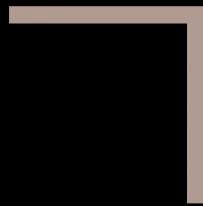


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CULTURAL HERITAGE AND POLICIES FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

Abstract: In the paper I analyze from ethnological point of view the processes of (re)construction of cultural heritage and traditions in local aspect as a culture politic and mechanism for economic revival of undeveloped border regions, and as a way into sustainable local development. I pay attention to usage of cultural heritage as a resource for the touristic industry. I examine the contrast and balance between “bottom-up approach” and “up-bottom approach” The center of my interest is concrete region – Municipality of Tran – where the use of culture heritage as a resource is still in inceptive stage: that will facilitate us to examine the processes in their progress.

Key words: cultural heritage, cultural politics, cultural tourism, local development.

Cultural heritage, which is involved and presented in various projects, is more and more often seen as a way to improve the environment that we inhabit, as well as the quality of life; during the last decades European countries have turned towards maintaining cultural policies, which seek the effect of decentralization of authority, which seek to achieve sustainable local development. Cultural policies facilitate social and economic programmes and have been included among the strategies for sustainable development. The main subject of this text is precisely cultural heritage, as well as cultural tourism, which is related to it, both used in order to attain sustainable local development.

I have examined the problem of cultural heritage from an ethnological point of view. I will take into consideration what is happening in a specific region, where using cultural heritage as a resource, is still in its initial stage; where recognizing it and turning it into industry by means of using it to develop cultural tourism has not happened yet. In spite of this and in fact precisely because of this, the example will let us take into consideration some issues connected with cultural heritage, cultural policies, and cultural industries. The place I am going to report on is Municipality of Tran¹.

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¹ Tran Municipality is located in Western Bulgaria, and the central town in the municipality – Tran – is about 80 km away from the capital city of Bulgaria, Sofia, and only a few kilometers away from Serbia. The hill and mountain terrain, the large temperature amplitudes and the short vegetation period impede the development of effective agriculture. During the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, the local population's main occupation was stock-breeding, which was supported by farming, and a large part of the male population joined in seasonal migration processes: these were the builders groups of the famous Tran builders, who provided construction work services and effected repairs in

The Tran Case: Within the sphere that is of interest to us – culture, cultural policies and tourism, there is no plenty of main actors – the Municipality, the Chitalishte¹ “Gjurga Pindzurova”, the Foundation “Dr. Stamen Grigorov”, the Foundation “Petar Gigov and the Businci Ceramics”, a non-governmental organization (Local Action Group-Tran), which was founded in 2003 under the Project for Sustainable Development of Rural Areas, initiated by the UNDP and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

Cultural heritage and alternative tourism have been assigned an important place within the municipality’s development strategy, which aims to achieve sustainable development and economic stabilization of the region: *“There are splendid opportunities to develop tourism in the Municipality, which are not used to the fullest of their potential, though... Actuated by the conviction that our local natural and cultural-historical sites, which we have at our disposal, are the basic resource for Tran’s economic prosperity, we shall focus our efforts on programmes that are connected with motivating local people to offer tourist products related to nature and a good deal of cultural-historical monuments...”* (Стратегия 2003).

In pursuance of this strategy, a Tourist Information Centre (TIC) was created in the Municipality in 2004 as a result of the realization of the first demonstration project of the Local Action Group – Tran. It was created in order to *“join the interests of the local community and the tourist business that was coming into being and in order to transform it into a main driving force for sustainable development of tourism”* (Туристически каталог 2004: 36). In addition to the information and the advertising leaflets about the region that you can get here, you can also see a small ethnographic collection and you can buy some local souvenirs. This centre, as well as the non-profit organization already mentioned, is beginning to play a significant role with respect to carrying out activities and policies in the sphere of culture and tourism.

What is also indicated in the strategy mentioned above is what is recognized as heritage and as local resource for development. It is striking that there are sites, which were appraised as being significant tourist sights as far back as the time of

various parts of the Balkans (Hristov 2008: 118-119). During the socialist period, between 1945 and 1990, the region went through a huge population decline crisis. Nowadays the municipality includes 51 more villages besides the central town. As of 31st December 2009, the population amounts to 5031 people, approximately half of them living in the central town of the municipality (НСИ – Население 2009). As far as the economic side of the question is concerned, the municipality is described as a backward rural and border region.

