

HERITAGE TOURISM IN THE CROSS-BORDER AREA OF SATU MARE (ROMANIA) AND SZABOLCS-SZATMÁR-BEREG (HUNGARY) COUNTIES

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to assess the prospects of heritage tourism in the cross-border area of Satu Mare and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg Counties. The two adjacent counties are bound by common historical roots, hence giving rise to an outstanding legacy. Variety and authenticity represent features that confer great value on these resources, enabling thus the development of a specific form of tourism, namely the heritage tourism. At present, the concept embodies several meanings, all of them nourishing from one idea. Regardless of their nature (tangible buildings, sites, museum objects, beliefs or traditional cuisine), heritage resources provide a special connection to the past and are perceived by the individual as possessing a genuine value. The present study has been developed in several stages. Firstly, the conducted field investigations provided the opportunity to acquire indispensable data, information and photographs, which made possible an accurate identification, inventory and classification of all sites relevant to the issue of heritage tourism. The use of QGIS 2.0 Dufour open source software provided a framework for comprising a database and also enabled the creation of graphic and cartographic representations. Furthermore, the endeavour was completed by the submission of certain scenarios regarding the evolution and development of the heritage tourism phenomenon.

Key words: heritage tourism, cross-border area, Satu Mare (Romania) / Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (Hungary) Counties, QGIS.

INTRODUCTION

Characterised by common historical roots and an obvious affinity between communities, the two counties of Satu Mare and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg encompass centuries-old heritage assets worth to be left for future generations. These values represent a major component of the region's touristic offer and,

due to the possibilities of use for tourism, might generate significant revenues. Against this background, built heritage such as fortresses, castles or churches, when endowed with certain attributes (for instance impressive dimensions, age, uniqueness, architecture) become representative elements of a certain area and are marketed as symbols.

Nowadays, heritage presents special interest for tourists becoming a “rare evidence that comes to our times from the past” (Orbasli and Woodward, 2008: 314). The complexity of the term “heritage” is derived from its numerous definitions, but as a common element we note tourists’ perception. Timothy and Boyd (2003: 2) consider that heritage comprises those “elements of the past a society wishes to keep”, inferring thus its selective character, as individuals filter heritage according to a value system that tends to change in time and space. Recent studies have revealed a more complex image, highlighting that tourists need to be emotionally linked to their own past and personal heritage (Orbasli and Woodward, 2008; Weaver, 2011).

In the case of heritage tourism, it becomes essential to underline the fact that, although heritage and cultural tourism intersect (the former being considered a subtype of the latter), differences do exist between them. For instance, heritage tourism appeals to the so-called sense of place, with origins from folklore, landscape, architecture, artefacts, namely all features and elements which define a certain place. Cultural tourism is based on the same type of experience but the sense of place is being less emphasized. The term heritage relates not only to culture or history, according to Richards (1996), there is also a relationship with society, nature and environment. Heritage tourism generally highlights the history of places and people, bringing the valuable past into the present.

In order to achieve a wider perspective on the issue of heritage, it is necessary to examine the assets which lie at its base. Today, it is generally acknowledged that heritage encompasses a diversity of resources (Timothy and Boyd, 2003; Williams, 2009): tangible immovable assets (such as historic buildings and monuments), tangible movable resources (museum objects, archives) and intangible resources (including customs, ceremonies, festivals, cultural events or beliefs). Regardless of their nature, when referring to heritage resources the attribute of authenticity plays a decisive role, as heritage tourists seek values which are genuine or rare. But, most important, this particular type of tourists detach themselves as their experience often becomes an emotional one. Poria et al. (2003) conclude that heritage tourists are more than just mere visitors who travel to a certain place to observe and admire or for educational purposes. Such travellers become aware of the site’s significance, relate to it, and consider it as part of their own heritage, experience pride and a sense of belonging.

HERITAGE CONSERVATIONS VERSUS TOURISM DEVELOPMENT – CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Nowadays, the issue of sustainable tourism development in the natural world has gained great attraction from scholars, but conserving our heritage is equally essential. If not protected by specific mechanisms, among which legislation plays a decisive role, patrimony is facing several threats. Timothy and Nyaupane (2009: 20) emphasize the importance of such conservative measures because built heritage represents “a non-renewable resource that once destroyed is gone forever”. The authors also identify several factors with negative impact: acts of vandalism, the effects of modernisation (demolition of historic buildings) and mass tourism, to which we may add negligence coming from authorities and financial constraints.

