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The development of cultural routes: a valuable asset for Romania

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Abstract

The development of cultural routes is a valuable tool for intercultural dialogue at grass-roots level and contributes to social cohesion through the development of inspiring themes and participatory activities. At the same time they are an ideal way for the Council of Europe to put into action the values it promotes of democracy and human rights, including access to culture for all. The offer of various cultural routes at the European level is exceptionally rich, the choice of major cultural routes of Europe being defined by the basic criteria of the Council of Europe. The paper focuses on cultural routes development in Romania, as a valuable asset, having all required features and offering corresponding content, information and facilities to the benefit for both local businesses and tourists. A general framework for evaluation and impact measurement of cultural itineraries is presented, setting into value the results of the two projects developed by Romanian authorities, co-financed by the European Commission

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1. Introduction

In the contemporary world, cultural itineraries represent a competitive network of wisdom. In the international and European context, routes are competitive, recognizable and specific precisely due to their theme. The offer of various routes at the European level is exceptionally rich, which is why the choice of a theme for major cultural routes of Europe is defined by the basic criteria of the Council of Europe according to the Resolutions CM/Res(2010)52 and CM/Res(2010)53. Route development projects at the European level are subject to strict evaluation and selection. Equal criteria apply to routes of smaller territorial coverage, if the aim is to attract the attention of European travelers.

A cultural route has to function as a cultural tourism product as well by having all necessary product features and offering corresponding content, information and facilities for providing hospitality and accommodation services. A traveler taking the route wants to have fun, relax and taste local products; therefore, one has to be provided with all of the above. The selection of an attractive theme should be based on a historical principle as well as the principle of contemporaneity. In order to attract international guests, the cultural routes development projects should follow at least some of the research and development pillars, according to the following contents: cultural content, structural content, service content and associated content and accompanying activities. The contents and offer need to be identified, developed, organized and balanced along the route.

The projects: “European Destinations of Excellence” and Danube Cultural Project: “Roman Emperors Route” and “Danube Wine Route” should contribute to the implementation of the new European policy for sustainable and responsible development of tourism in less exposed areas, thereby stimulating an environment suitable for innovation in the tourist sector and the competitiveness of small and medium size companies of the area.

2. The European context of cultural routes typology and development

The tourism industry has an essential contribution to the European economy, generating, directly or indirectly, around 10% of EU GDP, employing almost 10 million persons in more than 1.8 million companies. In this context, the cultural tourism represents a key contributor to this industry development in Europe, accounting for around 40% of total European tourism.

Based on promoting Europe as world’s most important cultural touristic destination, with the highest diversity of tourism attractions, the EU policy framework is paying a particular attention to the preservation of the heritage, traditions and landscape, being adapted to the changes in tourists’ preferences, more oriented in recent years towards knowing other people and cultures.

The Council of Europe’s cultural routes programme celebrated its 27 anniversary in 2014. Since the Declaration of Santiago of Compostela in October 1987, launching the Saint James Pilgrimage Ways as the first Council of Europe cultural route, their number has grown to 29, all promoting cross-border cultural cooperation throughout Europe along routes and between places which illustrate the rich diversity of our shared culture and heritage. The European Commission and the Council of Europe have worked together over the past three years to support cultural routes initiatives by capacity building action. One of the results of this cooperation is the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes, adopted in December 2010, a successful new framework to which 19 countries had acceded.

The cultural tourism is contributing to the promotion of Europe’s image in the world, strengthening the values of European model, confirmed by centuries of cultural exchanges and creativity. The development of European cultural routes became of major importance for cultural tourism expansion, promoting, in most cases, lesser known destinations, focusing, in a large proportion (90%), on rural areas.

The Pan-European cultural routes, having a strong background due to their local heritage assets but, at the same time, being transnational because of crossing regions and/or countries are diversifying significantly the cultural tourism offer.

As cultural routes typology, a survey of the Council of Europe (2011) grouped the related activities in four categories: heritage restoration and preservation; raising awareness of cultural heritage; marketing and business development; commercialization of cultural attractions and products.

The cultural routes are certified since 1987 by the Council of Europe, and currently they are ranked as very important and as major importance routes. This classification takes into account the geographical area of coverage of the itinerary, the route managing organizations type, the number of SMEs and public authorities involved, the products developed, the funding sources, the network connectivity, the audience of the target group, the marketing tools availability.

