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Cultural tourism in Ohrid as a selective form of tourism development

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to investigate a specific type of tourism associated with cultural heritage through the analysis of the key segments that define it. The conducted research is related to a specific area through which it highlights its applicative value. The first part creates a broader context in which cultural tourism should be a part of the tourist offer. The second section focuses on a specific tourist destination, the city of Ohrid, which defines the necessary activities in order to ensure successful development of the cultural tourism. The analysis is based on the application of the SWOT methodology, applied for the wider area of Macedonia, with a detailed case study elaboration for the Ohrid area as most suitable for development of cultural tourism. The analysis differentiates the basic areas: the supply side, the scope of governance, marketing and promotion, with numerous indicated activities necessary to ensure the sustainable development of cultural tourism in an area protected by UNESCO. Generally it should be accepted that if cultural tourism is a complex type of tourism, then for its development the cluster approach should be essential which will ensure involvement of all stakeholders. If a variety of relevant activities are provided in the basic domains of operation which are addressed to each participant in cultural tourism, then its success will be very certain.

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Keywords: Cultural tourism; Ohrid; management of protected areas; cluster approach.

1. Introduction

This paper is the result of the research done as part of the Revision and Implementation of the National Tourism Development Strategy 2009-2013 for Macedonia. The existing need for the revision of the

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strategic approach towards tourist products design, methods and implementation of Macedonian tourism, led to the application of the cluster approach. The main interest in the paper is set on the cultural tourism. The Republic of Macedonia of today is the result of a rich and diverse history, which highlights a wealthy multicultural heritage. Macedonia's development has clearly been funded on successive historic and cultural identities (Antic, Mediaeval, Late Medieval), whose remains are still visible today. That is why cultural tourism presents a great asset of Macedonian tourism development which focus is put on. The example of cultural tourism in Ohrid has been examined through the scope of clustering. Researched are all stakeholders in the destination Ohrid which together direct their strategies towards a common goal.

The practical implications are evident of this contemporary approach. First because competition on the tourist market is getting tougher and second, it is the result of changes in the tourism industry in the past decades where the traditional methods of operating can not be applied any more. Hence, this cluster approach besides Ohrid as a pilot spot used in the revision can be used to other regions as well.

The main purpose of this paper is to improve the current methodology for strategic development of regions in a tourism sense. Ohrid as a pilot spot for implementing the cluster approach will be a successful example for other cultural destinations as well. It will show that communication between all stakeholders is essential for success. Thus, through the case study of the Ohrid cluster, this paper is aiming to enhance and widen the existing knowledge in tourism research done in Macedonia and to show the positive impacts and benefits this approach has.

2. Macedonian cultural resources

Diversity in Macedonia is the main word to qualify its tangible and intangible heritage. The major stake of tourism development in Macedonia is now to find the appropriate sustainable marketing offers and enhancement tools to reveal them as key tourist resources. Macedonia first determines itself by the variety and number of cultural heritage sites, directly inserted in its rural, mountain and urban landscapes. On its small geographical area of only 25 713 km², presently exist: Thousands monuments of culture from the Neolithic to the Ottoman historic periods; numerous archeological sites (with hundreds that are protected; memorial monuments; excellent examples of urban, rural and commercial architecture; vast number of churches and monasteries; medieval buildings, fortresses, bridges, towers; also a large number of mosques; as well as other objects from the 15th till the 19th century; unique religious masterpieces of great cultural importance – numerous icons inside the churches.

The visibility, accessibility, and knowledge by the Macedonians themselves of these cultural heritage resources and sites are generally little developed, and above all contrasted. Whereas the UNESCO-registered Ancient Town and Lake of Ohrid has highlighted some now popular heritage facilities, and apart from major Macedonian archaeological sites, many other heritage spots of major historic value remain almost unknown, due to their maintenance conditions, geographic location, or/and poor accessibility due to lack of transport connections.

The tourism development's paradoxical stake in Macedonia shows through this symbolic anecdote: Macedonia has now to justify and build contents behind its popular name, present in most foreigners' minds with historic and gastronomic connotations but with very few related actual contents. It has to build a coherent and overall tourist strategic product on a major asset – **diversity**.

