Promoting Arts-Based Activities for Local Sustainability: Danube Delta Case Study

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Abstract

A multiethnic community’s history, as represented in the cultural and built environment serves as an important asset for the economic development in a sustainable way. A review of arts-based activities in a protected and multiethnic area is the point of departure for this article. The products and activities offered and related issues on the economic sustainability of small villages situated on “islands” are examined. Challenges can appear in communities at risk of losing their unique character and attempting to protect their special sense of place. The role of arts is examined as a means for encouraging and strengthening sense of place and community identity, as well as building resilience. To combat social and economic inequity in this area, Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority, other relevant authorities, NGO’s, communities, and policy makers should seek ways to empower local residents to find local solutions. This study would help maintain the sustainability of the tourism sector and enable future support in order to engage communities in the arts-based activities.

Introduction

There are a number of good models all around Europe on creating cross-sector and cross-departmental working groups that have become the driving force behind developing cultural and creative industries policies on local, regional, national and international level. Cultural industries produce and distribute goods or services which have a specific attribute, use or purpose which embodies or conveys cultural expressions - traditional arts sectors. Creative industries use culture as an input and have a cultural dimension, although their outputs are mainly functional - architecture and design (EU Commission, 2010). The creative sector has a number of other attractive qualities from a local development perspective: it makes use of a range of skills at a series of different

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1. Introduction
levels, it tends to be socially responsible and inclusive and it usually involves ‘clean’, environmentally friendly processes (European Agenda for Culture Work Plan for Culture 2011-2014).

During the years, it was argued that development should only focus on specific economy sectors, but in the present day more authors argue that rural development should be tailored to the unique cultural characteristics and highlight the special elements (Dunphy, 2009). Richard Florida (2005) said that “Human creativity is the ultimate source of economic growth. Every single person is creative in some way. And to fully and tap and harness that creativity we must be tolerant, diverse and inclusive.” There were authors like Marcouiller (1995) who stated that promoting and hosting festivals and events can be a good community development strategy but may have limited effectiveness as an economic development strategy, because the latter generally focus on job creation or enhancement and income generation.

Community arts are considered to be shared, socially and self-expressive creative in the fields of visual arts, dance, storytelling, music, theatre, craft, film-making and new technology. The roles of arts community are enabling people to develop a relationship with the environment and understanding of identity, locatedness, economy, culture and well-being (Ramsden et al., 2011).

Local culture provides sense of identity for rural communities and residents (Hodgson, 2011, Keen et al., 2005). This identity facilitates common understandings, traditions and values, all central to the identification of plans of action to improve well-being (Brennan, 2009). The planning process plays an important role in assisting residents as they inventory and explore their community context. In this way, the planning process provides a grounding mechanism to ensure that the wealth of information latent in the community is revealed, enhanced, and maintained over time. This allows a narrative about the authentic elements of a community’s talent to emerge and thrive (Murray & Baeker, 2006).

A multi-approach method for protecting and enhancing was used as a functional framework for communities to integrate resources with community economic development and sustainability. Products emphasize traditional food habits, regional and local products, some of the emblematic character for that area, traditional preparation and marketing possibilities for them (Gafar & Grigorovschi, 2005). Production and activity development are correlated with environmental attractions, contributing to the economic sustainability of these activities. But there is a lack of local knowledge about the financial resource access. Environment-related products and additional activities are not very popular among the visitors to Danube Delta (Vaidianu, 2011).

This study demonstrates that culture and the arts are pivotal in the development of Danube Delta’s economy and in increasing community resilience, leading to community well-being and sustainability. Local vendors, artisans, craftspeople, hoteliers are kept busy and may indeed make large portion of their annual income during the festivals.

2. Study site

Danube Delta is a resource-dependent community of approximately 14000 people and has been engaged in diversifying its economy over the years, especially after the designation as “Biosphere Reserve” in 1991. This area could be described as a non-conventional and picturesque place out of time. The specific architecture highly influenced by sun, sand and wind abound with vividly painted houses, with hand-made wooden decorations and reed roofs. Celebrity of Dobrogea consists in the opening to the Black Sea, Danube Delta and the archaeological remains proving the existence and continuity of the Romanian population together with Turks, Tatars, Circassians, Aromanians and Greeks, Italians and Ukrainians, Germans, Bulgarians, Russians, Egyptians and even Muslim Gypsies - so a true ethnic mosaic (Popoiu, 2010).

