist offer. This type of activity on the promotion of cultural heritage would imply good preparation and readiness to understand, accept, and then jointly implement various proposals and ways in which solutions are proposed in economic, social, and cultural terms to improve the visibility of cultural heritage (tangible and intangible) along the Danube River. The emphasis of all activities is on the identification of potentials and events that should be role models for the development and implementation of transnational strategies for tourism development, as well as the preservation of cultural heritage. Contrary to the fact that many cultural heritage and accompanying activities are in the capitals of the countries through which the Danube flows, it is assumed that the new development potential is precisely in small and medium-sized cities, whose tourist offers along the river are recognized, but underutilized, and are therefore put into focus for finding proposals for improving recognition and quality. In particular, the possibility of improvement is the interconnection of cities, both those located on two sides of the river and other settlements along the Danube, nurturing their individual values, but also encouraging regional development, both in the spatial and socio-economic field.

2. The Importance of Cultural Heritage for the Development of a Region

Cultural heritage - tangible and intangible is considered as an exceptional potential for the development at local level and for improved connections at the international and intercultural level. There is a very clear definition by UNESCO that heritage is the cultural legacy which we receive from the past, which we live in the present and which we will pass on to future generations (www.unesco.org, 2023). We can consider and research cultural heritage through two major groups of specific elements. Tangible cultural heritage, the one that refers to physical artifacts produced, maintained, and transmitted intergenerationally in a society, such as heritage sites and monuments that exists due to human creativity and have a global cultural significance. Although they are physical objects, they help shape the aspirations, values, and beliefs of a person's national identity. Intangible cultural heritage is those that refers to nonphysical intellectual wealth, such as folklore, customs, beliefs, traditions, knowledge, and language. It is also comprised of living expressions inherited from our ancestors, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social manners, rituals, festive events, knowledge, and practices related to nature and the universe, and knowledge and techniques linked to traditional crafts. Despite its fragility, intangible cultural heritage or living heritage is an important factor in maintaining cultural diversity (Aziz Amen, 2017; Aziz Amen & Nia, 2018; Amen & Kuzovic, 2018; Amen & Nia, 2021). It includes natural, built, and archaeological sites, museums, monuments, artworks, historic cities, literary, musical, and audio-visual works, and the knowledge, practices, and traditions. French post-Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre's in his book *Production of Space*, stresses the importance of history for places and argues for distinct perceptions and usage of public spaces that could and still can be observed when comparing Eastern and Western European countries or every other space shaped by a specific socio-cultural or political tradition (Lefebvre, 1991). For this research, all cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, was researched through its importance for national and international culture, its tourist attractiveness, and its potential for the improvement of both local and regional development.

As the development of one region strongly relies on its tourist potential, attractiveness of cultural heritage presented on different localities is very important for the travellers to spend a certain amount of time visiting them. Significant factors that can generate the urban development of each individual settlement are tangible and intangible cultural heritage, which is often an underestimated cultural and social resource. Its recognition, preservation and emphasis affect the overall urban development of certain settlements, but also beyond. It is not enough to recognise the values of the cultural heritage of certain settlement but also the whole organization of the tourist location itself depends on the type of attraction, from the way of presenting the attraction itself, all the way to the architectural and urban solutions that accompany a certain attraction and thus make it even more prominent and attractive to visitors. The Danube River with its heritage is part of different researches that have considered its tourist potential (Tomić et al., 2020), stressing the importance of investing in passenger infrastructure (Danilović Hristić et al., 2020). Also, by putting intangible cultural heritage into the focus of cultural tourism, the scope of stakeholders in tourism expands considerably, as well as the fact that different elements of cultural heritage are potentials of nation's culture and a valuable development asset for a particular destination on which its place-branding strategy for tourism could be built upon (Radosavljević et al., 2019). The planning of future development should be directed towards settlement with attractive cultural heritage (tangible and intangible) that is very important for the development of the entire region and might encourage visits to a particular destination (Božić et al., 2017).

