

CULTURAL HERITAGE ENTREPRENEURSHIP: KEY FACTORS FOR REGIONAL SUCCESS

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Abstract: Cultural Heritage has had its ups and downs since the very start of organized tourism at the Bulgarian Black Sea Coast. This paper focuses on a very brief history of Cultural Heritage interpretation in order to draw its path dependence, and the repetitive key factors for success that are critical for modern Cultural Heritage Entrepreneurship. Arguments and data are drawn from the theory of social entrepreneurship and previous interdisciplinary research on the Intercultural Communication as a service competence. The results of the key factors will be the main topic of the presentation.

Keywords: cultural heritage interpretation, path dependence, social entrepreneurship.

INTRODUCTION

When Bulgaria entered the mass tourism market, the country was not entirely unprepared, as its tourist traditions were looking back at developments before that. Yet, the social and political restructurings in the 90s led to shifting results within heritage entrepreneurship, opening possibilities for new entrants. The main focus of this paper are Tourist Guide Associations and the key factors for success, drawn from a previous larger research on Intercultural Communication and Tourist Guiding services, thanks to the positive path-dependence of an open and cosmopolitan yet typical local Black Sea culture. Another reason for this analysis is the deeply rooted reverence for culture and education, after all the country celebrated 65 years of UNESCO participation in 2021 which sometimes toggles into service quality. In order to understand the logic of heritage entrepreneurship and its ups and downs, we need to devolve into patterns of path dependence and alternative benefits for future regional development.

The very outset of guided tours in Bulgaria in the modern terms of democratization of tourism has to be pinpointed at the turn of the last century with a vast involvement of the cultural elite. This fixated touristic experience and internal organized tourism to the positive image of the responsible and erudite traveller. Among the founders of organized domestic tourism in Bulgaria were writers and influential figures like Ivan Vazov and Aleko Konstantinov, as exemplified by the outing of the Urvich Club in 1889 and the establishment of the Bulgarian Tourist Club in 1895.¹ Their tourist guide books and astute social understanding established a special attitude towards nature that spilled over towards a similar appreciation of cultural landscapes. The first Bulgarian tourist Union with its voluntary work defined some of the main cultural features of Bulgarian society, with an inherent openness and democratic access of tourist resources. Similarly, to the early 20th century, organized trips and excursions within the country continued to be a form of significant social and cultural experience for Bulgarians in the second half of the 20th century. With the advent of mass tourism, the Bulgarian Black Sea Coast was exposed to the new trends of mass tourism, but in reality, the tourism industry was carefully managed with controlled use of resources and rent seeking. For example, accommodation places were engineered with a generous allowance of 18 square meters beach per host, centralized management took care of the additional services and rent seeking from abroad was possible under stern conditions. Heritage interpretation was also carefully managed. Special colleges formed the professional skills of new entrants into

¹ Plyakov 2014, 13-14.

the tourist services, tourist guides, ski teachers, animators, hotel and restaurant staff were picked among their graduates of the International Tourism Institute (IMT) and College of Tourism (VINS), and after a further hands-on experience were turned into typical European professionals. Bulgaria joined the UNWTO early on, even before Italy. The top Bulgarian sea destination, the Ancient City of Nessebar made it to the World Heritage Convention List of UNESCO in 1983. More importantly processes were carefully considered, and the Heritage Interpretation was split into two different markets, one being more propagandistic and loaded with statistics and industrial information for the other countries from the Warsaw treaty, and the other being consumer oriented with services appropriate for the so called "Western tourists". Most importantly that flexibility of interpretation was further influenced by the somewhat more particular cultural heritage of Varna, being a city that reinvented itself also at the turn of the century thanks to many foreigners and internal and external immigrants. Now it is acknowledged that the international tourist service at the Bulgarian Black Sea assumed its present form through organized tours around Varna and Nessebar.²

Similar to other smaller countries, guides acted as tourist guides and tourist managers on shorter one day trips. Some of them developed their own proposals for successful tours. In the 80s that was a longer trip from Varna at the Sea to Silistra at the Danube. The same tourist guide, Elka Zhelezova, who had a pivotal role for the establishment of the first Tourist Guiding Association, proposed in the 90s the Traditional Evening visit during a village tour, where visitors had a genuine encounter with the homeowner, who often prepared a local meal. This is the period where a very much oriented towards Intercultural Communication, and more complex than the professional European standard, heritage interpretation became delineated. The most striking example of the depth of intercultural methodology was maybe the differentiated approach towards the "Western and Eastern" Germans, with a much more informative and detailed interpretation for the latter.