¹ In Bulgaria the public institution and building which fulfills several functions at once, such as a community centre, library and a theatre is called “Chitalishte”.

the socialist regime. One of these sites is the Erma River gorge – in 1961 it was pronounced a natural landmark and one of Bulgaria's 100 national tourist sites. The municipal administration associates the creation of a complete tourist product namely with the Gorge. It has become the basis of a few municipal projects, which are connected with the development of ecotourism and sustainable development.

The other such site is the village of Businci, the cradle of the Businci School of Ceramics. In the 18th and the 19th century all the people living in the village had pottery as their main occupation. After the Liberation of Bulgaria the craft started declining as a result of a set of circumstances and reasons. During the 70s and the 80s of the 20th century, Businci and the art of ceramics were rediscovered in compliance with the state cultural policy that was effective at the time; research was commenced on the "Businci ceramics" phenomenon. The Museum of Businci Ceramics was built in the village in 1986. However, after 1989 the place began declining even more; the museum still exists, though. Nowadays, the municipal authorities still continue looking after it, as well as some other organizations, so that Businci can continue to exist as a "living" ceramics centre.

A few more sites were recognized in the 90s as being part of the heritage and they were included within the tourist advertisement as local landmarks. The St. Petka Rock Chapel occupies a very important place here. It is a natural cave that was turned into a really attractive place to and worship. According to stories about it this was happened in the 10th century, after the Saint Petka hid there from her pursuers. The footmarks from her feet remained in the cave, as well as the round loaf that she had prepared, which turned into a rock. Today this is one of the places in the municipality, which are most visited by tourists. Some other religious sites and monuments have now also been included in the list of sights. Most of these sites are in poor condition and they more or less need some steps to be taken towards their restoration. Nevertheless, they have been recognized by the local authorities, organizations and experts as parts of our heritage and resource.

Another interesting project concerning culture was realized in 2006-2007. Dr. Stamen Grigorov was born in the village of Studen Izvor, Tran Region, the person who discovered *Lactobacillus bulgaricus*, the bacteria that turn milk into yoghurt. This is the basis, on which the idea was constructed to set up a Museum of Yoghurt in the village. This is a joint initiative of the Municipality and the Dr. Stamen Grigorov Foundation. A traditional house in the village was restored, so that it could be used as a building for the museum collection. The museum has the ambition to present the ways to prepare yoghurt, from ancient times to modern technology, on the one hand, and Dr. St. Grigorov's work, on the other hand. If the prospect of developing the museum is considered, the idea has been launched to create a small

production plant for yoghurt, as well as the possibility that a tourist will be able to taste various kinds of yoghurt and dairy products, which will be prepared on the site, etc.

I would like to focus your attention on one more project initiated by the Local Action Group and the Tourist Information Centre (TIC). The project itself has not been brought to a good end, but the very idea deserves attention. Because it is by means of this project that an attempt was made to include the so-called non-material cultural heritage within the tourist product. The project's main goals are to conduct ethnographic field research in selected villages in the region in order to study the local traditions, occupations and customs, to inscribe "the bearers of tradition" in an index as a first step towards the creation of various ethno- and folklore tours. The project itself was drawn up with an ethnologist taking part, and the research was carried out by a team of ethnology students from Sofia University. Traditional culture is studied by means of looking for local characteristics, something that will make the place different from other places and will create a possibility to develop cultural tourism as a way to ensure local development.

Here I will stop giving examples. On the basis of this empirical material I would like to demonstrate how we can construct heritage in a local and regional perspective and how it is used as a basis for local development policies.

Cultural Heritage: Concept and Problems When we discuss heritage, it usually includes the historic and cultural monuments, but also languages, skills, knowledge, practices, customs (Micoud 1996: 116-117; Серкле 2000; Ome Baron 2008: 9-16). I will not discuss the history of the concept. Its contemporary meaning is associated with the French Revolution, when it was "resurrected" in order to create, invent an identity of the French nation in time (Мику 2000). This is how we create means and mechanisms that allow us to include sites within the heritage (legislative, administrative texts, various committees and institutions). Gradually within the sphere of heritage we include a nation's history, its traditions and art; in order to construct their national identity the German Romanticists started searching for "the nation's spirit".