Furthermore, in the developing countries the goal of heritage conservation is difficult to attain, facing many socio-economic and political challenges. Some of the most frequent ones might be summarized as follows (Timothy and Nyaupane, 2009):

- Insufficient budgets to support protection and management efforts, tendency to overlook the needs of remote rural areas and small communities when conservation funds are distributed;
- Private ownership becomes a problem when privately owned buildings of historical importance are neglected due to owners’ lack of interest or finances required by restoration and preservation;
- Illegal digging and looting nourishing from the desire to possess or trade valuable artifacts;
- Inappropriate materials, lack of skilled and qualified personnel for restoration works;
- Conflict and war can also cause an irreparable loss;
- Destruction of old, valuable buildings on account of modernisation and development;
- Lack of cooperation, overlooking the fact that collaborative efforts between stakeholders are vital for effective heritage management.

In spite of all the challenges that need to be dealt with, heritage conservation also provides important opportunities. It is generally agreed that tourism is a promising economy sector and a significant source of income, improving the quality of life. Provided that heritage tourism development is planned according to a strict set of principles, this activity will improve living standards for local people and create economic benefits. It also stimulates economy in rural and peripheral areas, revitalises urban areas through renovation of their symbolic buildings and makes them more attractive for investments. Heritage protection and conservation contribute to creating a sense of pride and awareness of history and culture (Prentice, 2005).

THE PROSPECTS OF HERITAGE TOURISM IN SATU MARE AND SZABOLCS-SZATMÁR-BEREG COUNTIES

The present study is concentrated on the two joined counties of Satu Mare (Romania) and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (Hungary) with focus on the rich cultural heritage of the region. Traces of history are entwined with local legends, rich folklore, hospitable people and traditional cuisine, elements with great potential for tourism development. However, these values are little known to the general public but, if included in thematic tourism packages and promoted properly, they can become an attractor for drawing tourists to the area.

In this respect, the present study is an endeavour to identify and complete a typology of the most valuable heritage components, which represent a favourable premise of tourism development in the area. These resources are different in terms of their nature and age, over the years fulfilling multiple functions or undergoing certain transformations. When examining the heritage values in the counties of Satu Mare and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg it is necessary to highlight the diversity of its resources:

- Tangible heritage comprises sites and monuments with historical, cultural, artistical importance: archeological evidence, fortresses, castles, manor houses, churches and monasteries, museums;
- Intangible heritage: festivals, music and dance, oral traditions, crafts, customs, traditional cuisine recipes, all being fragile elements but of utmost importance for the cultural identity of the region.

The oldest evidence which provides information about the region's history was brought to light by archaeological excavations. A remarkable legacy was unearthed at Medieșu-Aurit, a unique treasure of Dacian pottery kilns dating from 2nd–4th centuries AD. The Satu Mare County museum has restored and permanently exhibited a Dacian pottery atelier. Thus, visitors are given the opportunity to visualise the entire process of burning ceramic items.

Proofs of history and cultural identity are provided by numerous monuments. Specific to some troubled times, *fortresses* have perished under siege and therefore, such buildings are few in number. Only three have been preserved and included in the tourist circuit of the two counties. Age and historical value foreground the earth fortification from Szabolcs, built during the 10th century, one of the few fortifications of this type still preserved in the Great Plain. The core of the city's cultural life is represented by the fortress of Kisvárd, dating back to the 15th century, where The Across the Border Hungarian Theatre Festival is being annually held. Rich in history and local legends, the fortress in Ardud was first attested in 1277, destroyed and rebuilt various times over the centuries. The Neo-gothic tower was recently restored, the maze of cellars still nourishes legends and appeals to adventurers, the high ground fortress becoming thus a true legacy.

Castles, built during medieval times for defense purposes, present a great attraction for tourists due to their attributes (Cocean and Dezsi, 2009), namely novel location and specific characteristics correlated with its main function: defense walls, battlements, towers, buttresses, etc. Similar to fortresses, the edifices belonging to this category were built in different times, faced destructions and consecutive restorations. Unfortunately, the research has revealed several abandoned buildings and castles, consigned to oblivion despite their historical importance (for instance the Lonyai Renaissance castle from Medieșu-Aurii – Satu Mare County and the Dessewffy castle from Tiszavasvári – Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County are ruined and urgent restoration measures impose). Nevertheless, in a cross-border context, certain castles have been revived and included in the tourist offer. Recently restored, the Károlyi castle from Carei is now hosting the town's museum, its exhibitions presenting valuable historic interiors and the town's history. Another outstanding example in this respect is the 19th century Andrássy castle from Tiszadob, which bears the imprint of classical and romantic styles. Its garden and wide hedge maze, as well as the cultural events hosted here, enhance the touristic attractiveness of the castle.

