



Developing the Cultural Route Evaluation Model (CREM) and its application on the Trail of Roman Emperors, Serbia



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ABSTRACT

The principal aim of this paper is to establish a Cultural Route Evaluation Model (CREM) to better assess the importance of cultural routes for tourism development taking into account both heritage values and economic impacts. This model is applied to 'The trail of the Roman Emperors' in Serbia. This application is based on two groups of values – the 'main values' namely scientific, route-specific, economic, and protection and conservation Values, and secondly additional values. It is found that not all values contribute equally to the final assessment score, but the CREM model and the related matrix visually highlight current and potential values of the trail, thereby permitting management to devise policies that would enable the trail to better achieve its purposes.

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1. Introduction

The development of themed routes as tourist attractions has gained prominence in recent years. Trails and routes have been popular in travel and tourism over the centuries, representing an important factor in shaping travel patterns (Timothy & Boyd, 2014). In the past three decades, tourism routes flourished all over the world, in particular in the developed world. This is mainly because they offer important opportunities for creating and selling new products, but also due to the increasing trend of visitors craving for new and different experience. Changing tourism trends have led to a shift from mass tourism to more individualistic journeys with meaningful experience being their pivotal part (Gilbert, 1989; Hummelbrunner & Miglbauer, 1994; Poon, 1989). The most representative examples are certainly Camino de Santiago in Spain and Route 66 in the USA which are well known routes of the developed world, but there are also a variety of examples in other countries, such as the Cracow Industrial Heritage Route in Poland, the Dandi Heritage Route in India and the World Heritage Route in Vietnam (Snowball & Courtney, 2010). Developing countries with rich and valuable cultural and natural heritage have significant comparative advantage in attracting tourists wanting authentic new experiences. The formation of diverse cultural routes proved to be a good way to achieve this, representing a tool for economic and tourism development of a region or the country as a whole.

A detailed explanation of the concept of route tourism is given by Meyer (2004), who indicates that 'The essential concept of route tourism is linking together variety of attractions to promote local tourism by encouraging the visitors to travel from one location to another'. He also states that 'By combining the attractions or a number of attraction providers into regional packages, thus creating greater access to a variety of products while at the same time increasing the product's appeal, routes are important tourism development strategies' (Meyer, 2004, p. 3).

A very popular type of routes, which was first established by the Council of Europe are certainly cultural routes. The Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe are in line with the key trends of cultural tourism development in Europe today. They have achieved a considerable progress within the last two decades, and showed to have an immense potential for SME (small and medium enterprises) generation, clustering, networking, and promoting the image of the Council of Europe and Europe generally. The cultural corridors encourage local community to partake in cultural activities raising awareness of importance of cultural heritage. These corridors largely contribute to small business creation, as well as to the development of cultural tourism products and services. The Council of Europe (2010b) states that 'the promotion of cultural tourism is a logical next step in developing heritage routes since this type of tourism builds on the uniqueness and authenticity of remote destinations, local knowledge, skills, heritage and traditions'. According to the ICOMOS Charter on Cultural routes (2005) 'the consideration of cultural trails as a new concept or category does not conflict nor overlap with other categories or types of cultural properties—monuments, cities, cultural landscapes, industrial heritage, etc., that may exist within the

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orbit of a given cultural corridor. It simply includes them within a joint system which enhances their significance' (ICOMOS Charter on Cultural routes, 2005, p.1).

Many authors recognize the potential of tourism and economic development through cultural trails emphasizing their significance for both developing and developed countries (ICOMOS Charter on Cultural routes, 2005), but the fact is that a model for the evaluation of cultural routes, their current value and potential is not yet constituted. There were several assessment models in the past which dealt with the evaluation of cultural heritage sites (Ahmetović, 1994; du Cros, 2001; Laing, Wheeler, Reeves, & Frost, 2014; McKercher & Ho, 2006) but scientific literature indicates that there is no such unique model which would provide the assessment of tourist potential of cultural routes as complex tourism products consisting not only of cultural assets and other attractions but also encompassing a wide array of facilities, infrastructure, accommodation etc. This is in accordance to Denstadli and Jacobsen (2011) who claim that a tourism route usually includes a wide array of facilities and attractions helping to form the overall experience. Analyzing how visitors perceive and assess a tourism route as a tourism product should thus include not only the trail and nearby landscapes and attractions but also additional facilities including rest areas, toilets, accessibility and parking, as well as different kind of accommodation and restaurants.

The principal aim of this paper is to construct the Cultural Route Evaluation Model (CREM) for the purpose of the assessment of cultural routes as complex tourism products, going further than just simply assessing cultural assets on the route, as separate tourism products. This complex evaluation model was based on several already existing models for heritage assessment and some of the subindicators of these models were adapted and used for this new methodology. However, as a main contribution of this paper, the authors also introduced some new subindicators related specifically to cultural routes as well as their economic significance. The model consists of different aspects of the cultural route assessment including scientific, 'route-specific' values, economic, protection and conservation values (Main Values) as well as functional and additional values of the tourism product (Tourism-specific Values). The paper also deals with the application of this newly introduced methodology on 'The trail of Roman Emperors', as one of the most distinctive heritage routes in Serbia.