The design of deltaic infrastructure, such as architecture, channels, transportation facilities, and so on, presents an opportunity to interpret the many constituent elements of a sense of place: the natural environment, history, culture, language, and other aspects of local environmental, economic, and social conditions. Cultural landscape from Danube Delta is the result of harmonious jointing between natural resources, rich history and ethnic mosaic, an unique landscape around the world. Intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation is constantly recreated by communities and groups, according to their place of interaction with nature and their history, and gives a sense of identity and continuity thus promoting respect for the cultural diversity and human creativity (Law No. 26/2008 regarding intangible cultural heritage).
Through the specific aspects, artists can inform, educate, and comment on these local conditions. Some organizations maintain the revitalization efforts and plan a variety of events and programs — such as festivals, recreational activities, temporary art exhibits, and performances — in collaboration with the arts organizations, retailers, authorities, and community and educational institutions.

3. Arts-based activities in a protected and multiethnic area

The review of arts-based activities identified the following events and products: festivals and Patrons of churches celebration, elements of traditional ports and traditional practices (fishing tools or products), reed harvesting methods and products, traditional means of transport, traditional sports and a traditional social structure. But the most important benefits are related to the festivals due to greater involvement and participation of people (Table 1).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>NAME</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 May</td>
<td>Sulina</td>
<td>“FLOWERS OF MAY” FIELD</td>
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<td>6 May</td>
<td>Sfântu Gheorghe</td>
<td>CELEBRATION NAME CELEBRATION OF THE ANCIENT RITE CHURCH</td>
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<td>Sulina</td>
<td>“CHILDREN’S WORLD” FESTIVITY</td>
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<td>Tulcea</td>
<td>“NUFARU ALB” LIGHT MUSIC INTERPRETATION FESTIVAL</td>
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<td>29 June</td>
<td>Tulcea</td>
<td>THE DAY OF THE DANUBE</td>
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<tr>
<td>July</td>
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<td>PROMETHEUS YOUNG MUSIC FESTIVAL</td>
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<td>July</td>
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<td>“THE SONGS OF THE SEA” FESTIVITY</td>
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<td>July</td>
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<td>“THE FESTS OF THE DELTA” THE NATIONAL MINORITIES FESTIVAL</td>
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<td>August</td>
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<td>“GOLDEN FISH” INTERNATIONAL FOLKLORIC FESTIVAL</td>
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<td>INTERNATIONAL DANUBE FESTIVAL</td>
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<td>15 August</td>
<td>C.A. Rosetti</td>
<td>THE NAME CELEBRATION OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH “ADORMIREA MAICII DOMNULUI”</td>
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<td>August</td>
<td>Sarichioi</td>
<td>RAZELM FESTIVAL</td>
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<td>August</td>
<td>Tulcea - Mîlă 23 - Sulina</td>
<td>PATZAIKIN NAUTICAL SPORT COMPETITION.</td>
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<td>September</td>
<td>Tulcea</td>
<td>DELTA MUSIC FEST</td>
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<td>”TRAGOS” INTERNATIONAL THEATRE FESTIVAL</td>
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<td>THE FEST OF THE TOWNSHIP</td>
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<td>September</td>
<td>Murighiol</td>
<td>THE FESTS OF THE WATER AND FISHING</td>
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<tr>
<td>13 October</td>
<td>Danube Delta</td>
<td>THE FISHING DAY</td>
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The festivals have dual purposes, increasing tourism to the region, and increasing awareness of the value of the flora and fauna of the local area and issues around environmental management, an increasingly serious problem.

The first edition of “Festivalul Solzilor de Peste” or Razelm Festival (as it was renamed in 2013) took place on August 27, 2007. This project was funded by Regional Operational Program 2007-2013. The main goal of this project was to develop and promote sustainable tourism, creating the necessary infrastructure in order to increase Romania’s attractiveness as a tourist destination. During the festival numerous activities are organized: dance competitions, traditional music, boats contest, contests in preparing various fish dishes specific to the Delta. As a
part of the culture, traditional food says a lot about the people’s specifics, origins and history, about cultural exchanges and loans from which they were born (Bonte, 1999). The long history of food shows that every culture is the result of contamination, each tradition belongs to history, and history is never immobile (Goody, 1998). Given the rich cultural load-up, in Dobrogea there are a series of specific food events.