Other restored castles inserted in the region's tourist offer also host museums or other cultural institutions. In this case, the value of the exhibits is enriched by the architectural value of the building: the baroque castle of Tomcsány from Vásárosnamény (hosting the Bereg Museum), the Vay castle from Vaja (permanent exhibitions dedicated to Rákóczi's fight for independence and the Adam Vay collection), the Lónyay castle from Tuzsér (an art monument famous for the baroque frescoes adorning the banquet hall) and the Cserey-Fischer baroque castle from Táshad (housing the town's museum).

The travellers arriving in the area are encouraged to visit the *manor houses*, the most representative were built by landowners or local gentry. The Mudrány manor from Szabolcs, an architectural monument from the 18th century, hosts an interactive exhibition of furnishings and unveils its guests aspects regarding the everyday life on the mansion. Along with the castle from Carei, the mansion in Szabolcs has been promoted in the context of cross-border tourism, raising the interest of community and stakeholders. The main goal of the project was to strengthen social and cultural cohesion by joint efforts to preserve and promote cultural heritage in the Romanian-Hungarian border area.

When it comes to the artistical monuments of the region, witnesses of the passage of time are also the ecclesiastic buildings. Their importance lies essentially in the role played by *churches and monasteries* in the spiritual life of the community. Secondly, according to Cocean and Dezsi (2009), their tourist attractiveness is linked to the architectural style, the building materials, painting and decorations, to which other features may be added, for instance: age, significance, novelty, uniqueness.

In the case of religious touristic attractions it is essential to note that these are also components of our heritage, as several churches are under historic building protection. The wooden churches from the northern part of the Carpathian Basin present a special interest which lies in the unique traditions of church architecture. The Western-European architectural style meets the Eastern-European one and its orthodox influence is materialised in the wooden architecture. The small churches with wooden bell towers, richly decorated ceilings and carved pulpits, built in the 14th and 15th centuries, are reminders of bygone ages in Hungary. Thus, the churches from Tákos, Lónya, Csaroda, Márokpapi or Nyírbátor, due to their remarkable heritage value, have been submitted on the Tentative List and considered for inscription on the World Heritage List.

Associated with art and architecture and also complementing them, the fresco represents “one of the most lasting and spectacular manifestations of the medieval art” (Iegar, 2010: 4). The recent parament research in the Satmar region have revealed mural paintings, the oldest layers dating back to the end of the 13th century, as in the case of the Calvinist church from Csaroda. Other monuments which preserve frescoes (dating from 14th – 16th centuries) are the churches from Berea, Baktalórántháza, Csaroda, Laskod, Lónya, Nagyar, Ófehértó, Tarpa. The representations unveil allegorical scenes and floral motifs, highlighted through a palette of neutral colours: Elisabeth of Hungary caring for the sick, the legend of King Ladislau, Saint George killing the dragon, the Crucifixion scene, the Last Judgement, the Last Supper, the Virgin Mary praying, portaits of saints, etc. The parament research into the religious edifices of the region have returned these original mural paintings to our common heritage and, at the same time, encouraged new discoveries. However, these churches present a great importance not only in terms of heritage but they also represent significant religious attractions, as their visit might initiate a spiritual experience.

In a similar way, the Greek-Catholic monastery from Máriapócs comprises a double significance. The largest pilgrimage centre in Hungary, it is perceived as a sacred space of a Divine revelation, shielding the weeping Blessed Virgin's ikon. The sanctuary is rich in events and history, it has become a National Place of Worship and a part of Hungary's heritage.

The region's patrimony is complemented by several ecclesiastical monuments such as: the Calvinist Church from Acâș (a Romanesque basilica, dating from the 13th century), the Calvinist Church from Csenger (14th century, preserving the characteristics of the gothic style), the baroque churches from Satu Mare, Carei, Nyíregyháza and the wooden churches from Lechinșa, Stâna or Corund. The latter has preserved expressive mural paintings, depicting suggestive scenes: the Passion of the Christ, the Last Judgement and the representation of Lucifer.

