

# **Cultural Heritage in Local and Regional Social and Economic Stability**

## **State of Art – Slovakia**

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### **1. In this diverse reality we preserve that which defines our identity**

Slovakia has a population 5,3 million inhabitants and a size of 50 000 square kilometres. The countryside and villages have important roles within the country. Roughly speaking there are 130 towns and 2870 villages. The benefit of the Central Europe position is in diverse culture which has gained a lot of skills from different societies during the centuries, so Slovakia is a country with a wealth of built and natural heritage.

Heritage can play an important role in presenting our country to other nations and regions in the world. Its presentation helps to built national identity and can serve as an example to other newly independent countries. Within the country heritage provides a huge potential for developing links between people and places; between the past, the present and the future.

Heritage creates the identity and image of Slovakia. It creates at the same time housing and job opportunities, opportunities for tourism development and sustainable development of small and medium businesses services and opportunity for human settlement regeneration.

### **2. Every monument is a dramatical story, which part is also its protection**

Since the independence of the Slovak Republic, cultural and natural heritage has been dealt with by two separate ministries: the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of the Environment (with jurisdiction over regional planning, construction, architecture and nature conservation).

Responsibility for the implementation of policy measures relating to the protection and conservation of the heritage is exercised principally by:

- the government (responsible for the designation of national cultural monuments and protected areas),
- the Ministry of Culture (responsible for the implementation of legislation relating to the cultural heritage in general and for the designation of cultural monuments),
- the Institute for the Protection of Monuments (responsible for preparatory scientific work and keeping the Central List of Cultural Monuments),
- specialised departments at district level (external State services) responsible for protected areas.

The opinion of the Slovak Academy of Sciences and the Nitra Institute of Archaeology must be sought in certain cases.

Today almost all individual resorts have in their competence some activities with direct or indirect impact on state of cultural heritage. Ministry of Agriculture – rural development. Ministry of Economy – small and medium enterprise, travel industry. Ministry of Work and Social Affairs – monitoring of unemployment, re-qualification. Ministry of Education – creation

and approval of school curriculum. Ministry of Building Industry and Regional Development – housing and support of regional development projects. Ministry of Interior – supplementary support of cultural monument owners.

As of 1. July 2000, there were 12 579 immovable cultural monuments and 29 870 movable objects registered in the Central List of Cultural Monuments.

Four cultural heritage sites are on the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites: Vlkolínec, Spišské Podhradie, Banská Štiavnica and the newest one Bardejov.

Democratic and pro-reform orientation of current government, formal adoption of declarations and small legislative improvements such as Declaration on protection of cultural heritage in Slovakia (agreed in Slovak parliament on 28<sup>th</sup> of February 2001), major update of Building law in 2000, new law on Protection of Monuments (now will be discussed in the Government and later in parliament for final approval), together with progress on developing Sustainable Development concepts, form positive background for heritage protection.

With regards to local socio-economical development (and finally also the socio-economical development of the country as a whole), the role of the local government might be questioned. Also in Slovakia the decentralization processes are linked with a growing dependence of individual cities, villages on their endogenous economic and social potentials, on their local economic base, and to some extent on the qualities of the local authorities. But the conditions for these decentralization processes are not favourable. Most cities and villages do not have local firms with substantial investment capabilities. Besides this, there are problems with communication, information services and know how and management knowledge. Responsibilities should be delegated to local governments without adequate funding for the implementation of those responsibilities. Finally, local governments suffer from the burden of their history, in terms of financial and staff resources required for assuming a (leading) role in local socio-economic development.

However the need for Reform of public administration and for establishing of new regions that will renew natural regional identity (like Spiš, Zemplín and others) is generally accepted and it is the most problematic political issue nowadays in the country.

Heritage is often at odds with the contemporary thrust towards economic development. Funding heritage protection and cities regeneration is the area that is, despite all positive steps, still very underestimated in Slovakia. Funding of heritage projects (from state and also private sources) is at the lowest level since the beginning of 1990.

2 millions US\$ spent in whole country from central public funds in 1998 comparing with 11 millions in Czech republic and 14 millions in Hungary (calculated as an equivalent of the 5 millions Slovak population) indicates the lowest investment into cultural heritage in Central Europe. Many of Slovakia's heritage treasures like mansions and castles are unused or in very bad conditions. From those registered buildings, 2501 (20 %) are in very bad conditions or are unused buildings, another 688 (5,5 %) are buildings at risk before extinction. There is very low proportion of repairs and reconstruction within building industry (only 9,5 % while in United Kingdom 41 %). There are no tax benefits for repairs and regular care.

Other negatives on the local level are: low public involvement and public awareness on cultural heritage potentials, very low support of local NGOs and almost no public- private partnerships in cultural heritage field.

The protection, use and development of cultural-historical entities (CHE) is a continuous process of experimentation and learning. Monument care is one of the forms in which the implicit relation of the given family, subculture, nation or civilization to the time and place is manifested. Cultural monument isn't anymore considered as a simple object, its soul is returning, it is a social subject which takes care of its environment. To move out inhabitants from the monument is more or less like to move out the snail from its shell. It is a mortification of the monument in the name of its preservation.

