

# EXPLORING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN CULTURAL HERITAGE, TOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF ROMANIA

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**Abstract:** *Far from being properly understood, valued, cared for and enjoyed, the cultural heritage, in its tangible and intangible forms, represents a resource that may contribute in a higher extent to the sustainable development of the local communities. Paper presents, from a marketing perspective, the results of an exploratory assessment of the connections between variables describing cultural heritage, tourism and sustainable development, in order to identify ways that may be considered in the capitalization of cultural heritage for supporting the sustainable development.*

**Key words:** *Cultural heritage, cultural tourism, sustainable development, Romania*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

UNESCO (1972) has defined cultural heritage as including: monuments (architectural works, works of monumental sculpture and painting, elements or structures of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, cave dwellings and combinations of features, which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science), groups of buildings (groups of separate or connected buildings which, because of their architecture, their homogeneity or their place in the landscape, are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science) and sites (works of man or the combined works of nature and man, and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view) [14]. Three decades later, UNESCO (2003) expanded what seemed almost exhaustive by recognizing the value of the intangible components of the cultural heritage also considering the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage [15].

ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Committee (2002) has proposed a more preferable, from a marketing perspective, definition of cultural heritage focusing on the experiences people may enjoy discovering it: expressions of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation, including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expression and values. Cultural heritage takes the forms of tangible (places of human habitation, villages, towns and cities, buildings, structures, art works, documents, handicrafts, musical instruments, furniture, clothing and items of personal decoration, religious, ritual and funerary objects, tools, machinery and equipment, and industrial systems) or intangible (all forms of traditional and popular or folk culture, the collective works originating in a given community and based on tradition – oral traditions, customs, languages, music, dance, rituals, festivals,

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traditional medicine and pharmacopeia, popular sports, food and the culinary arts and all kinds of special skill connected with the material aspects of culture) heritage [9].

From all the entities involved in the management of the cultural heritage, museums appear the most representative both in terms of conducting related activities (research, preservation, restoration, promotion and capitalization) and of bringing its tangible and intangible elements in relationship to the interested audiences. A classical, very technical, yet most referenced definition was proposed by the International Council of Museums (2007), according to which a museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment [8]. The Museums Association (1998) advanced a definition that focuses on the experiences visitors may enjoy: museums enable people to explore

collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. They are institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artefacts and specimens, which they hold in trust for society. This definition includes art galleries with collections of works of art, as well as museums with historical collections of objects [10]. Badalotti et al. (2011) have observed that, traditionally dedicated to our relations with the past, museums collect the heritage of our culture and past experiences aiming to enable a bridge between the present and the past, interacting with large number of people in the process of generating collective narratives of the past as an interpretation of the roots and the evolution of our culture [2]. Fromm (2016) has observed that museums will staunchly continue to collect tangible material telling about the practices, cultures, skills, and values of societies near and far while attempting to transform themselves into lively and engaging spaces and thriving to remain a nexus of living culture in their communities [7]. As Bjerregard (2015) argued, these collections of storytelling objects should be organized to stage atmospheres and the gaps established in-between objects and in-between objects and subjects allowing a dissolution of objects seen as the way in which museums create presence and the displayed objects stop being stable and isolated entities storing value and meaning, turning instead into ecstasies tincturing space [4].

All these evolutions are centered on visitors and their experience which may still not be a concern for nowadays museums. Dragicevic and Letunic (2014) have found that curators of Dubrovnik museums do not care enough about marketing researches, do not apply results of scientific research in practice and did not adapt to customers needs and expectations, hence a strong need for rewriting their agendas in terms of meeting customers preferences and satisfying their expectations [5]. According to Sua and Teng (2018), providing a memorable and enjoyable experience involves considering certain dimensions of museum services' quality: reliability, tangibles, communication, empathy, responsiveness, communication, consumables,

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convenience, services cape, purposiveness, contemplation, and first-hand experience under a context in which acquiring education should be perceived as equally important to entertainment, enjoyment, and restoration [13].

Studying the role of museums in supporting the sustainable development, Azmat et al. (2018) have confirmed the potential of museums in promoting sustainable development as value created by cultural institution is captured, on most occasions, by key beneficiaries producing a positive social, environmental and economic impact. Cultural institutions should use different art-based initiatives to address economic, social and environmental issues and promote sustainable development by connecting and engaging people and creating positive spill-over effects at the individual, organizational, community and public domain levels [1]. In the context, Basso et al. (2017) consider that evaluation of overall museum performance may use a model based on four perspectives: customers (number of visitors, website visits, members, catalogues, value of donations), internal process (conservation and restoration costs, amount spent for new acquisitions, number of visitors), innovation and learning (personnel training, enjoyment of exhibits, environmental consideration and museum accessibility) and financial (incomes from tickets, sponsorships, donations, public funding, other sources) [3].

## 2. METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

The overall scope of the research was to explore the relationships between the cultural heritage, tourism and sustainable development at the level of the Romanian market considering that cultural heritage represents a resource that can be capitalized by the local communities in their efforts of sustainable development and tourism, particularly the cultural tourism, is the best way to put this resource to work in the benefit of these communities.