During the years before the transition to republican rule, working as a tour guide or tour representative was an elite and socially recognized occupation, related to the representative role and responsibilities. Another difference was lower tourist seasonality and more cultural tourism at the wings of the season.

In the 1990s, as a result of the wholesale restructuring of the existing tourist industry, mainly by a fragmentation of the bigger tourist congregations like "Golden Sands", its management was also restructured and thus the teams responsible for tourist guiding services met their gradual disintegration. Similar were the institutional issues as well as the problems with the lack of licensing.³ Now there is a state policy on tourist training, licensing and qualifications since the establishment of an independent Ministry of Tourism in 2014. In the interim period several non-state actors acted upon the same issues. Protection of collective interests of tourist guides and the uniting of their efforts to raise the prestige of the profession, as well as training in heritage interpretation was enhanced by three main non-governmental organizations. The biggest now is the Association of Bulgarian Tour Guides with headquarters in Sofia, established 2008.⁴ The Union of Bulgarian Tourist Guides in Varna, established 1990, as well as the registered in 2014 in Burgas, the Southeast Union of Tour Guides "Vanya Raykova". All of them are influential on the Sea Coast, but for brevity here is a short explanation of the role of the oldest Association as an actor involved in social entrepreneurship and heritage interpretation, based on interviews concluded for a previous project.

The Union of Tour Guides in Bulgaria (UEB) is a non-profit association. As such it cannot offer a pricing list, and due to that its internet site that is currently a name list of association members cannot offer a full-fledged marketing tool. Moreover, the Association cannot propose a professional standard for different services and pricing, nor fight for a European remuneration for a service that has to abide by European standardization, and is mainly offered to visitors from counties with higher standards and expectations. Yet, the oldest branch organization registered in 1990 under the Non-Profit Legal Entities Act, was a project deemed to protect consumers and tourist guides, exactly by offering high standard and boutique services. Tour Operators were referring to the early years of the Association as a very useful actor, with clear policy in pricing and professional standards that delivered the services it promised. Currently, the Union operates as a voluntary association of individual members, natural and legal persons who accept its statutes and are willing

² Neshkov, Kazandjieva 2016, 207-208.

³ Neshkov, Kazandjieva 2016, 208-210.

⁴ AEB 2018.

to contribute to the achievement of its objectives.⁵ As of 14th December 2018 the Union changed its registration under the Tourism Act (Art. 52, para. 3) as a professional tourist association (Certificate No. 36 / 25.10.2013), and made some other changes in Statute later on. In addition, the image of the Union is polished by the honorary members who are of special merit to tourism. Among them there are professors at the University of Economics-Varna, archaeologists and other prominent tourism figures. Members of the Union are mainly tour guides from Varna, but there are representatives of other cities, such as Plovdiv, Sofia, Shumen, Burgas. In its activities the Varna based Union is guided by its Statute adopted at the General Delegate Assembly the 2nd of December 2002 and amended by a decision of the General Delegate Assembly on 01. 05. 2008 and the Code of Ethics of the Tourist Guide, which establishes binding rules of conduct in the implementation of all professional activities, and defending the prestige of the profession. Issues that this Association seeks to solve are among others, the problem of pronounced seasonality and lack of trained professionals in the peak summer days, and the control of gray practitioners. In 2018-2019, the UEB organized a number of media appearances and a conference on topics that the Board of the organization considered a priority. Yet, since the establishment of the National Registry of tourist Guides membership base is dwindling, which is another argument for more flexibility in heritage interpretation and tourism in general.

KEY FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

The success of heritage entrepreneurs must be related to a fine tuned balance of all represented actors. The key issues covered during the most successful years of the examined Association were based on a well-represented local interest that established a positive bridging to world practices.

Firstly, the Union of Bulgarian Tourist Guides used the positive development of path dependence within the tourist industry and worked on the high end of the tourist guiding services, which was based on Intercultural Communication Competences. The emotional labour and bigger strain were offset by a positive image within the industry and long term strategy for a fair remuneration. Meanwhile, the abidance to the world standards of professional ethics was an integral part of the good will it amassed, and thus most probably this first Union sparked in a way the establishment of other similar associations. The clearest cut element of social entrepreneurship was the added value for the local community, benchmarking for others to follow, and the provision of a missing state service, namely licensing.

