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## CULTURE AS A MEANS FOR A SUSTAINABLE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT IN TRANS-BORDER RURAL AREAS

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### ABSTRACT

The rural Balkan areas are characterized by the urgent need for their coming-in pace with the economically developed European regions. The application of a coherent regional policy, concerning the management of the local resources, meeting across priority needs and taking advantage of potential advantages could open the way for a sustainable development. The role of culture in such a perspective is crucial.

The trans-border Thracian lands of Greece have been sufficiently financed, both by the European Union and by national funds. Although the results do not mount up to a satisfactory outcome, the accumulated experience, concerning culture and cultural tourism, through the thorough examination of the drawbacks and minuses, as well as the pluses and advantages can help both, Greeks and the neighboring, “new in Europe” Bulgarians, to reveal the problems, to avoid failures and, working together, to exploit the emerging perspectives.

**Key words:** sustainable development, rural areas, trans-border, experience, European Union, programmes, case studies.

### INTRODUCTION: CULTURE AND CULTURAL TOURISM

Culture as a term sprang from economy and the Latin verb “colere”, meaning the cultivation of crops and animals. (1) Thus, initially, it metaphorically implied the “cultivation” of our personal or collective spiritual selves, as well as the means to achieve it.

Today, the concept of culture has become particularly wide. Already in 1952 A.Kroeber and C.Kluckhohn attributed no less than 164 different meanings to the word. (2) The prevailing, conceptual one considers culture as a set of shared values, goals, attitudes, practices and achievements, which characterize a group, an institution, a nation etc. Moreover, culture, as an elementary factor of the communal self-identity and prosperity, can contribute substantially to its development, perceived, not only as a process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic self-knowledge and

evolution, but as a product, as well, proving itself “useful” in the following three ways:

- As a general frame of terms and principles, necessary for any development policy.
- As a supporting grid of outcomes which can be used complementary, i.e. in branding, advertisement, support or “illustration” of a policy.
- As a crucial economic tool, offering the means for development through the exploitation of local resources and especially through cultural tourism.

Tourism is a peculiar, multiply interdependent sector of the world market, (3) constantly growing and overcoming any crisis, since it satisfies the needs of the human being for differentiation in time and activities, for leisure and for getting to know the world around. These elementary “habitual social pleasures” form the main objective of modern tourism and cannot be deprived from the citizen. (4)

Culture and tourism have a deep, mutually beneficial relationship, which can considerably increase the competitiveness of regions. (5) Today, when the emphasis is set on “stimulating production rather than subsidizing consumption”, (6) the convergence becomes

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more intense. Culture shapes identity, distinctiveness and attractiveness and enhances image and innovation, the main requisitions in the imposing environment of a globalized, highly competitive tourist market. On the other hand tourism provides indispensable, practical means to culture, subsidizing creativity and helping it to fulfill its goals. Thus, the synergy widens the perspectives and facilitates the new fascinating role of both, moreover contributing to the social cohesion and the general effectiveness. (7)

Cultural tourism covers a wide range of fields, starting from the way of life and going on with all its material and immaterial parameters. It includes events, festivals, happenings and everyday activities, as well as historical monuments, ethnographic collections and complexes, museums, exhibitions and theaters, churches and monasteries, industrial heritage and, even, national parks or ecosystems in their wider, cultural concept. (8) The supporting infrastructures must be added here, as well: hotels, restaurants, transport, handicraft and industry products, sightseeing, management and marketing.

The level of the “cultural tourist” is higher than the average one as far as it concerns his/her cultural, economic, spiritual and social status. He/she is more educated, can dispose more fluently with money, is well informed, using the electronic media much more than the average, travels more and spends more money per day and per travel. (9) Moreover, cultural tourism, as “the movement of persons to cultural attractions, away from normal place of residence”, has a stationary character, necessitating the presence in the proposed place, in order to satisfy in a cognitive as well as an emotional manner the socio-cultural needs of the consumer-visitor, so that cannot be substituted by virtual or other proposals. (10)

Cultural tourism was identified as an area of national importance as early as 1946, but it was only at the 60<sup>ies</sup>, when the democratization of culture and the increased public intervention revealed culture, both as a means of documenting national pride and as an economic tool. (11) During the 80<sup>ies</sup> cultural tourism started to be considered as a major source for development in the European Union. According to the “Europa Nostra”, edited in 2005, more than 50% of the tourist

activity in Europe was already conducted to cultural heritage, while cultural tourism was expected to be its most growing integral sector. (12)

