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8-10 May 2024/ Skopje, North Macedonia

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Edited by

Prof. Dr. Hakan KOÇ

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Liza Alili SULEJMANI

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MODIFICATION AND VALORIZATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE FUNCTION OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Emilija Todorovic

Public secondary school for catering and tourism Lazar Tanev, Skopje, North Macedonia
emilijatod@yahoo.com

Dejan Metodijeski

Faculty of tourism and business logistics, University Goce Delcev, Stip, North Macedonia
dejan.metodijeski@ugd.edu.mk

Oliver Filiposki

Faculty of tourism and business logistics, University Goce Delcev, Stip, North Macedonia
oliver.filiposki@ugd.edu.mk

ABSTRACT

The city of Skopje is a destination visited by almost one-third of the total number of tourists coming to the country annually, has a rich cultural heritage that attracts an increasing number of tourists every day. In the interest of planning sustainable development of cultural tourism in the city, it is of great importance to properly modify and valorize the cultural heritage, assessing their value from the perspective of tourism. The subject of modification and valorization should encompass all tangible and intangible cultural assets of the city, aiming to hierarchically prioritize them based on their value, which will provide guidance in the strategic planning of cultural tourism development. This will determine which of them are leading in the overall cultural tourism product of the city, and which ones should be invested in first. Given that the tourist valorization of the entire cultural heritage of Skopje is a complex and long-term process, this paper includes the valorization of a cultural-historical complex comprising the Skopje Fortress, the Old Bazaar, and the Stone Bridge. The fortress is located on the eponymous hill, in the very center of Skopje, on the left bank of the Vardar River and partially in the western part of the bazaar. According to existing knowledge, the area where the current fortress stands was inhabited since prehistoric times, around the 4th to 3rd millennium BCE. The Old Skopje Bazaar represents a blend of the old and the new, culture, and tradition. It preserves numerous functional objects from the Ottoman period, while new objects are also being built as a characteristic of modern times. The Stone Bridge connects the Old Bazaar with Macedonia Square. It symbolizes the city of Skopje and is depicted as an integral element of its coat of arms. For this purpose, both desk and field research were conducted, and tourist valorization was carried out using a qualitative-quantitative method that was modified and adapted to the subject of valorization. In this process, tourist valorization is performed according to three groups of indicators: indicators determining the cultural and touristic significance of the cultural asset and the management sector of the cultural asset. The overall assessment of all indicators ultimately determines the level of potential of the cultural asset in terms of tourism development.

Keywords: modification, valorization, Skopje Fortress, Old Skopje Bazaar, Stone Bridge.

INTRODUCTION

Cultural heritage as a resource for the development of tourism is much more than the accumulation of material and intangible cultural assets that need to be protected and preserved (Petković, 2019). Following the tourist trends and directions dictated by demand, it is necessary to create an attractive cultural product that is a combination of cultural heritage with various characteristics, management activities of cultural assets, and the tourism industry. According to Richards, the new perspectives in creating cultural attractions

are linked to: space, assessment of the capacity of cultural activities, and connecting cultural resources with social capital (Richards, 2018). Cultural attractions themselves can be a product placed on the tourist market, which primarily depends on their level of authenticity and attractiveness, but they can also be combined to create complex cultural attractions: cultural landscapes, cultural complexes, and cultural routes. The criteria for creating a successful cultural tourism product are based on an assessment of the cultural resource, which will determine: the tourism potential, the broader context of the cultural resource, issues related to ownership and belonging, and stakeholder concerns (McKercher & du Cros, 2002). Modifying cultural resources for tourism purposes poses several challenges, especially those related to providing services, but also those related to specific demands, such as creating a sense of place and ensuring authenticity (Petković, 2019). According to Richards, the modification of cities and urban landscapes is easier because they already have formed authentic cultural spaces. However, in any case, the local community should be involved in the modification process to determine its benefits in the overall process. The same author emphasizes that the modification of rural environments is more complex because it is associated with privatization processes, which complicates the exploitation of cultural resources for the tourism industry (Richards, 2018).