“ANONIMUL International Independent Film Festival” is an international film festival organized in the region of Danube Delta (Romania). It takes place annually in Sfântu Gheorghe, a rural settlement of little more than 900 inhabitants. During one week each year, the festival draws many professionals and spectators, transforming the village into an impressive celebration, and a very effective showcase for the contemporary performing arts. Since its foundation in 2004, “ANONIMUL” has evolved to positioning itself as an international reference for film festivals in non-conventional venues. The Xth edition registered a record of participants in 2013, more than 5000 tourists. ANONIMUL Film Festival has two close locations in Sfântu Gheorghe: during the day films are screened in the Green Village cinemas. The entrance is by invitation only. Invitations can be picked up from the ANONIMUL Info Point (situated in the camping) starting Tuesday morning, according to the number of the available seats. During the night all films from the Festival are screened in “Delfinul” camping on a huge open-air screen taking advantage of free entry (Fig. 1.a) (http://www.festival-anonimul.ro/home_en).

Another type of folk art is found in the different elements of traditional port of old believers from Danube Delta. For example, a belt crochet with colored wool, called –pois- can be crafted only by a few talented women of the community who have the blessing from the priest to do this. The rosary (mătănile) are made in leather and sewn with beads of different colors. The hand crafts are unique because they are made ony by demand according to each one’s preferences of color and model. Usually, the tourists buy this type of lipovanian traditional items only during churches celebrations (hram) when this items are exposed for selling near the churches.

The group „Landash” from Sarichioi was formed in 1980 and the repertoire contains over 60 Russian songs dating back centuries. Depending on the time or key community life situations, the songs might be grouped in: wedding songs, street, army and engagement songs. The most spectacular performances of the choir occur during the annual church celebration when several similar ensembles from the area gather together. This group also has a tradition to participate at various ethnic national and international festivals (Fig. 1.b).

Dance ensemble “Molodată” from Tulcea was founded in 2003 at the initiative of dance choreographer teacher Jora and some high school students, most of them being Russian-Lipovan. Over the time, the ensemble, participated in various festivals (e.g. Tulcea ethnic Film Festival, International Festival of shepherding from Sarighiolul de Deal, Bucharest Anniversary) where always succeeded to promote its ethnicity.

There are some associations and NGO’s who promote these kinds of activities (Ex: Ivan Patzaichin - Mila 23 Association, Salvați Dunărea și Delta Association, The Community of Russians Lipovan from Romania, etc). Besides these, the implications of local and regional authorities have a great importance. The RE concept is the platform of social responsibility and engagement that the resources for a purer environment will be revived and the communities will receive the chance for a sustainable development. Within the two projects focused on Danube Delta (“Forgotten traditions” and “Danube Delta, contested territory”), strategic partners from non-governmental domain (environmental NGOs with educational profile) were involved and they ensured that the messages were relevant.
4. Discussion and conclusions

This study identifies the links among culture, arts and creativity and their contribution to economic development. The number of visitors during the festivals is yearly increasing. The understanding that culture, creativity and arts play an important role in development of a resilient economy should increase.

The review of the literature and interviews with local people indicate that arts and creative initiatives are significant for the development of rural and remote communities in the economic, environmental, social, and cultural domains – they bring many spill-over effects to the local economy (accommodation, logistics and other services); they can be used in tourism development and local branding and they create new possibilities for local professionals to work within international teams.

Factors that seem pivotal in building long-term sustainability for arts and creativity in rural communities include appreciation of local culture, history and heritage, local people, assets and characteristics, local entrepreneurship and investment and a focus on retaining young people through employment, recreational, and educational initiatives.

The study reveals that the culture can influence the confidence for coming together to address specific needs and problems. The local commitment among residents, regardless of economic or political conditions, can serve as a valuable tool in shaping the effectiveness of development options and local actions. The impacts have social, educational, economic and aesthetic implications. But challenges can appear in communities at risk of losing their unique character and attempting to protect their special sense of place. Also a challenge is how to further integrate the cultural and creative sectors into regional innovation strategies for smart specialization, which in the current Commission proposals will be an ex ante conditionality to access funds. Authorities have to fully take into consideration the complex links between traditional cultural assets (cultural heritage, dynamic cultural institutions and services) and the development of creative businesses or tourism. To combat social and economic inequity in this area, the policy makers should seek ways to empower local residents to find local solutions.

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