In Romania there is a significant potential that can be valorized through cultural itineraries, which is demonstrated by the sights included in the Cultural Routes certificate by the Council of Europe, namely: St. Michael Catholic Cathedral of Alba Iulia (longest and oldest cathedral in Romania, built since 1297); the historical thermal towns route, including Techirghiol resort, among 24 other cities in Europe (eg Vichy, Baden-Baden, Bursa, Budapest etc.) and Hebrew Heritage route - Piatra Neamt Synagogue Cathedral built in 1766, belonging to the route no. 2 - wooden synagogues in Central and Eastern Europe. Currently, at European Union level, 26 transnational cultural itineraries are set, connecting several cities, villages, rural communities across the continent, including from Romania.

3. Methodological framework of cultural routes impact assessment

The assessment of cultural routes development impact falls under the broader issue of measuring tourism activity effects. These effects are reflected in terms of labor employment, tax revenue, successful businesses, environmental conservation and cultural preservation at the level of local communities, but also at macroeconomic level, by the contribution to the economic growth and sustainable development.

For measuring the impact of tourism destinations and their sustainability, a set of key indicators has been set by the European Commission (2013), divided into four sections: destination management, economic value, social and cultural impact, environmental impact. Among these indicators:

- percentage of destination that has a strategy / action plan on sustainable tourism, with agreed mechanisms for monitoring, control and evaluation of development;
- percentage of enterprises / structures of the tourism destination using a voluntary and verified certification / labelling environmental measures / quality / sustainability and / or social responsibility;
- percentage of visitors satisfied with the general experience enjoyed at tourism destination;
- the percentage of visitors who are aware of the efforts towards maintaining the destination sustainability
- number of overnights stays (monthly);
- daily tourist expenditures (accommodation, food and drink, other services) ;
- the average length of overnight stays;
- monthly net use of tourist accommodation capacity (annual average) ;
- lpercentage of travel companies taking steps to purchase local goods and services;
- the number of tourists / visitors to 100 residents;
- percentage of destinations covered by a policy or a plan to protect cultural heritage;
- percentage of tourists / visitors who by different modes of transport to reach destination (public / private transport type);
- the average length (km) of travel by tourists to and from home / destination or average trip (km);
- percentage of tourism companies involved in climate change mitigation plans;

- waste volume produced by the destination (annually or monthly number of tons per resident);
- volume of waste recycled (or annual percentage resident);
- the percentage of treated wastewater from destination to at least secondary level before discharge;
- freshwater consumption in overnight stays compared to the rest of the population (water consumption per night / person);
- energy consumption per overnights stays compared to the local population (per night / person).

For destinations with more advanced sustainability systems, optional indicators, more relevant compared to those above mentioned, are considered. As concerns the economic value assessment, these indicators include the relative contribution of tourism to the destination economy, the percentage of top ten companies involved in tourist destination management, the average price per room destination, the percentage of seasonal jobs in tourism, the percentage of travel companies that supply at least 25% of food and drink from local producers / region. In the context of assessing percentage of destinations covered by a policy or a plan to protect cultural heritage special attention is paid to promote the cultural identity by identifying, protecting and improving the build cultural heritage (tangible) and the intangible one, that takes other forms, which are essential for local residents.

As concerns the impact of cultural routes development, the study of the Council of Europe (2011) highlights the importance of a systematic monitoring and evaluation of activities and performances in order to elaborate long term strategies and adequate policies, including the implementation of quality standards.

Under the circumstances of assessing the impact of cultural tourism a complex approach should cover direct and indirect effects, and also the so-called induced effects by widening the benefits in time and space coming from income level rise, in terms of tourism expenditures and visitors' number.

4. The development of cultural routes in Romania

4.1. The Excellence Destinations from Romania

Romania participated to all EDEN editions, being awarded at the moment 6 winner destinations and 19 runner-up destinations since 2008. The destinations and their rank are as follows:

- 2008, tourism and local intangible heritage: 1. Horezu, 2. Făgăraş Land, 3. Vrancea Land, 4. Neamţ Land, 5. Mărginimea Sibiului;
- 2009, tourism and protected areas: 1. Apuseni Nature Park, 2. Danube Delta Biospeher Reservation, 3. Vânători Neamţ Nature Park, 4. Buila-Vânturariţa National Park, 5. Mureş Meadow Nature Park;
- 2010, aquatic Tourism: 1. Geoagiu - Băi, 2. Techirghiol, 3. Sărata Monteoru, 4. Covasna, 5. Mangalia;
- 2012, rural tourism: 1. Buzău Land, 2. Drăguş, 3. Cârlibaba, 4. Polovragi, 5. Perişani;
- 2012, tourism and regeneration of physical sites, 1. Alba Iulia;
- 2013, accessible tourism: 1. Jurilovca, 2. Gheorghieni - Lacul Roşu, 3. The East Front Border, 4. Şaru Dornei.