3. Past activities regarding cultural tourism in Macedonia

Several relevant examples of decentralized cooperation already illustrate the needs and the capacity of the Macedonian actors at local and regional level to enter such programs and benefit from a direct transfer of know-how and of best practices. The example of the French Region of Lower Normandy is certainly

an excellent practice, covering, among others, the topic of heritage and sustainable tourism development, and present, in particular, in Berovo and in Mavrovo. This cooperation is briefly presented: “Cooperation between Republic of Macedonia and French Region of Lower Normandy - Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Tourism”[†]

The institutional cooperation between the French region of Lower Normandy and the Republic of Macedonia is based on a three-years-long term Program developed by the combined work of several French and Macedonian associations, working in tandem, and together with the support and the involvement of local bodies such as public institutions, schools and other associations. The Program is supported by the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs and is coordinated by the Association of Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA).

The project targets to develop new actions in the field of the local governance, and this in particular within the following fields of interest: new information technologies, youth, media, cultural exchanges and cultural heritage & sustainable tourism development. The aim of the program is to contribute to a better and long lasting relationship between the French region of Lower Normandy and the Republic of Macedonia, and this throughout the institution of a specific platform enhancing all relations and exchanges between these two territories while opening them and their cultures to the world.

The local governing remains the centre of the project aiming at the reinforcement the territorial dynamics between the two countries involved by capacity development on institutional and associative level. This local development dimension of the project has become wider and more evident thanks to the active participation of all local representatives involved in the project actions. The fifth component of the overall cooperation program is focused on Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Tourism, with the following intervention logic.

Objectives:

- Reinforce local authorities capacities in order to develop alternative tourism in their municipalities
- Reinforce municipalities abilities in preserving cultural heritage
- Reinforce local population’s awareness about their cultural heritage

Activities:

a) Development of alternative tourism

- Animation of group of municipalities willing to work together on the topic of sustainable tourism (questionnaires);
- Workshop 1 (for the employees in the local administration) to identify the needs for development of sustainable tourism on local level;
- Workshop 2 about the development of a specific know-how about alternative tourism

b) Heritage preservation

- Heritage inventory in Berovo;
- Youth training about houses renovation with traditional materials in Mavrovo

4. Analysis of cultural tourism

There exist a vast number of possibilities for successful development and implementation of cultural tourism in the Republic of Macedonia. “An overview of their current state of development as well as development opportunities and objectives will be detailed in the following segments”. Potentialities of Macedonian cultural tourism can be presented through several segments of interest that are essential:

• Segment A – cultural heritage resources:

[†] Technical Assistance in Revision and Implementation of the National Strategy for Tourism Development of the Republic of Macedonia – Final Report (2011)

Macedonia as biblical land; Macedonia as crossroad of cultures and civilizations; Abundance of cultural heritage originating from all periods of human history (Neolithic, Early Antic-Bronze and Iron Age, Antic period – Late Antic-Early Christian, Medieval – Byzantine, Late Medieval – Ottoman, XIX Century Revival, XX Century – Modern); Good inventory of heritage resources – digital database in creation; and so on.

• **Segment B - tourists:**

Image of living history; Challenge to explore and participate into something unrevealed; The country situated on current crossroads; No-commodification of the cultural heritage resources; Several regions with significant cultural heritage have developed good tourist infrastructure (accommodation, services, transportation); Warm hospitality of the recipient community; etc.

• **Segment C – state/local community:**

Awareness of cultural tourism potentials; Defined stakeholders in cultural tourism cluster (Ministry of Culture, Institute for protection of the cultural heritage, Religious organizations, Business sector, Professional associations, Local government); Existence of professional bodies at relevant stakeholders connected with cultural tourism and so on.

Essential for the current state of development is to present also:

• **Segment A – cultural heritage resources:**

Insufficient research activities in cultural potentials of Macedonia; No existing list of the cultural heritage that have development potentials in cultural tourism; No analysis of the current state of usage of the cultural heritage in tourism activities; Misunderstanding that cultural heritage is automatically touristic resource; Absence of cultural heritage management plans; etc.

• **Segment B – tourists:**

Cultural tourism brand on national level is not established; Faint image of the country on the international markets connected with cultural tourism potentials; The great numbers of the tourist agencies are interested in outgoing instead in incoming tourism; Week tourist products based on cultural heritage.

• **Segment C – state/local community:**

Insufficient communication between stakeholders; Deficiency of qualified human resources in the most of the regions in the country; not established cultural tourism network; undeveloped techniques to collect data about visitors in cultural tourism (numbers, motivation for visit, level of satisfaction etc.); Segmented and divided stakeholders; etc.