After the Second World War and especially during the last decades a new stage was reached in the way people perceive heritage and culture as a resource. Post-war reconstruction turned out to be a favourable context for defining new relations between heritage and society. Measures were taken with respect to assisting rural areas, measures that stimulate environmental protection and the preservation of local traditions. This was the time of growing interest in eco- museums, which had to preserve the heritage in its natural form, not take it to people's homes (Серкле

2000). It was not by accident that this was also the time when people started talking about rural tourism. And this was exactly the moment when the past, culture, traditions, nature became a resource for local development. In this way the projects, which were connected with heritage, became a mechanism for constructing not only national identity, it also became a mechanism for territorial differentiation; the emphasis in the way heritage was perceived was already placed on the wealth of regions, on local identities. Separate places adhered to the idea that they had their own heritage and they looked for an opportunity to praise those things that, according to them, characterized them most vividly. Natural sites, churches, national traditions, and local products – they are still living and our aim is to preserve them the way they are, not just preserve their vestiges behind the glass cases in museums, they have to continue their “authentic” existence. (Micoud 1996: 119-120; Микю 2000). Although there are almost no masters in the Businci ceramic art left, its traditions have not been lost yet and people have to keep (re)producing them, students have to be trained, who will continue making pottery. There are still old ladies, who prepare yoghurt in the traditional way, in a large old pot, and they have to continue preparing yoghurt that way. This is the reason why the local authorities plan to create the future Museum of Yoghurt in such a way, so that tourists can taste the yoghurt, which these old ladies prepare.

The next interesting point is connected with the very act of including something within the heritage. The things that belong to the heritage possess a peculiar status. As Denis Cerclet describes it in a figurative way, they are “somewhere on the borderline between going to a trash can or a museum, somewhere on the borderline between destruction and sanctification” (Серкле 2004: 135). For all of these churches, old houses, whose destruction fills us with indignation, all of these customs, rites, traditions that we are trying to register before they have disappeared, in fact owe their value to the very possibility that they might be destroyed or forgotten. And the second life of such an object is always connected with some kind of a discovery; there is always the interference of a “discoverer”. A municipality is necessary, an association or a non-governmental organization, or an expert – a museum employee, an ethnologist, a local historian – to engage the community on a local level in the object’s inclusion within the heritage and the act of saving it from disappearing. The object is reconstructed according to a system of rules. It is a system, usually one developed by an expert, which assigns a value and allows us to move on to symbolization. Researchers (ethnologists, cultural researchers, historians) also play a significant role, often indirectly and without even being aware of it. An investigation, which is conducted and is more or less accurate, allows us to then select the most appropriate elements and objects and to pick them out, at the same time allowing us to create a story about them. Finally, this

reconstructed and established meaning is presented to the general public as part of a cultural project, which aims at determining the value of this meaning – restoration, inclusion in a museum’s collections, producing a local tourist product, which can be offered as a product that is typical for the place and its inhabitants (Серкле 2004: 135; Кандо 2001: 91-93).

In this context, it was already made clear to us that nature is also perceived as being heritage. For instance, Erma’s Gorge is a natural phenomenon in its essence and as such it is something that our senses take for granted. However, sensuousness is not sufficient in itself for us to establish the presence and the nature of this object as a “*sight*” (Кръстанова 2004: 69). What is interesting with respect to this is Vakarelski’s paper on the Aesthetics of the People and his conclusion that not all people perceive and experience what is aesthetic and beautiful in the same way: „...*Vazov reports, for instance, about the utter aesthetic insensitiveness that a countrywoman from Kostenets showed, for whom the wonderful Kostenets Waterfall did not exist, only “hot water” existed for her, i. e. the bathing place by the waterfall*” (Vakarelski 1974: 625).

This example is a good illustration of the fact that our ability to see is not sufficient in itself for us to be sensitive to places and even sensuousness cannot enhance our potential to perceive them at least as different. For the Kostenets Waterfall, as well as the Gorge, are not sights in themselves. What makes them ones then; how is it possible that the Gorge is a sight? The answer is directly connected with the act of perceiving the natural environment from a cultural point of view, the way we assign aesthetic value to it, hence, the way we perceive it as something that is noteworthy. Thus, perceiving natural landmarks as such is culture-related; it is a result of cultural and social activity, a result of the processes of assigning aesthetic and symbolic values to things, processes that underlie the inclusion of landmarks within the value scale of the community (Кръстанова 2004: 69). A natural site is constructed and acknowledged as being part of the heritage; in this case it turned into the symbol and the emblem of Tran and the region.