In Greece, post-war tourism policy was oriented to the “three S-es” triangle, sun, sea and sand. In the 70<sup>ies</sup>, though, an attempt was undertaken to promote culture and especially archaeological sites and museums, as a main tourist attraction. (13) In the following decades, when the rest of Europe witnessed the minimization of State intervention in tourism, the Greek governments applied a different, protective regime. As a result, cultural destinations were multiplied and attendances concerning archaeological tourism had a considerable increase of 150-160% in less than 20 years. (14)

In the last two decades Greek authorities are more intensively focused on cultural as well as on all-through-the year tourism. Cultural tourism has at last started to be considered as an autonomous, self-integrated tourist sector and not merely as a supportive part of the general tourism. This is due mainly to the increasing pressure, set by the world tourist market, which seeks for diversification of the offered product. (15) At the same time, the transition from “sight-seeing” to “life-seeing” experience promotes the “atmosphere” and other non-tangible values and encourages innovation, alternative proposals, mobility and the use of new technologies. (16)

#### **LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND CULTURAL TOURISM**

Cultural tourist policies are dependent on the wider political, economic and social environment; at the same time, the potential and the perspectives that culture and cultural tourism offer, have raised them to a major parameter for the regional planning, forcing local authorities to deal seriously with them. Local communities also press for the evolvment of their cultural heritage, since it is evident that besides the hosts, they are as well the active participants in the tourism experience, defining “place and atmosphere”. (17)

An area develops its competitiveness by proposing services and products, which others cannot offer. These can be searched among the components constituting the destination attractiveness: the core resources and

attractions, the supporting factors (infrastructures, accessibility, facilities, sightseeing etc.), the management and the qualifying parameters, such as security, awareness, image and branding. From them, intangible values, such as the “atmosphere”, the quality of life, the cultural identity or the participation are the most important, since they are exactly those which establish the difference and the uniqueness. (18)

Here, the role of the public and the local authorities is decisive and complex. They can control core funding, in order to ensure the common benefit as well as the preservation of the authenticity of the cultural resources and the local identity. They can be the leaders in organizing, planning, improving infrastructures, inciting private participation, jointing together various interests, contributing to the image branding and monitoring, the latter being necessary not only for proving and demonstrating the effectiveness of tourism policies, but also for guiding any future strategy. (19)

Cultural changes initiated by tourist exploitation may have a significant impact both on regional cultural identity and on its cohesion. (20) The possible dangers can be avoided by the proper control, in order to maximize the social and economic benefits, without destroying cultural heritage and quality of lives, or removing authenticity, distinctiveness and attractiveness, main advantages of culture as a factor of local development. (21)

Especially today, when the extreme market liberalization cynically leads to the valorization of every activity according to its direct productivity and usually to a short-eyed and distorted “development”, the above mentioned principles have to be carefully kept.

### **THE TRANSBORDER LOCAL RURAL AREAS: NEW PERSPECTIVES**

During the last years the rapid transformation of the rural areas from typical agricultural to those of a mixed economy was followed by noteworthy social changes (22). Migration, at first, and recently the changes in land exploitation, imposed by the Common European Agricultural Policy, forcibly altered priorities. As a result, agriculture alone is not sufficient any more to sustain provincial life at a bearable level, nor secondary sector activities

can be helpful, especially in trans-border areas. All this necessitates the application of an “alternative” policy, in order for the seriously damaged income to be replaced and for the social and economic life to be rehabilitated.

The trans-border rural regions and between them the Greek-Bulgarian ones, present an enormous deposit of inherited cultural-historical assets and sight-seeings. Nevertheless, these areas until recently were considered as not proper for investment, exactly because of their position, for reasons both of “national safety” and high cost of investment. The new approach necessitates:

(a) The documentation and organization of the “virgin” cultural and environmental, material and immaterial resources in the form of tourist proposals.

(b) The maintenance and promotion of the local areal cultural character.

(c) The exploitation of the regional geo-strategic advantages.

The increasing competition, especially on the field of cultural tourism, incites the cooperation on a regional and a transnational level, in order for the regions to be more “effective”, as proposed places to live, to work and even to invest in. (24) Indeed, possible beneficiaries have realized that they can gain much more when they accept their neighbor as a partner and not as a threatening competitor.