In 2014 the Commission has decided to awarded a grant to promote the EDEN destinations of Romania, both winners and runners-up, selected in the period 2008-2013, and to enhance awareness of the EDEN rationale, in Romania and Austria.

Specific objectives of the Grant Agreement S12.ACGRACE059750600 are: enhance visibility of the EDEN destinations and EDEN project in Romania and Austria; facilitate contacts with travel enablers; raise awareness of the diversity, uniqueness and quality of the EDEN destinations in Romania and Austria; increase the number of packages that include EDEN destinations; reduce seasonality, help decongestion; support sustainable tourism development; facilitate networking between the EDEN destination.

The information regarding the EDEN destinations and EDEN project will be available in various formats, via the website, the application for mobile devices, the brochure, the DVD, the videos, easily accessible by tourists and travel enablers. They will be supported by the advertisements in tourism magazines in Romania and Austria and other promotional materials like bags, cup, pads, ball point pens and the roll-up. The tour operators will have the opportunity to meet the winner destinations representatives and participate at the promotion events at the tourism fairs in Bucharest and Vienna. Austria is one of the main source countries where the promotional activities regarding the new tourism brand are focused. It is also situated relatively close to Romanian the access to the EDEN destinations being possible both by plane and train or car. Moreover, the Romanian Tourism Promotion Office on this market is one the most successful promotion offices abroad.

The activities of the project are:

Activity 1

- The EDEN Romania Website

A website will be developed for promoting all EDEN destinations from Romania selected during the period 2008-2013, both winners and runners-up.

The website will include a description of each destination, videos including those produced by the European Commission, events, maps, photos, the pdf version of the EDEN brochure, information regarding the activity of the destinations and the application for mobile devices which will be available for free downloading. It will be elaborated in three linguistic versions: Romanian, English and German.

There will be published a link to the EDEN website of the European Commission www.edenineurope.eu and links from other tourism related websites will be made available to the EDEN Romania website.

Preliminary to the website, a data base will be elaborated, comprising all necessary information (texts, photos, videos etc.)

- The EDEN Brochure and DVD

The information collected within the data base will be used for publishing the EDEN brochure which will promote all EDEN destinations, both winner and runners-up, designated since 2008 till 2013. It will be published in 3 different languages: Romanian, English and German and the pdf version will be available on the EDEN Romania website and on the DVD. The DVD will include also videos and maps of the destinations.

The brochure and the DVD will be distributed at the events organized within the project, at tourism fairs where the National Authority for Tourism (NAT) participates as well as at other events and via the network of promotion offices abroad (Vienna/Austria, London/United Kingdom, Madrid/Spain, Paris/France, Rome/Italy, Berlin/Germany, Warsaw/Poland, Moscow/Russia, New York/United States of America) and the Tourist Information Centers in Romania.

- The EDEN Application

An application for mobile devices will be elaborated for making accessible information regarding all EDEN destinations, in three linguistic versions: English, Romanian and German. It will use the information collected in the data base and it will be available for free downloading on the EDEN Romania website.

- Other promotion materials

In order to disseminate the EDEN Romania website and EDEN logo, promotional materials like cups, cup pads, ball point pens, bags and a roll-up will be produced. The materials will be distributed at the events organized within the project, at tourism fairs where the National Authority for Tourism participates as well as at other events and via the network of promotion offices abroad (Vienna/Austria, London/United Kingdom, Madrid/Spain, Paris/France, Rome/Italy, Berlin/Germany, Warsaw/Poland, Moscow/Russia, New York/United States of America) and the Tourist Information Centers in Romania.

- Promotion for the Austrian Market

Activity no. 5 will be implemented in collaboration with the Tourism Promotion Office of the National Authority for Tourism from Vienna.

With the occasion of the tourism fair in Vienna, Ferien Messe, in January 2015, a conference will be organized, where the six winner EDEN destinations will be invited to present themselves. The EDEN videos, EDEN Romania website, the EDEN application will be presented and the EDEN brochure, DVD and other promotional materials will be distributed both at the conference and at the Romania stand. The destinations will have at their disposal a desk within the Romania stand, personalized with the EDEN logo and the EDEN Romania website address. One representative of each winner EDEN destination will be invited to Vienna Ferien Messe together with the EDEN Ambassador, Mr. Nicolae Furdui Iancu.