Secondly, the Varna-based Union had a key role as a platform for collective representation of independent entrepreneurs and for the creation of the modern professional culture. This type of heritage interpretation has in its heart the protection of the community, the local spirit and culture as well as the careful use of its resources. This is inherently sustainable.

Thirdly, the positive image towards other actors in the tourist industry and positive outcomes in the practice, were based on complex information management, knowledge sharing and ongoing training. Currently, training is restricted only internally within formats that fall outside the statute of institutions that offer professional training. In the meantime, state regulations are requiring new entrants to the profession to have hands-on experience next to a registered Tourist Guide.

Lastly, visitor-oriented guided tours are a changing service, but rooted on Intercultural Communication Competences, thus there is a big threat to already established successful practices to be cannibalized by new trends from abroad. For that reason, Tourist Guide associations have to be boosted in their efforts for marketing, income generation, and defending best practices. One way to do that is to ease the competence transfer for these non-state social and heritage entrepreneurs.

CULTURAL SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND TOURISM-BASED SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The gap in the social development of the society is closing due to special programs that support and encourage the social entrepreneurship in many fields for solidarity and social economy.⁶ Social enterprises

⁵ SEB 2018.

⁶ Martinov 2019a.

are operator of the social economy, offering innovative solutions to achieve social goals, and solve the problems of social exclusion and unemployment (OECD).

Cultural social entrepreneurs create cultural products (visual art, music, films) that offer new ways of understanding social issues (IED). Cultural social enterprises operate in their communities and need knowledge, skills and resources: proposals, financial management; funding grants, donations, reimbursable funding; relationships with donors and sources of support; networks; technical requirements; energy and time to complete the project (Cultural Placemaking Grassroots Social Enterprise).

Social enterprises, based in Arts support social and economic development and create social benefits for marginalized young people who trade in creative products or services. The main goals are economic activity, artistic practice, social purpose, interacting with a complex network of stakeholders. The interviews show hard managerial work of young people to create high quality art products, generate income and create a socially inclusive and supportive environment. Managers using the social enterprise model are critical of the neoliberal forces in which they operate.⁷

Social enterprises express responsible tourism, being financially self-sustaining and contribute to social and environmental goals such as poverty reduction or protection of environment.⁸ The success factors of all social enterprises in tourism, regardless of the main activity or operating model, are related to leadership, strategy and organizational culture, including a clear market orientation that balances financial, social or environmental goals. Tourism-based social entrepreneurship plays a role in adopting financially sustainable strategies to develop tourism, achieving social goals, especially for local communities.⁹ Some social entrepreneurship initiatives in tourism focus on practical experience or mechanisms that lead to greater success, but are often considered a panacea for various social problems.¹⁰

Romania presents its social enterprises based on the needs of their members and the communities in which they are created.¹¹

The practical issues, impacts and sources of innovation related to the creation of social enterprise ecosystems, which form the basis of a local network of communities located in the Danube Delta region in Romania (a local ecosystem developed by a local social enterprise), were studied.¹² In result are mapped the links that make up the social enterprise ecosystem, practical problems and impacts on the tourism business in the Danube basin region.

Tourism-related businesses in Mexico often have a social purpose, not only for economic growth, but also for meeting the emerging socio-cultural needs of Mexican communities. Transnational social entrepreneurs are shaping the character of development where networking and trust are key to the sustainability of their ideas.¹³ National identity, global understanding and transnational practices are needed to position transnational tourism social entrepreneurs in a broader sociocultural, economic, and political context instead of individual engagement.

At present, some Social Enterprises are starting their activities in the field of tourism. Some of them are focused on the disabled people, while others made farms and touristic houses in pretty villages in Bulgaria, thus extending the tourist niche to new destinations and services. Such Social enterprises are: Sun Camp Farm (village of Tankovo, Haskovo region), Safari Adventure (Velingrad), Social Enterprise Social Travel (Sofia), Time Travel (Ugarchin) (Social enterprise to KK Diplomat EOOD).

Similar Social Enterprises Startups, recently founded, are active also in Romania: VRUUM DECKS (Timișoara, Romania), Ruuts.travel (Bucharest, Romania) and HELLO MOTUM (Bucharest, Romania) for green transport alternatives.

⁷ McQuilten et al. 2020.

⁸ von der Weppen, Cochrane 2012.

⁹ Dahles et al. 2020.

¹⁰ Wang, Rasoolimanesh, Kunasekaran 2022.