The research objectives aimed to identify and assess the relationships between (1) the cultural heritage and tourism, respectively (2) the cultural heritage and sustainable development. The related research hypotheses assumed that: (1) cultural heritage and tourism should be significantly associated as the cultural heritage, in its tangible and intangible components, may represent both an attraction and a motivation for the tourists; (2) cultural heritage and sustainable development should also be significantly associated as the tangible and intangible elements of the cultural heritage could contribute, through their capitalization, to the sustainable development of the local communities.

A set of research variables has been built in order to explore these relationships, each component being described through specific variables:

(1) cultural heritage has been described by the number of:

- 1.1. museums, comprising art museums and public collections of archaeology and history, science and natural history, science and techniques, ethnography and anthropology, specialized, regional, general and mixed museum (2016);
- 1.2. visitors, defined as persons visiting a museums or public collections, individually or in group, to see the exhibited museum goods, statistically registered based on the tickets sold and the number of visitors attending the “Night of Museums” (2016);
- 1.3. employees, defined as museums’ personnel including the employed personnel at the end of the financial year, in full-time equivalents (2016).

(2) tourism has been described by the number of:

- 2.1. tourists, defined as number of persons accommodated in tourist reception units including all persons (Romanians and foreigners) who travel outside the locality where they normally reside, none other than to carry out a remunerated activity in

- the visited places, for a period of less than 12 months, and spend at least one night in a tourist accommodation unit (2016);
- 2.2. domestic tourists, defined as above and considering the Romanian tourists (2016);
  - 2.3. foreign tourists, defined as above and considering the foreign tourists (2016).
- (3) sustainable development has been expressed by the:
- 3.1. gross domestic product, defined as the sum of final uses of goods and services by resident institutional units (actual final consumption, gross fixed capital formation) plus exports and minus imports of goods and services (2015);
  - 3.2. employment, defined as the average number of employees comprising all persons with an ongoing individual labour contract/agreement for a definite or indefinite duration including seasonal workers, the manager or the administrator (2016);
  - 3.3. number of enterprises, defined as economic units – organisations consisting of one or several persons with legal entity, created in order to carry out certain activities according to the specific laws (2016);
  - 3.4. salary, defined as gross monthly average earning represented by the gross sums paid from the salary fund (the seasonal and annual bonuses included), the sums paid from the net profit and other funds averagely paid by the company to an employee monthly (2016).

Secondary data provided by the National Institute of Statistics [11] referring to the research variables, at the level of each of the Romanian counties, have been collected and used to determine correlation coefficients whose values have been analyzed, in terms of significance (on a scale from 0 – lack of association and 1 – perfect association) and nature (positive / negative) in order to assess the relationships between the investigated variables.

### 3. MAIN FINDINGS

There is a relatively strong connection between the number of the museums and number of their visitors ( $r=0.5759$ ), as museums seem to provide interesting opportunities for the visitors and an increase in the number of museums may correspond to a similar evolution in the number of their visitors. Although positive, this connection suggests that museums still have to improve in terms of their functioning focusing more on developing their audiences by attracting more visitors. Number of museums and the number of their employees are moderately associated ( $r=0.4928$ ) which means that although a museum provides reasonable work opportunities in the local community, an increase in the number of museums may correspondingly generate increase of the local job's market. Although positive, this connection indicates a rather moderate contribution and a limited impact of the museums in terms of the sustainable development due mainly to the limited number of workplaces made available to the local community.

Museums do not appear as being of primary interest for the tourists visiting the Romanian counties as the assessment of the relationship between the number of museums and the number of tourists indicates a slightly moderate connection ( $r=0.4368$ ). Increasing the number of museums may attract a higher number of tourists (particularly domestic,  $r=0.4112$ , than foreign,  $r=0.3502$ ), but not to a significant extent. An increased number of museums may attract a higher number of tourists but just the opening of a new museum will not make the tourist crowds assaulting it.

It is quite comforting and, nonetheless, hopeful to observe the strong association between the number of visitors and the number of tourists ( $r=0.8189$ ), valid both in the cases of domestic ( $r=0.7924$ ) and foreign ( $r=0.8258$ ) tourists. An increase in the overall number of museum

visitors will also determine an important increase in the number of tourists, with a potentially relevant impact on the incomes generated. Museums should assess the contribution of their main visitors' segments – tourists, respectively non-tourist (mainly local inhabitants, students, pensioners etc.) – by measuring the revenue per capita produced by each of these segments, identifying the sources of this revenue (in terms of the cultural products and services delivered) and opportunities to increase the generated income for each source and, also, to diversify the income sources.