This perspective finds its optimum effectiveness in the trans-border co-operation. For the first time, Greece and Bulgaria, the two neighboring countries, though for decades without any contact, have a real chance to develop a partnership which includes every stage, from the diagnosis to the proposal and from the tourist packages to the future strategies, taking advantage of the common paths, i.e. the past, the thematic, the problems, the experience, the perspectives, the outputs and the potential benefits. (24) In fact, a common proposal can become more attractive when it offers at the same time cultural diversity and similarity, while it helps the partners to avoid mistakes and drawbacks. This partnership can be the culmination of a system of concentric networks, starting from the inner one of the local entities and integrated with the international cooperation.

## THE HINTERLAND OF THE EVROS PREFECTURE

The trans-border partnership can find a promising application between Evros and the neighboring Bulgarian Municipalities of Ivailovgrad and Svilengrad. Evros is an unusually extended in length prefecture, lying between two countries, Bulgaria and Turkey. On one hand, Alexandroupolis with its coastal area, offers sea and sun, traditionally serving the old tourist model; however, recently, a serious effort has been undertaken by the private as well as the public sector to increase the duration of the tourist period, promoting alternative forms of tourism, such as congress, archaeological or eco-tourism, furnishing them with the proper hotel and other infrastructures and seeking new tourist markets.

On the contrary, the rural trans-border hinterland might concentrate on alternative and especially cultural and environmental tourism. The area is comprised of small towns, developed on the western bank of the Evros river, in almost equally distances of 20-30 km between them. Orestiada, Didymoteichon, Soufli and Feres are the centers over a rather dense system of rural settlements, extending at a zone of about 25-30 km between the borders with Bulgaria to the West and North and with Turkey to the East, in a crucial geostrategical position. Among them, larger rural settlements, such as Dikaia, Kyprinos or Metaxades, of a size of more than 1000 inhabitants, were developed during the 60's and the 70's as local agricultural- administrative centers. Some of them rose to seats of the "Capodistrian" municipalities, in 1999, although today faint away, after the application of the new "Kallikrateian" organization of the Municipalities, which left an area of more than 4.000 km<sup>2</sup> with only 4 municipalities. (25) The cultural importance of the area is unexpectedly high and remains unknown, not only to foreigners, but to the natives as well. Its resources are mainly developed along historical routes, such as the rivers Evros (Marica), Ardas and Erythrotamos, while they chronologically extend in a continuous, though not regular manner, starting from the Upper Prehistory.

## THE IMPLEMENTED WORK ON CULTURE

During the last decades the Greek trans-border regions received generous funding, both by the European Union and the State. The 2<sup>nd</sup> and the

3<sup>rd</sup> Community Support Framework focused, among the others, on the convergence between the poorer and the most developed regions of Europe. Programmes, such as the LEADER (26) and OPAAH,(27) the Operational Programmes, or the "Law for Development" set considerable challenges to the hinterland of Evros for a "new", sustainable approach, both because of its particular geographical position and its rural isolated profile.

We should start with the valuable experience, gained for the environmental tourism in the Delta of the Evros river and in the National Park of Dadia-Soufli-Levkimi, both of them protected by the Ramsar Convention and the "Natura 2000" Agenda. The unique biotope of Dadia owns a population of 219 species of birds and 36 out of the 38 species of daily vultures, residing in Europe and it had climbed up to high numbers of visitors, annually approaching the 60.000. (28)

Traditional folk-life culture is a well-known tourist resource. In 2005 Greece had no less than 365 folk-life museums and collections, founded mainly by local authorities and cultural societies. (29) It is, on the other hand, sad, that the "authentic" folk culture has not been the object of a returnable activity, leaving in its place "kitsch" representations of a questionable nature. The inconsiderate use of traditional culture for tourism often leads to the formation of a "fake authenticity". Nevertheless, a systematic folk-life tourism can be successful, regaining vitality and attractiveness, provided that the cultural resource will be confronted with respect, adapting the tourist offer to its authenticity, instead of reshaping it in order to be pleasant and attractive to the client. This also implies connection with the local market and its products, for example through workshops of artists, modern art or educational courses and parallel authentic folk-life events and at the same time, removal of the plastic plates catering and the puppet-like dances. Thus, an interesting ritual, such as that of Kiopek-Bey, "the Master of the dogs", has been gradually degenerated to a harmless parade, instead of reviving its direct ancestral, orgiastic procession of Dionysos, characterized by the representation of the pagan fertility, life-death "imitations" and extreme phrasal expressions. In Didymoteichon the event was culminated with the Bey's ritual drowning in the waters of Erythrotamos, followed by his miraculous

resurrection, something that consisted one of the main differences between the rural custom and the urban one. (30, **Picture 1**, from bibl. no.30)