¹¹ Lambriu, Petrescu 2016.

¹² Els, Kane 2017.

¹³ Clausen 2017.

We can expect that the impact of Social Enterprises in Tourism will increase in the near future, combining the tourist business with the social cause, thus extending the possibility to travel and enjoy different destinations, also for people with disabilities or limited income. The potential of the Balneary Tourism in Bulgaria at present is underestimated.

Especially for the low-income countries, the social enterprise is a successful model to generate employment and a mean to reduce poverty and social exclusion at a local and global level. A successful social enterprise is a good example of doing business, generates income and social impact, a good solution for the future of the enterprise.¹⁴

Romania tourism policies

According to the Tourism Satellite Account, the direct contribution of tourism to GDP in 2017 was 2.8% of the total GDP, and the tourism sector directly supported 373.074 jobs. The 2018 National Tourism Development Strategy was supported by the World Bank, in collaboration with the UN World Tourism Organization. In 2018 was launched a travel voucher scheme for employees to encourage domestic tourism and tackle seasonality. The travel can hold a maximum value of the equivalent of EUR 300 per employee. The National Tourism Development Strategy for Romania by 2030 is focused on the unique cultural and natural heritage, and world-class customer service, with key priorities on tourism sites which are insufficiently developed and difficult to access, and on the higher-value tourists in international markets, as well as on the Balneary Tourism.¹⁵

Cultural Heritage Entrepreneurship Projects

Cultural heritage entrepreneurship in South Eastern Europe countries is participating in the Sagittarius project (EU-7). Attention is paid to the contribution to economic recovery and sustainable development, and barriers associated with: lack of financial sources; market access and innovation; intellectual property rights; education and training.¹⁶ A cross-country comparison of the Cultural Heritage Entrepreneurship at EU-7 and EU-27 levels reveals a number of difficulties in the period 2009-2012. The importance of cultural heritage is determined by the complexity and diversity of the existing form of cultural property, as well as a public/private good or services. Capital is determined by the relationship between cultural value and economic value, where assets are contributing to economic growth, wealth and quality of life.

Economically oriented hybrid cultural heritage enterprises seek to profit through various public-private partnership schemes, while socially oriented hybrids aim to increase social education and well-being of the population at the micro, mezzo and macro levels. In China and Russia, 72.7% of the cultural heritage hybrid enterprises are economically oriented.

Particular attention is paid to the key factors for strengthening cultural heritage entrepreneurship in South Eastern Europe in terms of access to finance and the market; innovation, knowledge and intellectual property law; education and training network and international cooperation.¹⁷ The complexity and diversity of cultural heritage in South Eastern Europe countries require the effective implementation of proven strategies at local, regional, national and European levels, based on a more efficient use of internal and external funding sources.

"Smart Accelerators of Cultural Heritage Entrepreneurship" Programme 2014-2020 (INTERREG VB Central Europe)

Local communities co-develop cultural heritage, where citizen participation is essential for economic and social well-being. Cultural crowdfunding is a tool for social inclusion and participation, a way to raise funds, a type of management, as well as new forms of income and profit for a cultural institution. Training include: territorial development and museum networks; legislation on cultural heritage; cultural

¹⁴ Martinov 2019b.

¹⁵ OECD Tourism Statistics Database.

¹⁶ Zaman 2015.

¹⁷ Zaman 2015.

institutions, social integration and economic development; acquisition; participation of citizens in the management of cultural heritage.¹⁸

"Smart Accelerators for Creative Heritage Entrepreneurship" aims to develop a Central European model, in which theatres, festivals, museums and galleries are cultural engines that mobilize and energize small creative businesses. The main goal of the Programme is to develop and implement comprehensive local development strategies to accelerate creative entrepreneurship within and around cultural heritage, the role of cultural and creative industries in regional development (Smart Accelerators of Cultural Heritage Entrepreneurship). Promoted is also the cross-sectoral collaboration with other industries and services, especially in the field of digital technologies.

CONCLUSIONS

Tourist Guide Associations may not be viewed as actors at the heart of Heritage Interpretation and Heritage Entrepreneurship, but they provide for the key factors needed for success, namely for authenticity, complexity, professional standards oriented towards visitors with time flexibility, the protection of local resources and without local community. As the Black Seas region was always openly cosmopolitan, and welcoming for so many cultures without losing its own Identity there are many lessons about regional complexities

¹⁸ Interreg Central Europe 2021.

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