Cultural Heritage – A Resource for Local Development. Culture turns into a resource for local development. Cultural tourism, which has gained huge popularity in recent times, plays a significant role here. For as it became clear to us, cultural tourism or ecotourism is brought out as the № 1 priority in the strategy for local economic development of Tran Municipality; it is often seen as a magical solution to the local economic problems (here I ignore the fact that this happens in some places, it is to happen in other places and it will probably never happen in third places). Thus, after a natural or a cultural site has already been charged with cultural value, we reach the next point, the point where it acquires economic value. The

economic value of a site depends on the cultural value (O'Connor 1999). Of course, the policies concerning the promotion of the new product, its advertising and marketing play a huge role here. The suggestion that is made by the strategy mentioned, by the guidebooks and the advertising materials, by the offered tourist product from this region, is the following: „come to Tran Region, we are going to offer you well-preserved and eco-friendly natural environment, we are going to offer you the calmness and cosiness of our homes, archaic cultural traditions. Stay here for a few days; buy some of our genuine yoghurt, some of our unique ceramics, so that we can stay and continue living here, so that we can continue making pottery and yoghurt, so that the Tran Region itself can carry on existing” (compare Микс 2000). Cultural heritage has to become the basis for sustainable and ascending development, especially in regions like this one.

Obviously, this has not happened in Tran yet. The process has gone as far as the attempts to acknowledge and include the sites within the heritage. For we have to take into consideration a number of other factors. All of these processes, activities and policies are bound by some kind of intellectual, political, economic processes of supra-local or even supra-national character and are influenced by institutions, organizations, technology (state normative acts and European normative acts and documents, the press, the electronic media, etc.). These are cultural policies and activities, which take their course in different places simultaneously and in parallel, but whose final result is not the same, they are all manifested in a specific way, because the places are different, and the people and the institutions that carry out the inclusion of sites within the heritage, their inclusion within a tourist product and in “economic turnover” are not the same either.

In this particular case, I believe we should pay attention to the ratio between initiatives from below and initiatives from above. To what extent do the local people need or give significance to the activities undertaken as being their own, activities, which are set within institutional frames by strategic plans, national programmes or European finance funds? Due to the lack of well-trained personnel in Tran Municipality, due to the great demographic problems, financial issues, due to the conflict and clash of interests between the central players in the sphere of culture and tourism, due to a lack of a consistent and integral policy in these spheres, the strategic priority indicated has remained just something written down on paper so far. The inhabitants of the municipality have not managed to acknowledge the efforts made as a step towards their own economic stabilization and development. The communication between the institutions and the local people is utterly distorted – from conversations with inhabitants of Tran and the surrounding villages it becomes clear that they consider the activities in question

perfunctory, they consider them a way “to steal some money” for the personal benefit of the institutions and the organizations in question. This is the reason why most of the projects, which are realized, are not further developed after the term of the respective funding elapses. And each next attempt has to be started from the beginning, which is the case with the several attempts to train masters of the pottery art by means of funding various projects, for example. After the funding was terminated, the Tourist Centre also stopped existing and was not until now, three years later, that new steps were taken to re-establish its activity. The local farmers, who make the decision to invest their time, efforts and means in the sphere of tourism, remain few. Still, their actions in this direction are encouraging. Only time can tell whether all obstacles will be surmounted; whether we can reach the balance between local needs, initiative from below, on the one hand, and institutional efforts, efforts from above, on the other hand; whether the act of determining the economic value of the sites, which are recognized as being heritage, will happen in the Tran Region as a way to ensure a really sustainable local development.

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КУЛТУРНОТО НАСЛЕДСТВО И ПОЛИТИКИТЕ ЗА ЛОКАЛЕН РАЗВОЈ (Резиме)

Во предложениот текст, авторот прави етнолошка анализа на процесите на утврдување и (ре)конструкција на културното наследство на локален и регионален план, како политики и механизми за економско заживување на пасивните селски и гранични региони и нивен локален развој. Се обрнува внимание на користењето на културното наследство како основа за развој на туристичката индустрија. Се разгледува контраста и рамнотежата меѓу иницијативата „од долу – на горе“ (локална иницијатива) и „од горе – на долу“ (иницијатива на централно ниво). Во текстот се истражува конкретен случај во Бугарија – во пограничната општина ТРН, каде користењето на културното наследство како основа за развој е сеуште во почетна фаза: тоа ни овозможува да ги проследиме процесите во нејзиниот развој.

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