**Picture 1.** Kiopek-Bey

Similar “passage” feasts still survive in the area; we could mention the “summer St.Athanassios”, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May, which introduces to the blooming of nature and to the relative agricultural activities, implying a vital economic meaning for the rural population. Clear pagan survivals can also play a substantial role. Such are the kurbans, the ritual sacrifices of animals dedicated to saints, partly maintaining their originally congregational and mystic character, adapted, though, to the modern necessities and conveniences. An interesting example is the St.Demetrius kurban, taken place at the saint’s tiny altar, into the castle of Didymoteichon, which is adorned with the late-byzantine burial plaque of the sevastokrator Andronicos Raul Assan(es) Palaeologos. Here, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of October, at the beginning of the winter season, the faithful bring two roosters each, which are sacrificed on the upper surface of the sanctuary, reminiscing pagan precedents. (31)

Besides events, institutions and establishments are as well potentially “strong papers” of the “folk-life” tourism, the most prevailing being the ethnographic museums and collections. Such is the example of the folk-life museum of Didymoteichon, once a large but obsolete collection, arranged at the four floors of an eloquent mansion of the beginnings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, later used as an agricultural bank. Gradually, through the implementation of a number of projects, the collection is re-organized and adapted to the modern priorities

and demands, covering a wide spectre, both chronologically and thematically.

Religious tourism is the oldest documented kind of the certain economy, while the interest on it is constantly growing. It includes festivals, happenings, processions, litanies, liturgies and other events, and also material resources, such as architecture (churches, monasteries, sacred caves, mosques etc), icons, literal sources, wall-paintings, as well as souvenirs. (**Picture 2**) It is a provoking field, which can be promoted together with other cultural attractions, revealing the multi-notable role that the artistic, aesthetic, structural etc. implications of its assets can play. (32)



**Picture 2.** The icon of Crucifixion, church of Christ the Savior, Didymoteichon (early 14<sup>th</sup> century)

Through the Leader and the Interreg Initiatives a number of post-byzantine churches of the area has been restored and promoted. We can mention the churches of Therapeio (1895), Patagi (17<sup>th</sup> cent.–1852), the three wall-painted churches of the area of Metaxades (1696-1729), that of the Birth of Virgin Mary in Levkimi (18<sup>th</sup> cent) or the Armenian church of Surp-Kevork (St.George, 18<sup>th</sup> – early 19<sup>th</sup> c) in Didymoteichon. The interventions included, besides the restoration of the buildings, the conservation of icons, wall-paintings or other holy items, signalization and, in some cases, promotion. The female monastery of Panagia Portaitissa in Kornofolia is an attractive example of how religious tourism can be developed without destroying the Orthodox spirituality and authenticity. (33)

We should add here a number of local Muslim religious monuments which reflect the considerable role that the region played during the Ottoman expansion in the Balkans. Characteristic is the bektashi monastery (tekke) of Rousa, erected by Seyyid ‘Ali Sultan or Kızıl Deli in 1401-02, which still maintains its form, character and sanctity. The annual bektashi congregation at the near-by Hilgia, the prophet Elias’ plateau, next to the Greek-Bulgarian border, can be as well a profitable attraction. (34)

In Didymoteichon, a festival aspired to combine the revival of the first modern Olympic Games in June 1332 and the Pentecost, a religious celebration connected with the double salvation of Didymoteichon, by the Crusaders and the Bulgarians (1206). (35) It was meant to function both as an introduction to the Byzantine history of the town and its monuments and as an invitation for the locals to participate in the tourism “game”. As far as it was financed by an agricultural program it also aimed to promote the traditional local products and especially garlic, coming out at the period. However, from its beginnings it was ingloriously reduced to a parade of bagpipers and a mediocre litany into the castle.

Festival tourism is another strong thematic for the Balkan rural areas, with a variety of happenings. Until now, they are basically focused to the natives, although the majority of foreign tourists visit at least one cultural event during their stay. (36) A noteworthy “good practice” can be referred for Didymoteichon. Its municipality was enlisted in the National Cultural Network of Towns, under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture, as a Center of Meetings of the Eastern European Young Artists. The concept dealt with the fact that Didymoteichon could regain its position a spiritual and religious center of the wider Orthodox community, apart from a military and political one, “the most powerful castle in Romania and one of the wealthiest” (37) through a new means of interpreting the world, that is modern art, under the consideration that the relative countries were still connected with the same mentality and ideology.