As the association between the number of employees of the museums and the number of tourists reveals ( $r=0.8713$ ), also both in the cases of domestic ( $r=0.6395$ ), and, particularly, the foreign ones ( $r=0.9578$ ), an increasing number of tourists gives museums opportunity to create workplaces, which may support the sustainable development of the local communities that are primary workforce suppliers. These newly created workplaces could and, from a marketing perspective, quite should cover positions and responsibilities meant to improve the experience of the tourists discovering, exploring and, in the end, enjoying these cultural heritage objectives.

In terms of the research variables considered, the relationships between the cultural heritage and sustainable development appear, in an open and positive view, as rather moderate. Number of the museums and gross domestic product associate slightly moderately ( $r=0.3725$ ) suggesting that a higher number of museums may impact positively, but to a limited extent, the gross domestic product. It is to be further investigated if the potential increase of the gross domestic product may be the result of a higher public and/or private financial support for culture and related activities or of the public and/or private spending for cultural goods and/or services, particularly for those provided by the museums.

The number of museums and employment also associate slightly moderately ( $r=0.3906$ ). While the cultural sector, including the segment of museums, generate a certain number of workplaces, they obviously are not among the branches that can strongly support the sustainable development. If museums exert a limited direct impact over the labor market, they could instead influence it indirectly by engaging other industries to create workplaces: travel and tourism industry is, probably, the most noticeable case in this respect. This idea is also supported by the slightly moderate association between the number of museums and entrepreneurship ( $r=0.3564$ ), as a part of the entrepreneurial initiatives could provide goods and services addressing directly the cultural market.

Last but not least, museums and salaries paid are, not at all surprisingly, in a slightly moderate association ( $r=0.3829$ ). If the museums are not among the major employers in the market, it is hardly expected they could pay either higher salaries or a significant number of employees as to influence the labor market and, overall, the whole economy. In terms of sustainability, this association should be considered in connection to the number of visitors as increasing the number of museums and attracting more visitors allow getting a higher income from which a part could be employed to pay improved salaries.

Number of visitors is more than moderately associated with all the considered indicators – gross domestic product ( $r=0.5815$ ), employees ( $r=0.6056$ ), entrepreneurship ( $r=0.5769$ ) and salaries paid ( $r=0.5345$ ) – to describe the sustainable development. Seen from a marketing perspective, this situation is quite natural as it is hard enough to imagine a supplier of goods and/or services without customers. Similarly, a museum cannot operate without visitors: increasing their number and value (in financial terms) represent the best organic source of museums's and, by aggregation, of the culture and overall economy's and society's sustainable development.



Finally, the number of employees in museums is strongly associated with all the considered indicators – gross domestic product ( $r=0.9525$ ), employment ( $r=0.9511$ ), entrepreneurship ( $r=0.9365$ ) and salaries paid ( $r=0.7171$ ) – to describe the sustainable development. Creating workplaces continues to be probably the best form of supporting the sustainable development of a market segment, industry, economy as whole and, finally, society, as workplaces, on the one hand, provide the income the community members need to acquire the products and services satisfying needs and, on the other hand, they are created to facilitate the provision of the goods and services demanded in the economy.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Romania has 761 museums: they may be too many – for those not involved or not interested, or too few – for those working in the cultural market, creative industries, cultural economics or cultural management. Although Romania is not among the most relevant cultural markets, and the museums are not necessarily the most representatives cultural institutions, the analysis of the relationships between the cultural heritage (illustrated by the museums' sector), cultural tourism and the sustainable development at the level of the Romanian market allows drawing several interesting and, nonetheless, challenging conclusions.

The simple existence of a museum does not provides opportunities to grow if the connection with their visitors – the beneficiaries of the museums' goods, services and activities – is missing. Therefore, museums should aim to extend their visitor base as a main source of their further growth searching primarily for the cultural tourists that tend to replicate outside their homes and countries their domestic behavior proofing what Stylianou-Lambert (2011) observed, that cultural tourism is an extension of everyday life [12]. They should embrace the marketing vision acknowledging that more visitors means more income, thus more resources capable to support their current operation and future growth. Under the same vision, these museums should become, as Badalotti et al. (2011) suggest, multi-located, scalable at the European or international level institutions, open to multiple experiences offered to public physical and virtual spaces, and providing points of interaction with different and wider communities, providing alternative visions of possible futures to today's public, but also a rich and valuable archive to their future audiences [2].

The answer to the question whether museums and cultural heritage can contribute to the sustainable development of their communities has two parts: yes, they may but currently do not. What really matters aiming to answer this question is that there are evidences that cultural heritage has connections, some of them slightly moderate, other more relevant, with some of the elements characterizing the sustainable development. Based on them it is possible to imagine and put into practice a strategy of growth centered on visitors and/or cultural tourists, in fact consumers of cultural heritage and their experiences. The extremely inspiring example of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao works as an effective proof that it is possible and the "Bilbao Effect", as described by Franklin (2016), leading to the regeneration of a former industrial city as a pole of new service industries, emerging technologies, design, culture and aesthetics, based on the more than one million visitors per year and generating a contribution of \$33.5m by linking art museums, art tourism and urban regeneration, can be replicated, in adapted version, to the different local contexts [6].

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