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Heritage as an Alternative Driver for Sustainable Development and Economic Recovery in South East Europe

Identifying Cultural Tourism Potentials in Republic of Moldova through Cultural Consumption among Tourists

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Abstract

In last decades, tourism development in Moldova has improved in terms of tourist flows, both as a diversification of tourism demand and tourism products. These improvements give grounds for an optimistic prognosis for the tourist industry in Moldova. Regarding this, authors revisits the phenomenon of cultural tourism in the country, in order to identify cultural tourism potential through cultural consumption among tourists, applying a special tourism survey. At the same time, there are a number of factors which may endanger sustainable development of tourism in Moldova, this is due primary by a imperfect cultural management that risks to endanger cultural heritage from the country. Another critical limitation on the development of cultural tourism is the low involvement of the population in cultural and tourist events held in the country. The study concludes that current situation calls for a more flexible and innovative approach to tourism industry development in the country.

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Keywords: Tourism; cultural tourism; cultural consumption; sustainability; cultural heritage in Moldova;

1. Introduction

Worldwide many agencies, institutions and individuals involved in economic development programs have recognized the need to help developing countries in preserving cultural resources, referring to cultural values. Restoration of historic centers provide means for social revitalization of communities and neighborhoods,

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physical access to historic buildings as an important indicator of life quality and a key factor in improving the social inclusion.

National cultural heritage should be considered an important tourist attraction in terms of intrinsic peculiarities, as well as for its continuing growth in cultural purposes, related to the history of different cultures and civilizations. In many cases, the main motivation for tourist trips is the recreation, as tourists can take advantage of their stay in a certain region, visit historical and archaeological sites, museums, attend festivals and cultural events, etc. This makes the cultural heritage an important tourist resource, increasing the tourism potential of an area. In specialized literature there are many international studies on cultural tourism (Richards, Bonink, McIntosh, Goeldner, P.Origet of Cluzeau, etc.) and its impact on economic growth. Cultural tourism appears as a type of tourism clearly differentiated from the others, especially through the motivation, and can be defined as a form of tourism mobility whose primary goal is to broaden the horizon of knowledge by discovering artistic or architectural heritage and territories.

2. Data and Methodology

Based on tourist survey, the consumer behavior of cultural tourism services in terms of perception of touristic objectives from Calarasi county has been studied in two steps. The first part of the study was focused on the visitors of cultural sites' perception. The second part was focused on identifying features and behaviors of cultural tourism consumption, which initially has been grouped into two categories: respondents from Calarași county and other respondents, including foreign tourists. The interview technique "face to face", based on a special questionnaire elaborated by the authors, was used for the cultural tourism consumption study. The main purpose of the research was to study the perception of visitors regarding cultural tourism heritage. The results of these survey are crucial for observing trends related to cultural tourism consumption in Calarasi county.

3. Analysis and findings

3.1. Background: heritage and cultural tourism

In the 20th century, the concept of heritage gains power, divided into tangible and intangible aspects and subdivisions - the movable and immovable assets, covering all areas of human interest in recognizing and preserving past and present values. Cultural heritage in many countries is seen as an important factor of quality of life, being an important source of income (Zbucnea, 2008). Many countries get income mainly from tourism activities generated by cultural heritage. The existence of an important cultural heritage from the qualitative and quantitative point of view generates many investments and leads to a large number of permanent or temporary jobs. This phenomenon leads to an increase of the local government revenue, a raise in the living standards of the inhabitants of the region. It also increases the attractiveness of the area and the number of tourists from the country and abroad.

According to OECD (2009), more than 50% of tourist activities in Europe are generated by cultural tourism and cultural heritage. This is also confirmed by U.S. Historic Preservation data (National Trust for Historic Preservation) - the increase of cultural tourism generates a number of benefits such as: creating new jobs and businesses; increasing income from taxes; diversifying the local economy; creating opportunities for partnerships; preserving the traditions and culture; generating local investments in historical monuments. The European Commission encourages travels on the continent as a tool to promote European cultural values (OECD, 2009), thus promoting cultural tourism as "*unity in diversity*". The travel through different countries

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