The project targeted to the rapidly developing Eastern European tourist market. The indirect advertisement would be accomplished by the involved small, but influential spiritual-artistic

elite of the countries involved. It was at first concentrated on a two-week plain-air with seminars, conferences, acquaintance with the area and its people, workshops for children and working in-situ, culminating in two exhibitions. The project quickly started to expand both in time and thematically, with a complementary funding for supporting infrastructures, such as restoring old buildings to be used for residence and artistic creation. It nurtured hopes, reinforced by agreements concerning a permanent cooperation with Art Academies, as well as by the procedures for the foundation of an Applied Arts State Academy in the town. However, the venture faded away, knocking against the lack of competent cadres as well as the micro-political interests of the local authorities, dispersing money in non-productive expenses.

Speaking about arts we should also mention the theatrical weeks in the near-by Orestiada, with the participation of schemes coming from all over Greece, being a culmination of the pioneering, high quality work, owed to one and only person, Akis Tsonidis. Some kilometers to the North, the famous “Ardas river” music festival, an event of Balkan importance, offers to the visitors, besides music, arts, sports and leisure.

Festivals, connected to local economic activities step on a firmer base. In Soufli, a picturesque small town, 27 km to the south of Didymoteichon, the festivals of the traditional local products of “tsipouro” (“raki”) and silk act mutually with a number of implemented projects, both public and private. The specific identity of the town, woven with sericulture and silk, can reflect ideally the combination of cultural tourism with the brand-named local traditional products.

The silk festival, with events, such as seminars, concerts, presentation of books, exhibitions etc., functions both as a connector with the market and its promoter. Wine tourism, on the other hand, “touches” a prevalent local occupation of the past and can find an excellent field of application in Soufli. The necessary infrastructures already exist. They are, for example, the wineries or a traditional restored store-house, where the production of tsipouro in six cauldrons is combined with the realization of the “tsipouro” festival in the first days of November. “Staphylos”, on the other hand, the local “association of the friends of

grape and wine” extends its activities, from the religious rituals in the chapel, dedicated to the saint of the vines, St. Tryphon, to the pilot cultivations of vineyards.

What is further needed for Soufli is the combined, systematic promotion of the long-time quality products: silk – wine/tsipouro – sausages and of the local heritage, including music and education (38), and, above all, its unique architecture “of silk”.

Educational tourism corresponds to high level tourist qualifications, since it answers to the human necessity for enriching knowledge. Until now it has not been a systematic source of income for the area. Nevertheless, here the students’ weekly excursions can be developed, as well as a small scale “congress tourism”, which can take advantage of the geographic position of the area and the advanced intercourse of the locals with our Balkan neighbors. Moreover, besides the economic profit the area could be also benefited by the multiple contribution of the participating scientists.

Since history and archaeology form a strong advantage for the area, the restoration and rehabilitation of the castles of Didymoteichon and Pythion form a strong tool for development. Work was implemented through the co-financed Operational Programmes. The Pythion castle, refuge and safe of the emperor Joannes VI Kantakuzenos, met an exemplary restoration, undertaken by the Archaeological Service itself, while the much larger and most important Didymoteichon castle exhibits signs of a fragmentary and occasionally careless work. **(Picture 3)**



**Picture 3.** The castle of Pythion

The project on the ancient burial tumulus near Mikri Doxipara, next to the Greek-Bulgarian border bears high expectations. The excavations have revealed five chariots with the horses buried next to them and with eloquent mobile findings. Although the work is continuing, the number of the visitors – in a high percentage students- is impressive and the Museum, which is going to be erected in-situ will multiply the local tourist potential. (39)

Alternative tourism can be approached more effectively through the combination of different objectives, subjected to the same central strategy, something that will allow for the optimum funding, organization, connection with the local market, promotion and dispersion. An example comes from Soufli; here, cultural development policies are declared as priority ones, as it was confirmed by the Municipal Operational Program of 2009. The Leader and Interreg Operational Programmes offered the possibility to increase the number of the known destinations and to lengthen the potential visitors’ sojourn, developing, together with the Bulgarian neighbors, a network of co-operation, promoting common sustainable tourism offers. Such projects were: (40)

The restoration and promotion of the old masonry bridges of the area, an unexploited field of the traditional Balkan architecture, implying a multiple constructional, historical, symbolical etc. significance.

“Architecture on the routes of silk”, including the research and documentation of the material, the study of the restoration of a neoclassical building as a “Museum of Thracian Architecture”, the promotion, popularization and a conference. The project had a mirror Bulgarian project, dealing with the traditional sericulture and its architecture in the Ivailovgrad area.