The **threats** that exist in cultural tourism development can not be excluded:

- Unstable accession process in the EU and NATO;
- Lack of financial assets in the infrastructural projects;
- Strong political division of the country that sometimes causes problems in communications on the national versus local government;
- Disputes und unsolved issues with some of the neighboring countries.

As a third part of this analysis that is important to mention are the development opportunities and objectives:

• **Segment A – cultural heritage resources:**

To develop coordinative research strategy; To develop relevant methodology connected to valorization of the cultural heritage for cultural tourism – possibilities and restrictions; To improve the presentation of the cultural heritage to the public; To facilitate the access and utilization of the existing database of the cultural heritage in Macedonia; To make management plans prerequisite for involvement of tourist activities into the protected buildings and sites; etc.

• **Segment B – tourists:**

To make distinctive brand of the country based on cultural heritage resources; To develop strong and innovative cultural tourism products; To create materials that are supporting the brand and created cultural tourism products; To carry out advertising, publicity and media plans for the brand and cultural tourism products; and so on.

• **Segment C – state/local community:**

To ensure that cultural resources will be a tool for sustainable development on national/local level; To establish a network of the stakeholders in the cluster of cultural tourism; To improve the communication between stakeholders; To appoint national/local leaders who will be ambassadors and advocates about the benefits of cultural tourism; To appoint national/local leaders who will act as decision-makers in cultural tourism; To educate the local communities about the essence of the cultural tourism and other.

5. Cluster approach and market targeting

Tourism marketing for strategic development purposes is about linking different markets to different tourist products. First there is a need of identifying markets’ needs and assigning the tourist products which are matching their expectations. Our belief is that all tourist products do not necessarily match all targeted markets. Targeted markets indeed have their own specific needs, and then will not be attracted to products which do not suit their own expectations. More specifically, we must be aware and accept that Western European market will not be attracted by all tourist products. The selection must indeed be made at tourist product levels before making any targeted market prioritization in the absolute. This will also have an impact on the promotion tools’ contents which will be addressed to each market.

We will consider with equal consideration 3 targeted markets:

- Domestic/national market
- International regional market
- International Western European/ EU market

Table 1. Overview of market targeting

	Domestic market	International – Regional market	International – Western Europe market
Cultural tourism	++	++	+++

As shown in the table, it can be concluded that a greater emphasis must be put on targeting the international western European markets.

Domestic markets are eager to take advantage of all their countries’ resources and opportunities. The diversity of Macedonian tourist products is more propitious to increase and further develop domestic tourism. Among all clusters, lake tourism is probably the one which makes them stay in Macedonia for tourism purposes. Cultural tourism can be also attractive since there is space for increment of public awareness about the cultural resources.

International-regional market can equally be impacted with renewed and identically strong tourist products of Macedonia. Being the most identity-related one, rural tourism must impact them on a higher degree, for its customs sharing and inhabitants meeting aspects. Cultural tourism can act as an accelerator of the development on the basis of the common interest for the mutual history of the Balkan people.

International-western European market’s expectations are obviously more focused. Their criteria of choice will prioritize discovery and pleasure, respectively embodied by cultural tourism and wine

tourism. A strong desire of authenticity and cultures discovering must attract some segments of this market to rural tourism.

6. City of Ohrid as a cultural tourism cluster in Macedonia

Built between the 6th centuries BC and 19th centuries AD, from the Antique City of Lychnidos, the City of Ohrid is one of the oldest settlements in Europe. Registered in the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1980, the cultural and historical core of the City of Ohrid, overhanging the eastern shore of Ohrid Lake (registered to the UNESCO in 1979) [7], appears as a cultural centre of great importance for the history of the Balkan Peninsula, for all nations of the Slavic tongue and more broadly for world history and literature.

Marked by the heritages of St Naum and St Clement's works who founded there at the end of the 9th century AD a Slavic church and university, Ohrid has a strong religious and historical echo, within a valuable and protected natural mountains and lake landscape.

6.1. Cultural resources of Ohrid

Ohrid has a large variety of cultural facilities. As a city of UNESCO since 1980, it represents an important attraction for cultural tourists worldwide.