When a certain site is referred to as singular, it will certainly arouse interest and curiosity. It is the case of the unique Calvinist cemetery in Szatmárcseke, with nearly

600 wooden graves in forms of human heads or boats. According to certain authors (Veszprémi, 2011), this unusual funeral custom probably originates in the days when the village was flooded and the dead were taken to the cemetery in boats.

Exhibiting objects of artistic, cultural and historical interest, *museums and collections* become a landmark for heritage tourists, gathering the most representative pieces for the spiritual richness of a community. The region's cultural and ethnic diversity is reflected by the various types of museums: art, history and archeology (Satu Mare, Carei, Nyíregyháza), ethnography (Negrești-Oaș, Bogdand, Sóstó), preserving traditional trades (for example the Ceramics Museum from Vama) and customs specific to different ethnic groups (Hungarians, Svab, the Moși people) that inhabit the area. They each have preserved their longstanding traditions, values and lifestyles, enriching the region's heritage.

Compared to a museum or collection, the *rural culture* is alive and presents a growing attraction in the context of the stressful urban life (Ciangă, 2007). Despite modern influences, traditional values have been maintained in the form of:

- craftsmanship such as pottery, weaving or woodworking, which express the artistic skills of local artisans and at present are brought to life during festivals or in ethnographic museums;
- traditional architecture and installations: rustic households preserve a rich inventory of textiles, ceramics, furniture, costumes and items for home use. This category also includes functional items, for instance water-mills (Túristvándi), dry mills (Tarpa);
- shepherding with its various customs and rituals, some of them revived during the folk celebration from Huta-Certeze (“Sâmbra Oilor”);
- cuisine (traditional dishes and drinks) is an integral part of local culture, representing the culinary heritage of the region: home-made food prepared by using traditional recipes (collected in the Szatmar Traditional Cookbook) and plum brandy contribute to creating the region's brand;
- traditional costumes, dance and music are revived through folklore festivals;
- Christmas-time rituals, religious and local customs specific to different ethnic groups, among which we enumerate the traditions of the Svabs in Satu Mare County, namely Kirchwieh (a celebration held in order to honour the patron saint of a church) and Funke (a burning pyre meant to chase away dark spirits, a local custom held before the Lent).
- Human Living Treasure: represented by the talented bearer of Oaș Land authentic traditions, Finta Floare from Negrești-Oaș. One of the thirteen Romanians given this official recognition of their skills, she continues to transmit her knowledge to younger generations, her house becoming a collection of hundreds of traditional artefacts.

Figure 1. The map of heritage tourism assets in Satu Mare and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg Counties

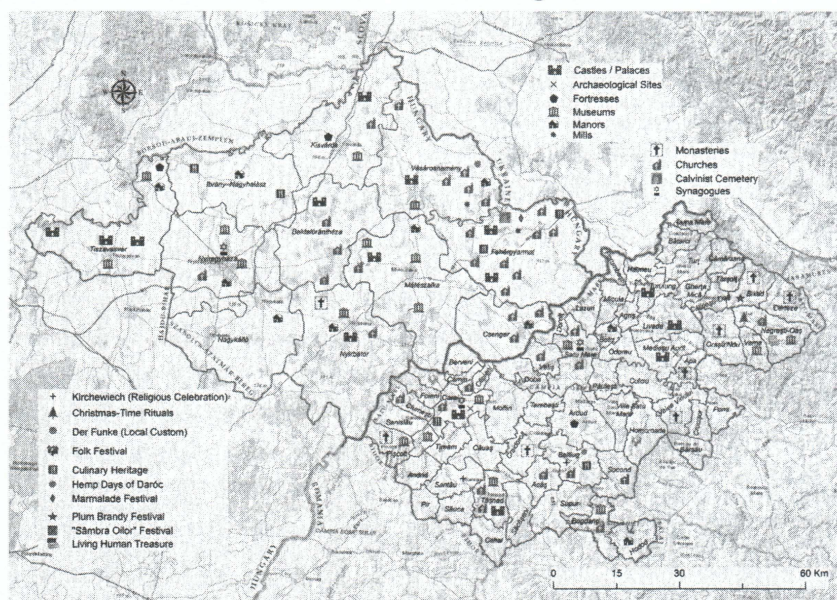


Figure 1 reflects the distribution on the most significant heritage assests comprised by the two counties of Satu Mare (Romania) and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (Hungary). A higher concentration of cultural edifices is encountered in the case of urban settlements (Nyíregyháza, Szabolcs, Nyírbátor, Satu Mare respectively Carei), whereas the most significant feature of the rural space is the authentic preservation (intangible heritage).