In our country this statement is also connected with the processes of privatization of cultural monuments. In many cases the anonymous ownership of monuments has been eliminated. The new structure of owners has been created.

*Tab. 1: The structure of ownership of immovable cultural monuments in Slovakia in 1988 and 1999*

	1988	1999
The State	3777	1995
The Local Government	2100	3093
The Church	2097	2830
The physical persons	2520	3593
The legal entities	0	944
Together	<b>10 494</b>	<b>12 455</b>

### **3. Each place has significance. It is where people live, work, and die, but it is also place for guests**

Most areas of Slovakia, where tourism is a part of the general local or regional development plans, possess various natural and cultural attractions. Among these, the most important ones are the clean natural environment, the preserved traditions and all forms of historical environment, the hospitality of local people, the gastronomy, the rural lifestyle. The interest in cultural heritage among ordinary people, visitors and tourists also grows in Slovakia. Together with this increasing interest in cultural heritage the concept of the cultural heritage has been enriched by the products of the everyday life mass culture.

We can assume that the speeding up of technological changes will contribute to the increase of nostalgic evaluation of the past cultures.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the Institute of Tourism defined three main progressive forms of tourism in Slovakia. This central forms have been also acknowledged by foreign experts.

These are mountain tourism, spa tourism and culture and history oriented tourism. According the statement of the above mentioned institute, the cultural tourism is for our country the product of the future. But if we want to use this big potential we have to do a lot of work in renovation, revitalisation of our regional, local cultural heritage, in the field of its presentation, interpretation and marketing.

For many professionals working in tourism the word cultural heritage is still connected with the financial loss and vice versa professionals working in cultural heritage field do not realise that they profit from tourism.

Local and regional plans for general development exist in all tourist destinations, since they are required by the law. Tourism planning is far less common, especially in those areas where tourism is in the early stage of development. Even when there exist regional development plans, with the stress on the ecological, economical and social sustainability of tourism, they do not meet with too much success.

Among the reasons for not having good tourism development plans, we can find the lack of educated and experienced planners or of a common will on behalf of the local residents, the negative previous experience concerning tourism development plans (more plans have been written than implemented, outsider experts have often created unaccomplishable plans) or simply the lack of financial resources.

The existing plans very often focus on the economic aspects of the development process, disregarding future ecological or socio-cultural consequences of the proposed actions. The necessity of a regional approach is being accepted relatively slowly: at the present low level of demand, destinations usually see each other as competitors, not as potential co-operation partners.

Tourism development has been concentrated in a few areas of the country (mainly located in the mountains). In most of the areas the stress – measured as the number of visitors/tourists in a given destination – is not threatening the sustainable future of Slovakia's tourism at the moment. If we do not include a few well-developed holiday resorts, then the number of visitors/tourists is much lower than what local communities would find as appropriate.

The involvement rate of local people is high, though it depends on how the term "local people" is defined. Especially in the smallest, least developed villages, it is quite common that the people originally living in the area have moved to bigger villages or to towns, in order to get a job or provide better education for their children. Their houses have often been bought by people from cities who looked for relaxation in natural environment or who decided to save the dying old villages. Many small-scale businesses are managed by these people, who, by origin, are not local, but, by their commitment and their efforts to help a settlement or a region survive, must be evaluated as locals.

Since the demand for cultural, rural tourism is relatively low in Slovakia, the number of jobs created by this activity is not high at the moment, but the diversification of the attractions and services could induce a significant growth in this field in the near future.

At the moment tourism provides additional income for local people and contributes to the development of "pluriactivity" (i.e. when family or an individual carries out more than one type of job). The supplementary income generated by local communities can help the development of the infrastructure or social services as well, and the perceived potential of economic development (by tourism as a catalyst) can make an area more attractive, thus more viable in the long term. This is more of an expectation than a fact at the moment.

Consequently, the contribution of tourism to the local economy is relatively low in most destinations, at least in terms of registered financial income. This is partly due to the presence of grey economy (facilitated by the lack of well-established institutional framework and the informal nature of the local/rural tourist services).

Tourism supporting programs have their significance but they are not assigned to all business subjects. They represent certain compensation for commercial loans which are lacking and for small and medium enterprises are too expensive. The motivation role could play the tax reliefs which concern all businesses subjects.

In tourism development in general, training and education of the labour force is one of the necessary requirements of sustainability. Since in tourism businesses many local residents without formal tourism education are involved, their education must form part of the overall development process. In Slovakia, the failure of several tourism development projects could have been strongly related to the lack of market knowledge and marketing skills. Education of local people has to be a part of inner marketing. Most heritage attractions do not have a clue if their marketing materials and efforts actually work - there is no tracking or evaluation process. Many heritage sites have little or no visitor based information to work from. They do not know who their markets are! Brochures often simply illustrate or promote the wrong things. Marketing planning with learning, emotional and behavioral objectives is missing. Experimental marketing and memory mapping are not known terms.