Invitations for the conference will be sent to media, tour operators as well as to other tourism enablers and organizations. Advertisements regarding the project and the destinations will be inserted in three Austrian tourism magazines.

- Promotion for the Romanian market

With the occasion of the autumn edition 2014 of Romania Tourism Fair, in Bucharest, a conference will be organized, where the six winner EDEN destinations will be invited to present themselves.

The EDEN videos, EDEN Romania website, the EDEN application will be presented and the EDEN brochure, DVD and other promotional materials will be distributed both at the conference and at the Romania stand. Each destination will have a desk within the Romania stand, personalized with the EDEN logo and the EDEN Romania website address. Two persons from each destination will be invited together with the EDEN Ambassador, Mr. Nicolae Furdui Iancu.

Invitations for the conference will be sent to media, tour operators, other travel enablers, tourism organizations at national level like the National Association for Travel Agencies, the National Association for Spa Tourism, the National Association for Rural, Ecologic and Cultural Tourism, the Romanian Tourism Employers' Federation as well as to associations for tourism promotion and development from the local level.

Advertisements regarding the project and the destinations will be inserted in three Romanian tourism magazines.

By implementing the proposed activities, there will be ensured an easier access to information regarding EDEN destinations and EDEN project especially in Romania and Austria, there will be facilitated contacts between the winner destinations representatives and the tour operators from Romania and Austria.

The activities of the project will be implemented by the National Authority for Tourism in collaboration with the EDEN destinations. The evaluation will be based on the main tourism indicators for the EDEN destinations: arrivals, overnights, length of stay. Also a special survey will be elaborated to evaluate the impact of the promotional campaigns, after the first and the second year from the end of the project. The information will be collected via questionnaires distributed at the accommodation facilities in the destinations or at the Tourism Information Centers.

Following the implementation of the project it is estimated that the number of tourists will increase, both for individual tourists (with 10%) and in organized groups by the tour operators (with 15%).

The local organizations from the destinations will benefit from supplementary tools for promotion. They will gain visibility as EDEN destinations, having a positive impact on the development of all the area in the vicinity. Moreover, by participating to the activities of the project, the EDEN network will be strengthened.

Tour operators from Romania and Austria will have the possibility to meet the winner EDEN destinations at the tourism fairs, participate at the promotion events and thus to increase the number of tourist packages from the destinations.

4.2. The Roman Emperors Route and the Danube Wine Route

Roman Emperors Route (RER) and Danube Wine Route (DWR) is a newly developed transnational product covering Roman heritage locations (20 - 5 per country) and 12 wine regions, bringing together SMEs (tourism services providers, accommodations, restaurants, wineries, etc.), local authorities and public heritage institutions along the routes in Croatia, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria.

Market competitiveness programs, capacity building program, building cohesion through complementary activities based on networking and ‘know each other’ approach, promotional activities and certification process and follow-up activities envisioned within the framework of this proposal aims to stimulate higher involvement of small/micro enterprises, heritage institutions and local authorities, to increase the attractiveness of RER and DWR locations, to strengthen product cohesion within RER and DWR and to improve visibility and market uptake of the routes, thus enhancing the competitiveness of the transnational thematic tourism products in the Danube Region. The project is designed in a way that further strengthens trans-national cooperation, encourages higher involvement of small and micro enterprises and local authorities and contributes to the diversification of tourism thematic products along the routes.

One of the key project outputs will be more internally coherent and attractive thematic tourism product (RER and DWR), certified by one of the most relevant European institution in the field of cultural tourism – European Institute of Cultural Routes. Transnational thematic tourism products and cultural routes have enormous potential. Tourism growth along transnational cultural tourism itineraries will stimulate local investment, help protect cultural and environmental resources and drive economic regeneration of marginal areas and emerging destinations. Among the expected benefits arising from the implementation of this project are:

- stimulating higher involvement of small/micro enterprises and local authorities in order to raise standards/quality of tourism services/offers along the RER and DWR;
- increasing the attractiveness of RER and DWR through diversification of products and services along routes’ heritage locations and wine regions;
- strengthening product cohesion within RER and DWR through strengthening trans-national cooperation and networking of stakeholders along the routes;
- improving visibility and market uptake of the routes through profiling/promoting RER and DWR as attractive tourist destinations;
- creating and working with a network/pool of tour-operators in order to increase a number of visitors along the routes presenting routes as innovative tourism offer for new markets;
- reinforcing the image and profile of lesser developed European regions (Middle and Lower Danube Region) as a quality tourism destination, promoting and increasing the visibility of the Danube region in the tourism;

The Roman Emperors Route and the Danube Wine Route includes 20 ancient Roman Sites and 12 wine regions in Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, and Serbia as:

Table 1. Ancient Roman sites and wine regions included in the Roman Emperors Route and the Danube Wine Route

Country	The Roman Emperors Route	The Danube Wine Route
Romania	Colonia Ulpia Traiana Augusta Dacia Sarmizegetusa (Sarmizegetusa) Tropaeum Traiani (Adamclisi) Histria (Constanța)	Dobrogea Hills: Alcovin, Murfatlar, Clos des Colombes Muntenia and Oltenia Hills: Galicea Mare, Segarcea, Starmina, Vânju Mare, The Danube Terraces: Ostrov, Zimnicea

	Roman camp and the cities of Apulum (Alba Iulia)	
	Alburnus Maior Roman Mining Galleries (Roşia Montană)	
Croatia	Colonia Iulia Iader (Zadar)	Ilok Wine Region
	Amphitheatre Colonia Pietas Iulia Pola (Pula) and Insullae Pullariae (Brijuni Islands)	Baranja Wine Region Fruska Gora Region South Banat Region
	Diocletian's Palace in Split and Salonia	Negotin Wine Region
	Aquae Iassae and Andautonia Archaeological Park	Morava Region
	Narona (Vid)	
Bulgaria	Roman Tumb (Siliistra)	Nortwest Region
	Sexsaginta Prista (Ruse)	The Northeast Black Sea
	The Roman Legion Camp Novae (Svishtov)	North-Central Region
	Kaleto Fortress (Belogradchik)	
	Ulpia Oescus (Gigen)	
Serbia	Felix Romuliana (Zajecar)	Fruska Gora Region
	Diana – Dierdap Region (Kladovo)	South Banat Region
	Viminacium (Kostolac and Poyarevac)	Negotin Wine Region
	Mediana (Nis)	Morava Region
	Sirmium (Sremaksa Mitrovica)	

5. Conclusions

The economic, social, environmental and cultural impact of the presented projects as valuable assets for cultural routes development in Romania could be summarized as follows: Economic impact: a better living standard of local communities through creation of new jobs and income through sustainable tourism development and increased number of tourists; revitalization of the tourist activities along the Destinations of Excellence and Routes corridors; increased competitiveness of the SMEs sector, better prepared for the market competition with other destinations; development of the region identity and of links between communities, people and business from different counties. Assuming a number of 60.000 visitors (of which 30.000 from abroad) in a year along the RER and DWR, an average length of 5 overnight stays and a figure of 300 EUR expenditures per visitor (accommodation, food and drinks, transport, other expenses) a sum of 18 million EUR is resulting, which represents a contribution up to 2% to the increase in tourism revenues of Romania, including in foreign currency, attenuating also the current account deficit. Social impact: increased involvement of local communities; raised awareness of the local residents about the importance of cultural heritage; strengthening physical and intellectual accessibility of the cultural heritage; creation of links between the local community and cultural heritage. Environmental impact: development of sustainable tourism products based on responsible usage of cultural heritage. Cultural impact: connection to cultural and historical attractions, valorizing the cultural heritage in an innovative way, more aware citizens about the importance of intercultural dialogue, good practices extended in other areas of Romania. The presented projects have improved the managerial and technical capabilities of the target groups (both public and private sector) and of the involved regions/communities. The tourism authorities, the small and micro enterprises in the participating regions have developed a new understanding of culture and tourism as well as gaining clear

ideas about the role to be played by each stakeholder/service provider. „Knowledge multiplication“ and „network of multipliers“ represent the basic „legacy“ of the projects and a pre-requisite for sustainability of projects results (Botton, 2002). The projects initiated the creation of tour-operators networks, tourism service SMEs and public institutions along the Destinations of Excellence and along the Routes. As a result of financed and implemented projects, the research should continue by drawing up an inventory of potential resources and connect them into an integrated cultural routes offer as a valuable asset for Romania, based on the evaluation of their development impact according to the presented methodological framework

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