Cultural heritage highlights the potential of tourist offers:

- Visits are not seasonal and materially sensitive.
- The target group of tourists who travel are more than average.
- It evokes a subjective experience among tourists.
- It is a complex experience, based on services that provide insight not only into material heritage, but also intangible historical and cultural context.
- It gives visitors an authentic sense of local values and heritage, while different customs complement the attraction of a site.

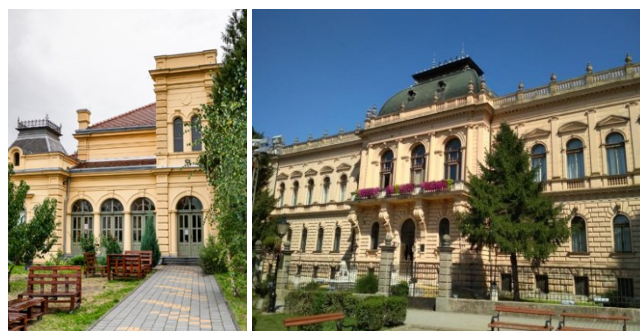


Figure 1. Reconstructed Edžeg Château in Novi Sad – a place for different cultural programs (left) and The Patriarchal Court in Sremski Karlovci (right) (source: by author).

One of the most important potentials for tourist development on the territory of Serbia is certainly the Danube River (Lukić, 2015), which, in addition to providing outstanding natural attractions and opportunities for sports and staying in the natural environment, has undoubted economic potential. Throughout the Danube stream, there are numerous elements of cultural heritage with the potential to represent one nation's culture and development capacity for a particular destination through the tourism place branding strategy. In addition to local significance, cultural heritage along the Danube River has exceptional historical significance at the international level, as the site of the former Roman Limes. From the aspect of tangible and intangible heritage, the Route of Emperors and Kings is an interesting cross-section of European diversity and history along the Danube. Most of Danube landscapes and monuments are under protection, some of those are even on the official UNESCO World Heritage List (old town of Regensburg with Stadtamhof in Germany, Wachau cultural landscape and historic centre of Vienna in Austria, Hungarian capital Budapest, Gamzigrad-Romuliana in Serbia, Danube Delta in Romania and Srebarna nature reserve in Bulgaria). Equally important as preservation and presentation of cultural heritage is placing intangible cultural heritage in the focus of cultural tourism with an aim to attract more visitors. More and more tourist destinations along the Danube, apart from natural elements, highlight the values of cultural heritage that include built heritage, local cultures and customs, entertainment facilities and other attractive cultural programmes, and the most attractive are thematic attractions that bring excitement and adventure to tourists (Fonyódi et al., 2019).



Figure 2. Old town of Regensburg, Germany (left) (source: <https://etbtravelphotography.com/2019/01/06/top-places-visit-regensburg/>); Wachau cultural landscape, Austria (middle) (source: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/970/>); Gamzigrad - Romuliana, Serbia (right) (source: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1253/>).

3. Material and Methods

For this research, topics that were developed through three abovementioned research projects, were considered as joint elements that should be included in one unique analysis that can bring conclusions for the development of region in general. As main thematic area is considered the Danube River, that connects ten European countries, and although each one has its own specifics and traditions, their past is a common memory of the Roman and Byzantine Empire, as well as of the Neolithic and medieval fortifications. The research was composed in 3 main parts, as it was thematically connected in each of three beforementioned projects. The first one considered what are the urban potentials and heritage that we recognize along the Danube River and how the synergy of those two could jointly provide improvement of regional development. It included both tangible and intangible heritage research, its current use, and potentials, but also strongly focusing on different events along the Danube River in Serbia, but also in the region, thinking on how the similar manifestation can be united in one brand. Focusing on the legacy of the Roman

Limes, striving to better represent the traces that exist along the Danube from the Roman Empire, the second part of research was strongly devoted to the Roman Heritage, combining tangible remaining of fortifications, as well as of customs from late times. The third part also included research of small and medium size cities along the Danube River and their urban spaces with potential for its attractiveness. It included joint potentials of cultural heritage and small urban spaces in different ways of how to create cosy places for tourists and visitors, but also for local inhabitant. Most of research is performed by collecting information on cultural heritage, lists about cultural festivals or other events and by observing local small urban spaces. After collecting an overview of different cultural heritage, results were defined, and some conclusions developed.