In the process of transforming and modifying cultural resources for tourist exploitation, management encounters obstacles and problems related to: ownership and location of the cultural resource; socio-economic profile of visitors; income flow; communication with potential visitors; cooperation and marketing; experience, interpretation, and authenticity (McKercher & du Cros, 2002). Although faced with numerous obstacles and challenges, managers of cultural resources and other stakeholders must realize the transformation and modification of cultural resources because it is the only way to simultaneously protect the resources and ensure sustainable development, accumulate funds for local and societal development, and strengthen the community's identity and image. In the process of transforming and modifying cultural heritage for tourist development of the destination, it is important to protect it from overexploitation and respect the principles of sustainability. The best way to achieve this is through its valorization. This is primarily because sustainable tourism seeks to establish a balance between the economic benefit the community derives from cultural heritage as a tourist product and its protection from excessive consumption. That's precisely why McKercher claims that cultural tourism can be the main driver of sustainable community development (McKercher, 2003). Touristic valorization of cultural heritage involves assessing its value from various aspects and determining the possibilities for its implementation in the tourism offer of the destination, regardless of whether it will be positioned as a separate tourist product or within the framework of another destination product. This, among other things, largely depends on its authenticity and attractiveness. In this implementation process, it is crucial that cultural tourism products do not "emerge" outside the cultural context of the local community because, in that case, they will have a relatively short lifespan (Petrić, 2009). Through tourist valorization, cultural heritage has the potential to be competitive in the tourism market and attract a large number of visitors. It's a fact that destinations have always attracted tourists with their unique atmosphere, culturally significant monuments, traditional festivals and events, and other cultural experiences, regardless of whether cultural motives predominate in the decision to travel (Sigala & Leslie, 2006). Thus, cultural attractions become significant criteria in assessing the quality and level of tourism development in a destination, and according to research by Smith, culture emerges as a direct and/or indirect content in the majority of tourist trips worldwide (Smith, 2003). The issue of tourist valorization of cultural heritage is always accompanied by discussions and clashes between representatives of the cultural sector and representatives of the economy and tourism, primarily stemming from their different perceptions of the cultural values of resources. The first consider cultural goods invaluable due to their cultural and historical impact, while the others that they can be assessed (valorized) according to consumer demand, transformed and modified as tourist products for commercial purposes. The solution that can reconcile these opposing views lies in the principles of sustainable development, which dictate that a portion of tourism profits should be used for the conservation,

preservation, and maintenance of cultural goods, for supporting and incentivizing arts and artists, as well as for other cultural activities within the local community (McKercher & du Cros, 2002).