Ohrid is one of the most ancient human settlements in Europe, with wider area containing Neolithic archaeological sites as well as others from the Bronze Age and the Ancient period. With its numerous prehistoric sites and its traces of the material culture of more than 5,000 years ago, Ohrid is indeed an archaeological treasure and the surroundings of the lake can be styled a magical land of archaeology.

An important part of the cultural treasure that Ohrid has to offer is the fact that Glagolitic writing, education and Slavic culture – have a common start from this city in the 9th to 19th centuries. It is a cultural centre of great importance for the history not only of this part of the Balkan Peninsula, but also for all nations of the Slavic tongue and for world history and literature, with precious manuscripts and other rarities. This city and its historic-cultural region are located in a natural setting of exceptional beauty, while its architecture represents the best preserved and most complete ensemble of ancient urban architecture of the Slavic lands.

Within the center of the present city of Ohrid lies the antique city of Lichnid – the old town. The ancient city Lichnid was renamed into medieval Ohrid in the period of the 6th to the 9th century, still presenting one of the most significant medieval cities in the Balkans. The Ohrid cultural remains prove the beginnings of the Slavic literacy and culture in Ohrid through the works of St Clement and St Naum; St Clement is worshipped as a patron of the city: his three decades of work in the city (886-916) initiated the foundation of the Clement School – today celebrated as the first and oldest Slavic university in Europe.

The Ohrid today has around 30 **churches** which are made into cultural museums and can be easily visited by tourists. The actual number of all the churches in the Ohrid region is much larger.

Besides there exist three significant **monasteries**, more than 800 **Byzantine-style icons** dating from the 11th to the end of the 19th century in the Ohrid churches, remains of **ancient monuments** and basilicas as well as numerous churches and chapels, built from the 2nd century BC to the 19th century.

Also important to mention are 4 **museums** and 1 **gallery of icons**.

7. Actions required for the Ohrid cluster

Based on the conducted research there can be differentiated and defined the actions needed for successful implementation of the cluster approach in Ohrid as a cultural destination.

The targeted geographic **markets** would be:

- Local peoples, first concerned by heritage enhancement;
- Domestic and regional tourists spending their holidays in Ohrid or near or coming in Ohrid for city-breaks;
- Tourists from Europe or all over the world visiting the Balkans (within guided tours or on their own) or making a broader visit tour of cultural European destinations.

Targeted **market segments**:

- Couples
- Seniors

The **product's philosophy** of Ohrid must also be determined. This philosophy would be: "*Ohrid, City of cultural continuity*". We can differentiate here between needed **objectives** and **offer**.

Objectives:

- Creating a spatially coherent cultural product;
- Boosting the development of Ohrid and enlarging its "tourist daytime" to the night period in the high season;
- Broadening and boosting Ohrid to the concept of multicultural city;
- Improving visitors' cultural understanding and comfort.

Offer:

a) **Creating a spatially coherent cultural product.**

Needed in this sense is upgrading and modifying the existing road signs in the Old City and to the cultural spots located in other parts of the City and municipality; setting up and tracing 2 general cultural tracks (1 long, 1 short) and several thematic cultural routes (archaeological, customs...) in the Old City of Ohrid with appropriate road signings connecting all spots and proposing a sense of visit; drafting a feasibility study to set up a specific and adapted signage for the general cultural tracks and thematic cultural routes in all the municipality of Ohrid; elaboration of a feasibility and programming study for the creation of an Interpretation facility/ museum about Ohrid history and intangible heritage, using ICT and media technologies.

b) **Boosting the development of the Old Town of Ohrid and enlarging its "tourist daytime" to the night period in the high season.**

Different research are necessary such as: making an urban study of the accesses to the Old Town of Ohrid and of car park spaces around; making a feasibility study about public lighting in the Old Town of Ohrid and elaborating a "Light Plan for Ohrid Heritage"; tracing an "Ohrid by night" pedestrian track/route in the Old Town; elaborating a Trade and Urban Plan for the Old Town to fix spaces/facilities for the creation of quality small tourism facilities in the Old Town: accommodation in typical housing (in traditional private apartments or small hotels) and traditional restaurants; setting up an investors tender to the installation of identity stores in the upper Old Town, including a very restrictive list of stores fields: cultural shops and libraries, art galleries, etc.

c) **Broadening and boosting Ohrid towards the concept of multicultural city.**

In this sense there must be done undertakings such as: drafting a feasibility study for the development of the street culture by government subsidizing the artists through state-sponsored spectacles (producers of icons and crafts, national dance performers, selling souvenirs connected to cultural sites, Macedonian music selling); setting up a detailed program of day and night cultural and folklore events from Spring to Autumn in the Old Town – light and sound shows based on historic periods ("antic theater",

restitutions of traditional feasts with local music and costumes...). Of course they must be with an adapted frequency (weekly programme during summer time), etc.

d) Improving visitors' guidance, understanding and comfort.