2. Literature review

2.1. Cultural routes and route based tourism

Route tourism can bring together less well known tourist attractions in order to market them more effectively under a unified theme and improve the management and conservation of heritage assets (Meyer, 2004, p.3; Stoddart & Rogerson, 2009; Timothy & Boyd, 2006).

Routes seem to be particularly beneficial for less developed regions with valuable cultural assets that appeal to special interest tourists, who are characterized as tourists who stay longer and spend more to satisfy their interests. Besides the fact that routes attract long-staying visitors they also appeal to international overnight visitors that visit the route as part of a special interest holiday, daily visitors, or urban domestic day-visitors. Routes can differ in terms of their length, theme as well as in type and number of visitors. There are also many routes that are developed for domestic visitors, and these routes are often located in areas that are not of particular interest to international tourists but appeal to domestic visitors willing to learn more about their own culture. Routes thus attract different types of visitors, that can be driven by various motives and this is reflected in the routes' theme (Meyer, 2004).

Many papers discussed the immense significance of routes and route-based tourism (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004; Hill & Gibbons, 1994; Kent & Eliot, 1995; Lourens, 2007; Murray & Graham, 1997; Rogerson, 2007; Snowball & Courtney, 2010) as well as diverse benefits

which are produced by their creation including social, economic, environmental and cultural. For instance, Briedenhann and Wickens (2004, p.72) especially emphasize the role of route creation for economic development of rural areas arguing that 'the clustering of activities and attractions, in less developed areas, stimulates cooperation and partnerships between communities in local and neighboring regions and serves as a vehicle'. Lourens (2007) states that route development can significantly contribute to sustainability of travel and tourism while Hill and Gibbons (1994) mention that trails have contributed to development of a range of attractions and facilities along their routes. They argue that the fact that tourists are distributed along the route contributes to facilitating the carrying capacity, reducing negative environmental impacts and making the economic benefits evenly distributed along the route. They also emphasize that cooperation between different local areas, regions and even across borders can be seen as an important benefit of such developments. One of the aims of these routes, aside from attracting tourists to an area, is to connect several attractions that alone would not have the potential to entice visitors. Using this synergy effect can lead to greater pulling power and it also disperses the total revenue to a larger number of recipients.

In 1964 a Council of Europe working group initiated the idea of a series of European Cultural Routes, with the prime goals of raising awareness of European culture through travel, setting up networks for cultural tourism, and utilizing European cultural heritage as a means of stimulating social, economic and cultural development, thus improving the quality of life of local people. The idea, however, only came to fruition in 1980 with the establishment of the Santiago de Compostela Pilgrim Way (Council of Europe, 2002). The term Cultural Tourism Route was defined as 'a route crossing one or two more countries or regions, organized around themes whose historical, artistic or social interest is patently European and the route must be based on a number of highlights, with places particularly rich in historical associations' (Council of Europe, 2002, p. 2). Twenty years later the project is described as 'an instrument for understanding the European values arising from the complex cultures and societies that have formed Europe' (Council of Europe, 2002, p. 2). The European Council claims that the route must be based on a number of attractions, places with a very rich history, which represent the European culture as a whole (Council of Europe, 1995). Of paramount importance was the establishment of a technical body, the European Institute of Cultural Routes (EICR), in 1998, for operational purposes. Its role is to examine applications for new projects, to monitor activities in the field and co-ordinate the work of partner organizations and to disseminate and archive information documents (Council of Europe, 2010b). Moreover, in December 2010, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted Resolution CM/Res(2010)53 establishing an Enlarged Partial Agreement (EPA) to enable closer co-operation between states particularly interested in the development of heritage trails. How significant these trails are for European tourism is evident from The Charter on cultural routes presented at the 16th General Assembly of ICOMOS, Québec (Canada), on the 4th of October 2008, which clearly defined cultural routes (ICOMOS Charter on Cultural routes, 2005).

Nowadays, popularity of cultural corridors, especially in Europe, resulted in a wide array of successfully realized projects such as The Santiago de Compostela Pilgrims Way, Via Francigena; Rural Habitat; The Silk Routes; The Baroque Route; Celtic Routes; Mozart Route; Schickhardt Itineraries; The Viking Routes; The Hanseatic Routes; Parks and Garden Route; Writing Frontiers, the Pont de l'Europe; European Cities Discoveries Route; Living Arts and European Identity; The Northern Lights Route; Popular Festivals and Rites in Europe; the Gypsy Route; Dracula tour.

On the other hand, there are some interesting projects of cultural routes which are waiting to be realized in the near future, but which are still unrevealed to the worlds' cultural tourism market. One of them is certainly the 'Trail of Roman Emperors' in Serbia with a popular theme, which can make tourists come in droves to take part in it.

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