4. Results and Discussion

This research has shown that the Danube region, with numerous local places have significant elements of tangible and intangible heritage that could be very intensively used to encourage the development of tourism, as well as urban and economic development. With the focus on historical traditions, many local attractions could become interesting points for visits, increasing the number of tourists, but also locals who are enjoying some events and getting some new experiences and knowledge. Furthermore, the efforts that could be put to make a network of similar places, not just in Serbia but along the whole Danube, are a very important segment of strong EU connections and overall development of settlements along the river that connects numerous countries and nations. Good supporting infrastructure, as well as interesting events and attractions, can bring to the heritage sites additional potential and value. This could be a force for further urban development of the settlement and wider environment, as the tourist potential of the site would also contribute to improve economic parameters.

Along the river Danube, 3 different types of settlements were recognised with its specific elements of cultural heritage:

- Capital cities on the Danube River.
- Smaller settlement and twin cities along the Danube River.
- Heritage from the Roman times along the Danube River - The border fortifications of the Roman Empire, located along the banks of the Danube (the so-called Danube Limes), included in the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites.



Figure 3. The arrival of a replica of a Roman ancient ship „Danuvia Alacris“ in Novi Sad with following festival, Serbia (source: by author).

Results after analyses of settlements along the Danube River with its numerous element of cultural heritage, showed that they represent the great potential for creating a comprehensive spatial and cultural network, connect all communities along the river, uniting them into a single tourist destination as a brand with themed tourist routes, develop opportunities that can increase the number of visitors and extend their stay in this area, its tangible and intangible heritage can jointly generate the urban development of each individual settlement with an unused cultural and social resource. However, in addition to examples of tangible cultural heritage, along the entire course of the Danube River, and thus on the territory of Serbia, there is a lot of intangible heritage specific for certain localities. The first elements encouraging the development of tourism, and thus urban development, are urban events that often relate to heritage tourism and focus on historical traditions or create a new tradition associated with local attractions. Important roles for heritage promotion have different festivals with cultural and music programs, but also with gastronomy as its parts. Those festivals usually celebrate and promote several segments of rivers beauty and local culture. Like other aspects of the Danube life, gastronomy is also a good example of mixing and sharing different cultures - many food specialties in more than one country, while a common approach to gastronomy is characteristic of neighbouring regions. Apart from cultural programs, it should not be forgotten that the exploration of both tangible and intangible heritage may be combined with sports activities, such as -sport

fishing, hunting, riding, and hiking - as well as with the development of various forms of rural tourism, such as agrotourism. There is also increasing number of interests for river cruises and visiting of attractions on different sites that also supports the tourism industry. Numerous ship stops should therefore offer accessibility to attractive cultural heritage, to influence the recognition of the site and the development of the entire region, and further encourage visits to a particular destination, as a strategic approach from the entire region with intensive engagement of institutions and local communities, but also international partners (Damir, 2012., Terzić et al., 2014).

5. Conclusions

Upon analyses of Danube River, its different cultural heritage and potential to represent it, undoubtedly there are numerous settlements with significant potential for new tourist destinations that can be jointly developed in one network as a tourist attraction with continuous increase in the number of visitors and length of their stay. The main value of cultural heritage is the atmosphere created at a certain place. Such potential could generate the urban development of each individual settlement with tangible and intangible heritage, increase its recognition, preservation, and presentation. With a focus on historical traditions, many local attractions could become interesting visiting points, increasing the number of tourists, as well as locals enjoying some events and gaining some new experience and knowledge. All activities should be implemented with the aim of encouraging the rational use of cultural heritage and resources of peripheral and border towns and areas along the Danube and creating new opportunities for increasing the attractiveness of selected settlements and cities in decline and reactivating underutilized cultural heritage to strengthen the Danube cultural identity, with a strategic approach to improving not only individual sites but the whole region.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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