This can be done through opening a real Tourism Office; installing signposts in front of every cultural spot (written or media cartels, in Macedonian, English, German and Italian); developing guiding services (in spots or through the Tourism Office); building essential facilities in/near to cultural spots: toilets facilities, souvenir shops, food and drink outlets; developing small interpretation signs (in Macedonian, English, German and Italian) near the main archaeological excavation spots and so on.

In order to achieve success of the product there must also be undertaken several actions in the fields of **governance, marketing and communication / promotion.**

Governance:

• Enhancing cultural heritage protection and management.

For this to be put into reality several actions have to be implemented such as: making management plans prerequisite for involvement of tourist activities; preparation processes and systems to measure the effectiveness of the plans and quality criteria fulfillment; setting up a process for measuring the collection of information about visitors in all spots (number and flows, motivations for visit, level of satisfaction etc...) and other.

• Building up a cohesive local network of stakeholders in the field of cultural tourism.

In this sense there is the need for: appointing local leaders as the ambassadors and decision-makers in cultural tourism; organizing civil educational workshops gathering political and civil actors in order to explain and to sensibilise the local communities to the essence and benefits of cultural tourism; developing an effective tourism association that as a vital actor in the tourism sector, bringing together the development of services, and ensure integrated marketing of the resort; to establish a permanent training center for LLL (life-long-learning) platform; setting evaluation systems in order to measure the cultural tourism impact at all stakeholders and in the local community.

• Going in regional and international governance in greater depth.

Thus, that includes: establishing if possible a UNESCO regional office in Ohrid and taking a proactive role in the upcoming Western Balkans Culture and Heritage Cooperation Programme (EU funded); joining a cultural heritage cities international or regional network in order to learn from best practices in cultural tourism.

Marketing:

a) Creating strong and innovative cultural heritage-focused packages (2-days to 7-days packages).

That is possible only through: creating a Tourism office; creating 2 main categories of packages: cultural-ludic packages "for culture-curious" and one cultural-elitist packages for passionate visitors; setting up a process for the dissemination of these packages (with preference for web marketing tools: website for packages directly sent to the visitors in site, newsletter to tour operators for professional packages) etc.

Communication/promotion:

a) Developing Ohrid media promotion through the creation of Ohrid Tourism Office official website (to become the Official Ohrid Tourism portal).

The previously said consists of: writing contents about Ohrid cultural spots and cultural events with 2 different tones in order to generalize culture: 1 ludic tone for culture-curious and 1 culture-elitist tone for passionate tourists; putting online packages directly proposed to individual tourists and other.

b) Writing, designing, publication of a brochure in different languages about Ohrid spots and offer.

This requires: writing, designing, and publishing a brochure in different English, Macedonian, German, Italian, about Ohrid spots and offer; organizing their diffusion at local (Tourism Office, accommodation facilities) and international (foreign tour operators) level.

c) Developing networking promotion.

This promotion is possible with the following actions: inviting international journalists specialized in cultural tourism and heritage issues; inviting specialized tourist guides writers; inviting managers of tour operators specialized in cultural tourism and city breaks.

8. Conclusion

In the past cultural tourism in the Republic of Macedonia was not experiencing a particular development, because there was no serious analysis and scientific approach that would set the basis for applying this type of tourism. The wealth of cultural resources didn't also mean their proper valorization towards the introduction of tourism activities related to cultural heritage. Therefore, through an analytical approach, this paper points out the existing potentials mainly related to the field of cultural heritage, but also the opportunities through their tourist valorization in order to initiate the tourism development.

The case study for Ohrid, which as a city of the world cultural heritage, clearly and unambiguously locates the activities that should be undertaken by the stakeholders with the aim for the cultural tourism to achieve its completeness and compactness without which the tourism product would not be competitive on the tourism market.

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