In this paper, an example is given of the valorization of Skopje Fortress, the Old Bazaar, and the Stone Bridge as a whole, which are significant parts of the cultural heritage of the city of Skopje. Skopje Fortress is a historical core, ie the origin of today's Skopje and is located in the center of the city, on the left bank of the river Vardar. Current scientific evidence indicates that Skopsko Kale was inhabited in prehistoric times, more precisely at the crossing between IV and III century BC, and during archaeological excavations in 1953 and 1967, material evidence of the late Neolithic settlement was discovered. The Fortress, as archaeological discoveries show, was re-inhabited sometime in the 7th and 6th centuries BCE, and the remains of this settlement have been discovered about 6-7 meters below present-day levels. The fortress was once again occupied in the X century, when the medieval Byzantine-Slavic city of Skopje was formed during the time of Tsar Samoil, which was "one of the most important strategic points - fortress-cities" within the then vast Macedonian Samoil Empire. With the latest archaeological excavations that began in 2007, 13,400 objects from different periods have been discovered, of which 4527 are coins. All items are preserved and divided into three collections: prehistory, the Ottoman period and the medieval period. The Old Bazaar of Skopje is one of the most significant and complex landmarks of the city. It spans from the Stone Bridge to Bit Pazar and from Kale Fortress to the Serava River. It dates back to the 12th century. The bazaar suffered extensive damage in the earthquakes of 1555 and 1963, as well as during both World Wars. It has been renovated several times. From the Byzantine and Ottoman periods, there are still notable sites: Kapan Han (now converted into a pub and national restaurant), Chifte Hammam (art gallery), Kurshumli Han, Daut Pasha Hammam (art gallery), Suli Han (Museum of the Old Bazaar), the old Turkish post office, the monastery of St. George Gorgos Skoposhtiggnik, Bezisten (covered market), the Stone Bridge, and Kale Fortress. Today, as part of the bazaar, there are also St. Dimitrija Church, Murat Pasha Mosque, St. Spas Church, Vilaet Konak "Ukumat", Mustafa Pasha Mosque, Museum of Macedonia, Museum of Contemporary Art, Clock Tower, Sultan Murat Mosque, and several other mosques. In 2008, a law was passed declaring the Old Bazaar of Skopje as a cultural heritage site, and since then, it has been under permanent protection by the state. The Stone Bridge over the Vardar River connects Macedonia Square on the right bank and the Old Bazaar of Skopje on the left bank of the river. There are two different opinions about its existence. According to the first, it was built in the 6th century, immediately after the catastrophic earthquake in 518 AD, during the reign of Emperor Justinian I. Others believe that the bridge was built in the second half of the 15th century, between 1451 and 1469, during the rule of Sultan Mehmed II the Conqueror of the Ottoman Empire. The bridge has undergone several changes, being upgraded during the reign of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent and Serbian Tsar Dusan. During the Second World War, the bridge was mined, but after the liberation of the city, the detonation of dynamite was prevented, saving the bridge from collapse. The name "Stone Bridge" was given because it was built using broken stone. Additionally, the bridge is historically known as the "Dusan Bridge," in honor of Serbian Tsar Dusan. The Stone Bridge is considered a symbol of the city of Skopje and is depicted as a prominent element on the city's coat of arms.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the literature, various methods are employed for tourist valorization. Due to the lack of a unified methodology, most authors utilize a qualitative-quantitative method that can be adapted and modified depending on the subject of valorization. For the purposes of this study, a model is proposed in which tourist valorization is conducted based on the value of indicators that determine the cultural and touristic significance of cultural assets and the cultural asset management sector. Cultural significance is determined based on the following indicators: archaeological value, scientific value, rarity of the cultural asset, and complementarity with other cultural resources in the vicinity. Touristic significance is determined based on the following indicators: transportation and accessibility, ambiance, attractiveness and recognizability, tourist infrastructure and amenities, and proximity to other cultural and natural attractions. Management of

the cultural asset is determined based on the following indicators: management plan, monitoring and maintenance, state of repair, promotional activities, and potential for investment.

All indicators are evaluated on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 - insufficient, 2 - satisfactory, 3 - good, 4 - very good, and 5 - excellent). The sum of the obtained values for each indicator is divided by the number of indicators to obtain an average score, indicating the value or potential of the cultural resource and its significance. Additionally, cultural assets can fall into one of the following groups based on their average score: 1 - 2: Satisfactory quality, local touristic significance; 2 - 3: Good quality, regional touristic significance; 3 - 4: Very good quality, national touristic significance; 4 - 5: Excellent quality, international touristic significance. Moreover, based on the total sum of obtained ratings, the cultural asset can be categorized as having: low level of touristic potential (0 - 25), medium level (25 - 50), high level (50 - 75). Tourist valorization has been conducted on Skopje Kale, the Old Bazaar, and the Stone Bridge as a single cultural entity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the conducted tourist valorization on the indicators determining the cultural and touristic value, as well as the management and administration sector of the research subject, are presented individually. Subsequently, the total value of the various indicators and the total number of points determining the level of tourist potential are provided. Based on the obtained results, a detailed discussion can be conducted regarding the degree of cultural and touristic value of the object, as well as the necessary measures for management and development. This discussion will identify potential opportunities for improving the tourist potential of the object and propose specific actions to achieve them.

Table 1. Assessment of Indicators Determining Cultural Significance

	5
	5
	4
	3
	3
	4

Table 2. Assessment of Indicators Determining Touristic Significance

	5
	4
	4
	4
	3
	4

Table 3. Assessment of Indicators from the Cultural Heritage Management Sector

	2
	2
	4
	3
	5
	3,2

Table 4. Total Value of Indicators

	4
	4
	3,2
	3,7

The relatively high ratings of the indicators determining the cultural significance of the object of valorization primarily stem from its archaeological, cultural-historical, and scientific value, as well as the fact that it encompasses a multitude of "witnesses" from various periods of Macedonia's history in one place. According to research, the fortress possesses immense historical wealth and evidence of its existence dating back 5 centuries before Christ, with archaeological excavations uncovering 13,400 artifacts as testament to the life that unfolded here in the past. On the other hand, the Old Bazaar together with the Stone Bridge represent the most complex cultural asset in the city. This complex, as a cultural treasure trove, provides a solid foundation for future scientific research for historical, cultural, and educational purposes, as well as potential for organizing cultural events and festivals. The average rating of the indicators determining the cultural significance is 4.