For the long term survival of the heritage sites, a lot of work has to be done in presentation and interpretation. Interpretation makes the site come to life for the visitors, giving the site relevance and importance. Where a heritage site is big enough or well known, it might not require as much interpretive effort to attract visitors – people want to see it or

experience it because of other benefits the site provides. Interpretation is a "value added" benefit to the total site visit. But for most moderate to small heritage sites (in Slovakia we can say that majority of heritage sites belong to this category), providing outstanding interpretive programmes and services will be required for their long-term tourism success. The concept of heritage interpretation in our country is still in its infancy.

Though there are exceptions, local people in general are far from satisfied by tourism development. The main factors behind this dissatisfaction are the gap between the expected and the realised profitability, the relatively slow growth of the sector, the related bureaucracy, the lack of significant support from the state. Other contributing factors were the lack of marketing and business skills of the local people, the lack of domestic demand and the overstatement of the local resources and attractions. Especially at the beginning of the development process, hopes were high, large number of tourists were expected to come and spend generously, but reality has not lived up to the expectations of the communities involved. Nowadays, a more cautious development phase is in stage, the co-operation between villages and regions improves, more thorough planning takes place: and the people involved are eventually gathering the necessary knowledge, skills and experiences.

Let me mention a few activities as an example of good beginning:

1.) The activity of the region of Stredné Považie is remarkable. The region has accepted a common policy (the authors of which were V. Nižňanský and V. Kvasnica) with the orientation towards spa and cultural tourism which is a part of the programme called "Comfort in Old Walls". They think about how to use old manor-houses and castles. The region has possibilities for accommodation and knows its attendance rate. About 40,000 visitors come there daily in summer and about 20,000 in winter.

2.) Another important crossborder initiative is the "Revival of Settlement in Biele Karpaty", joining the villages of Červený Kameň, Křvoklát, Vršatecké Podhradie, Lednice and Mikušovce. The development of agriculture and tourism will help to preserve the original architecture, too.

3.) The common advancement of 7 villages near Trenčín, as well as that of 11 villages in the Považský Inovec region are some more examples of similar initiatives which can also be observed in Orava and Kysuce.

4.) A quite new phenomenon is micro-regionalism. A few villages join together according to their cultural, historical, geographical and above all economic backgrounds. The Čierny Hron micro-region and its Čiernohorská railway can be cited as one example. Čierny Balog and its Dream Train should become a paradise for children. The Čierny Hron micro-region, situated between Lom nad Rimavicou and Valašská, also has a lot of plans, enthusiasm and resolutions.

5.) Another micro-region originated in Horehronie and is known under the name "For Songs and Folklore" and includes villages famous for their folk creativities, e.g. Polomka, Hel'pa, Pohorelá and Šumiac.

6.) The "Association for Coordination Development of Podpolanie" is another. It offers rural tourism with accommodation in remote manor-houses surrounded by beautiful countryside. They are also thinking of renewing the forgotten fame of folk crafts and using the cultural and historical values of their traditions.

7.) In Kysuce a Tinkers' School has been founded and in Detva they are thinking of founding some folk artistic workshops. The Fujara School (fujara – Slovak shepherds' long

pipe) could be one of them. They would also like to revive the beauty of folk embroideries which could inspire other European countries.

8.) Last example is from work of our organization The National Trust for Historic Places and Landscapes of Slovakia. The NTS is a non-governmental organization chartered in March 1996. We are dedicated to heritage conservation.

In 1998 we rented a historic wooden building in village Podbiel and restored it in meticulous detail and transformed it into Orava Information Centre. The village of Podbiel contains 64 folk wooden buildings and is one of ten villages in Slovakia designated with the special conservation status by the Slovak Government for its folk architecture. By restoring one of them and operating the Information-visitor centre our organisation wanted to encourage further community development and help local people to promote their beautiful region to all visitors.

All these initiatives and activities are connected with the efforts of preserving old houses, traditions and habits. Our people are very skilful and are able to repair and adapt their old houses. Tourism is a challenge to reconstruct old houses according to professionally prepared projects. It is a challenge which requires more attention from state authorities and financial stimulation. Each organization dealing with heritage should be very sensitive to an understanding of problems linked with the maintenance of identity and local character.

Let me finish my presentation focusing on main thoughts of its topic.

Today's Europe cannot ignore that cultural heritage is already at the heart of economic development and constitutes a major means to consolidate a common European identity. But the new economic situation that assigns heritage a greater role can also lead to devastating effects, not only with regard to access to a culture, but also in terms of cultural conformity that flattens out and degrades the intrinsic richness of cultural heritage on cultural, spiritual and intellectual levels. However, if the social dimension of economic activity remains the focal point, than the social benefits that have accompanied the formation and development of cultural heritage can themselves be considered a stable economic resource. The economic activity aimed at this sector should necessarily take into account the social dimension implicit in the formation of the cultural heritage in a determined territory as a stabilizing factor, tending to encourage investment. Paradoxically in this era of globalization, the local level seems to be developing as the level at which it is possible to meet needs relating to identity and establish community ties, and contribute to establishing a position in the international market.

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