

Cultural Tourism– instrument of the European cultural policy

In order to prepare my speech for the Seminar regarding cultural tourism, seminar organized by the European Institute of Cultural Routes in Luxembourg on the 21st-22nd April 2005, I asked my collaborators from the Consulting Centre on European Cultural Programmes to find out the real situation of the cultural tourism in Romania: projects, proposals, theoretical studies, in other words, I wanted to know if and to which extent we can speak about coherent actions and measures. After three days of investigations they came to tell me that they hadn't found much: no projects, no studies, no policies. In order to attenuate my disappointment, they proposed opportunities that deserve to be developed and they identified exceptional premises for future initiatives.

In Romania a situation is never black or white. It is grey. Of course, we have travel agencies that include in their offers circuits, guided visits to monuments and historical sites such as the painted churches in the North of Moldavia, the sculptures of Brancusi in Targu-Jiu or the Dacian ruins of Sarmisegetuza. But allow me to say that these are not projects, they are services. But even if they are of good quality they are still a trading product. The service offered by the travel agency answers only to a more elevated demand of the clients. It does not take into consideration the creating of socio-economic devices with sustainable effects, it generates only little added value, it does not change the attitude of the local communities, it does not have as consequence the development of a possible cultural dialogue. The tourist voyage to cultural objectives comes and goes. The only thing that remains is a beautiful memory in the sentimental archive of the tourist, in the form of a photo or a film.

On the other hand, in what culture is concerned, we have to say that especially after 1996, the Ministry of Culture was actively involved in important projects of the Cultural Routes initiated by the Council of Europe being convinced that, only through cooperation with other countries, Romanian culture proves its European nature, that through a permanent exchange of spiritual values, each people promotes its identity contributing to the enrichment of the European immaterial heritage itself. In this respect, I would like to remind all of you that the route of monastic influence, pilot project within the large theme of „Democratic Citizenship”, had its conclusion in Romania in the area of the monasteries Horezu and Durau (1999). Important steps of the route „Rural Habitat” took place also in Romania (1998-1999). Romanian operators were involved in the „Wood Route”. I dare say that this active presence determined the choice of Bucharest and Sibiu as places to launch the campaign of the Council of Europe: „Europe – a common heritage” (1999).

Maybe you don't agree with me but in what I am concerned, I consider that a cultural route is an intellectual reason based on an initiative that can be proposed either in the real, geographical space or in a virtual environment, and it is not necessarily an action that belongs to cultural tourism. It can assure favourable premises for the development of a cultural tourist project, but this is not compulsory. The cultural route conceived and supported by cultural organizations is an offer meant to emphasize spiritual values, monuments, traditions, mentalities with no implication in the trading area.

Therefore I noticed that, for Romania, there is a clear separation between the cultural project and the tourist service. For the moment neither a common concept has been defined yet nor an institutional structure that allows the association of the two fields the way it was done in Hungary and Malta, for example.

All this being said, I may be asked : in the end what does cultural tourism mean? What minimal conditions are there necessary in order to state : „yes, here it is, this is a typical cultural tourism project”? I have identified at least ten. Therefore, the project of cultural tourism must be:

- an initiative based on a cultural idea
- an action that has a starting and a conclusion point
- it promotes cultural diversity and intercultural exchange from the very beginning
- it creates the device that can emphasize cultural values for groups of beneficiaries identified in advance
- it stimulates, creates and supports new working places, especially in the area of cultural industry
- it contributes to the accomplishing of a better infrastructure in the space included in the project, in other words, it takes part in the development of the region
- it is not involved only in the process of preservation and restoration of the site and monuments, but also in the process of revitalizing traditions and customs
- it is open to trans-border extension, in other words it can be not only of a regional interest but also of an European one
- it is compatible with European programmes of financial support and if it is necessary it can be an application to the European Union founding
- it takes part into the consolidation of the networks and into the cooperation of the cultural operators, it generates public-private partnerships.

Such an approach of a cultural tourist project makes it a privileged instrument of the European cultural policy, preserving at the same time the practical components that are related to the economic profit.

According to what I know, in Romania there is no organization that can assume the responsibility of such an initiative from the initiation phase to the one of accomplishment and implementation. Still, what we can do is to create the framework for these initiatives, to create the premises in order to make them come true.

Recently (21 January 2005), The Ministry of Culture and Cults has founded a new public institution: The Consulting Centre for European Cultural Programmes. The new organization is meant to offer, to the cultural operators, information and consulting regarding the opportunities to access the alternative financial resources, other than the ones the central or local authorities offer. The centre has the right to promote projects on condition they are not related only to the Programme of the European Union „Culture 2000”, for which according to the stipulations of the contract with the European Commission, the services of the Centre have to be made for free. This centre can and must make cultural tourism a priority. After a necessary evaluation of the cultural and tourist possibilities of some of the routes, the Centre has to make a pilot project that can be promoted both by travel agencies and the public authorities.

In order to do this I hope I can count on the competent support of the European Institute of Cultural Routes in Luxembourg which is, otherwise, our favourite partner. I am also happy for the support of the colleagues I met here during this seminar. I would like to believe that their answer to an invitation to come to Romania to share with us their experience is positive.

I don't think it is only by chance that this organisational adventure that opens the gates to Europe takes place 2 days before the solemn moment of the signing of the accession treaty of Romania to the European Union on the 25th April 2005 in Luxembourg!

Thank you!

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