The value of the indicators determining the tourist significance is also 4. The high ratings are attributed to the excellent transportation options from the emitting areas, both by air and land. Specifically, the objects are located in the center of the capital city, providing good accessibility. The fortress offers a magnificent view of the city, although the ambiance is somewhat marred by inadequate maintenance of the site. On the other hand, the Old Bazaar boasts a delightful ambiance, offering a top-notch experience. Regarding tourist infrastructure and amenities, despite some ongoing investment activities, they are not yet fully realized. Inside the fortress, there is a lack of informative signs, pathways, benches, etc., while the bazaar and the bridge are well-equipped in terms of infrastructure. In the vicinity of these sites, there are numerous tourist establishments offering accommodation, dining, entertainment, and recreation options.

The value of the indicators determining the management sector of the cultural asset is 3.2, which is a relatively low score for a cultural asset with high cultural and touristic potential. These sites represent excellent investment opportunities, but a quality strategy for their development is needed. Although the fortress has been extensively researched, and the bazaar is under permanent protection by law, it is essential to establish a management plan, continuous monitoring, plans for repair and renovation, investment projects, and sources of financing to ensure continuity and stable policy in managing the site. Regarding the promotional activities undertaken so far, this cultural wealth is featured on several national and international websites, as well as in all printed promotional materials (guides, monographs, etc.) for North Macedonia and Skopje.

The overall value of all indicators for tourist valorization is 3.7, indicating a very good quality - national touristic significance. The total score is 56, indicating a high level of touristic potential.

CONCLUSION

A large number of research studies are dedicated to the relationship between cultural heritage and tourism, primarily because the preservation of heritage and its transmission to future generations depend on the continuous implementation of quality strategies for valorization, restoration, conservation, and appropriate management towards its sustainable development. The exploitation and commercialization of cultural heritage require a certain level of adaptation, which often leads to conflicts between institutions responsible for heritage protection and management and the tourism industry. This should always be taken into account in the planning and management of cultural heritage, along with respect for a set of criteria and legal frameworks.

Touristic valorization is the foundation upon which the acceptability of resources for tourists is determined, the type of tourism to be developed in the region, the standards to be applied in development, the

hierarchical arrangement of necessary investments, and so forth. In short, it determines the direction in which central and local authorities should steer tourism policy, as well as the plans that tourism entities should implement. Touristic valorization represents a significant phase in the process of tourism development planning because its aim is the objective evaluation of tourism resources in the destination. Moreover, touristic valorization plays a major role in successfully adhering to the principles of sustainable development and optimal resource utilization.

The overall assessment from the conducted touristic valorization of the fortresses indicates that these sites have a very good potential to be part of the cultural tourism offering at the local, regional, and national levels. However, a serious approach and planning are necessary for all steps in developing and promoting a high-quality cultural tourism product. The general conclusion is that this cultural heritage possesses attributes that are attractive to visitors, primarily due to the authenticity of the buildings, rich history, and beautiful ambiance. If all of these potentials are capitalized on, particularly for organizing various events and festivals, it is certain that an authentic and recognizable tourism product can be created, which will be a magnet for tourists. However, a tourism product cannot be defined solely by the object or the place itself. Additional services significantly influence its quality: hospitality establishments and services, cultural and touristic attractions, infrastructure, hygiene, etc. Therefore, measures need to be taken for strategic planning of continuous renovation and maintenance of the sites, establishing regular monitoring and quality control to timely identify deficiencies and take measures to eliminate them. All of this, supported by quality management from state institutions at all levels, as well as other stakeholders, will contribute to the development of a high-quality tourism product through which the country can compete in the market and become a recognizable destination.

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