EXPLOITING THE NATIONAL HERITAGE THROUGH TOURISTIC ACTIVITIES

BASED ON GEOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION SYSTEM APPLICATIONS

Gabriel Cristian Sabou
Scientific Coordinator: Prof. PhD Puiu Nistoreanu

Cultural heritage is recognized for its economic potential and for the contribution to the development of communities. As the world undergoes a rapid process of change, especially through globalization, it is necessary to act sustainable in all areas of activity, exploitation of heritage representing a path for economic, social and spiritual development of society. First of all, the heritage of a nation has a strong educational role, because it is a carrier of information from the past; secondly, it has an economic role, because it attracts visitors and tourists. The revenues from touristic activities are the premises for a sustainable heritage management.

Sustainable heritage tourism involves finding that harmony between economic competitiveness, nature, culture, history, architecture heritage preservation and the environment, as this equilibrium will protect and exploit the heritage assets by the next generations.

The first part of the paper comprises an analysis of the current state of knowledge about *tourism, heritage and the effects it generates on the socio-economic environment of a nation,* as well as *a review of the most successful models of sustainable heritage exploitation* implemented in countries having developed heritage tourism policies. Also, in this part, there are identified methods, principles and key indicators that define sustainable and successful heritage management, with benefic effects on the economy, the population and the environment. The literature review moves further on to analyzing Geographic Information System (GIS) applications in connection to sustainable heritage management and heritage tourism, such as virtual reality, augmented reality, recommended systems, location based services and content based services etc. These applications facilitate the provision of necessary information during a journey to improve the touristic heritage experience. Also, they improve the learning and educational processes about the symbolism and the relevance of the heritage assets, contributing to a unique visiting experience.

In the second part there were analyzed the results of the *two researches.* The first one, qualitative, focus group based, was developed with the purpose of identifying the perception of experts and authorities about sustainable heritage management through tourism, in connection with the information society we live in. The second research, quantitative, aimed at identifying the behavioral particularities of heritage tourists, as well as the utility of various GIS applications in heritage tourism. The results of these researches are the inputs for creating a sustainable heritage exploiting through tourism and GIS based applications model. A particular application of this model is performed further on for promoting and exploiting the heritage assets of Baia Mare city.

As a conclusion, finding the balance between protection, preservation and restoration of heritage, on the one hand, and its exploiting through tourism, on the other hand, is a real challenge. In order to maintain this equilibrium, Information Technology and Communications and, in particular, Geographic Information System, have proven to be of great use for authorities, communities and tourists.