The conducted study has revealed that the cultural edifices present a diversified structure in the matter of their touristic purpose. We note a significant share of ecclesiastical buildings, followed by cultural and historical assets (castles, museums and mannors). Therefore, the existence of a well-preserved patrimony, bearing unique or novelty features (the romanesque basilica from Acâș, the Calvinist cemetery in Szatmárcseke, the churches from the Satmar region conserving medieval frescoes), as well as a set of genuine intangible values confer sufficient premises to develop an integrated heritage cross-border tourism in the area.

CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION AND ITS ROLE IN PROMOTING HERITAGE VALUES

In the cross-border context heritage tourism has become an exponent of dialogue between the Romanian – Hungarian communities. This dialogue is restricted not only to partnerships between the institutions involved in cross-border projects but

it also requires collaboration between specialists from different fields of activity: tourism, marketing, art history and patrimony. Another essential element refers to the promotion of those values which are truly representative for the area and contribute to creating its image as a tourist destination. Against this background, the joint efforts to promote the heritage values become fully justified and a premise for further initiatives. Cultural openness and cooperation have begun to materialise through joint programmes and funded projects, which are a viable solution for heritage tourism, as well.

According to the Hungary – Romania Cross-Border Cooperation Program 2007–2013, ten funded projects include within their focus the cultural heritage of the region. To be noted that 85 % of the projects budget is financed by the European Regional Development Fund (Table 1). As a result, several objectives have been restored, included in touristic circuits and marketed using specific tools: guides, brochures, maps and websites. Along with the presentation of the heritage assets and the suggested touristic routes, general information for visitors is also provided (accommodation, financial affairs, borders, traffic information).

Table 1. Cross-border projects with implications on heritage tourism

Project acronym	Project title	Total budget (€)	ERDF awarded (€)	Project status
Patrimonium	The cross-border utilization of the common cultural legacy	526 648	447 650.8	finalized 2010
Route of churches	Route of medieval churches in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and Satu Mare	89 138,8	75 767.98	finalized 2011
Castellum	Organisation of interactive exhibitions in the castle of Carei and the manor-house at Szabolcs and their marketing in their marketing in the context of crossborder tourism	1 010 231	858 696.35	finalized 2011
SAMCULT	The village in the Satu Mare and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg region – past, present and common future	134 134	113 946.42	finalized 2010

Gastro-Tour	Gastronomic journey in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and Satu Mare Counties	148 760	121 802.32	finalized 2012
Patrimonium 2	Common cultural heritage development in the cross-border region through workshops, conferences and research	487 200	414 120	finalized 2011
LESZ	Legends of Szatmár	152 220	124 286.18	finalized 2012
Cult-tour	Realization, extension and rehabilitation of museal sites Satu Mare and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg Counties, in the context of cross-border tourism	595 621	506 227.85	in progress
CB destination	Cooperation between Nyírbátor and Carei for joined development as cross-border tourism destination	1 536 230	1 305 795.5	in progress
Mary's trail	Protection and presentation of mutual religious tourism values	1 384 574	1 176 887.9	in progress

Source: Adapted from List of beneficiaries available
at http://huro-cbc.eu/en/financed_projects/

CONCLUSION

At present, heritage tourism in the analysed area is aligned with an ascendent trajectory, bearing enough favourable premises for the further tourism development in a cross-border context. The region comprises a great variety of heritage assets; the preserved tangible values as well as the perpetuated intangible inheritance are authentic resources of great importance for tourism. In order to attract visitors a set of specific measures is required, for instance informative and promotional materials; in this respect a viable strategy would be represented by the shared marketing of the two counties. The collaborative efforts have already been established in the sense that several thematic touristic routes were connected.

As long as financial instruments are available, cross-border cooperation in the field of tourism and heritage should be encouraged. This process needs to take into account the involvement of several stakeholders as their joined efforts and interests will lead to more effective actions. In the present case, both counties share complementary values, similar objectives and face the same threats regarding the preservation of their heritage. Joint programmes have aimed at raising public awareness regarding the benefits cross-border cooperation may offer, the implications in the economic growth and the increase of tourist attractiveness of the borderline area. As further investigations were unfolded, it has become clear that the study area requires additional sources to generate economic benefits for the community. Heritage tourism has found enough authentic values in this region to ensure its responsible development.

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