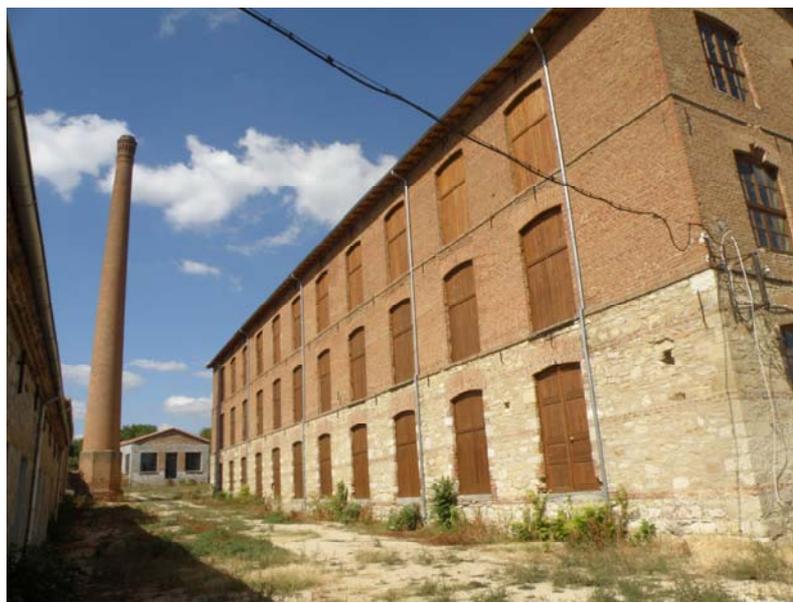
“The Past as the Future: historical topography of the area of the Municipality of Soufli and local development”. Here, five sub-projects comprised an integrated view on the local archaeological heritage, starting from the documentation of the material and culminating with a Greek-Bulgarian scientific conference, through the co-operation with four Bulgarian partners, from Svilengrad to Melnik. The project revealed about 20 sites, most of them previously unknown, which were approached,

studied and partly signaled, promoted and popularized.

The restoration of a number of “cocoon houses” in Soufli, Dadia and Kornofolia for cultural purposes, such as the “ex-Kalesis” Municipal Hotel and the Municipal Museum in Soufli, the “Museum of Human and Natural Environment” in Dadia, –now under organization- or the organized, private museums of Silk in Soufli, such as the

Museum of the Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation, the Museum of the Art of Silk or the “Gnafala” Collection.

The Tzivre industrial complex, a really impressive silk factory, built in 1909, was bought by the Municipality of Soufli and is restored in successive stages, in order to be used as a “Center for Support and Promotion of the Local Traditional Economy and Culture”. **(Picture 4)**



**Picture 4.** The old Tzivre factory of silk in Soufli

## THE RESULTS

In order for the results of the efforts of the previous years to be discernible, a long-time vision is necessary, especially for our “virgin” areas, where a period of at least 20-25 years is required. (41) Nevertheless, a question inevitably emerges: why sustainable tourism is not developed in the area and the economic and social level of the locals has not been raised considerably because of culture?

Small and medium local entities and authorities usually are not capable of corresponding, without external help, to the strategic and financial needs of the tourist management. Even when they overcome certain problems, often without money or cadres, they hit against the rigid wall of bureaucracy. This, added to the lack of coordination between different policy making levels, leads to the inability of responding to the incessantly changing demands of the tourist market. (42) Particularly, it has not been realized that even when tourism is concerned

with culture, it remains, nevertheless, a financially oriented system, obeying to strict, “non-humane” laws. In order to attract clients, local entities must “come out” in the tourist market, with a coherent and flexible proposal, searching for target groups, preferences or habits. (43) Unfortunately, local authorities delayed to realize that tourism facilities do not benefit only visitors, by definition being not among the electorate; through every investment in cultural tourism, the profit for the local communities can be multiplied, adding to the local income, to the creation of jobs and the invigoration of the local market. (44)

The problems are proved to be both structural and tactical. Thus, the responsible constantly neglect to create, reform or elaborate a serious structure that could answer to the market requisitions and take advantage of the strong local points. They do not pay attention to the lack of personnel or training and insist on the unprepared and unorganized attractions and

offerings. The lack of a persistent plan, a reliable budget and of advertisement-information and popularization are as well important drawbacks. In fact, although the proposed activities were supposed to spring from Local Development Municipal Programmes, it was proved that they were never taken seriously under consideration or they simply were empty papers. On the contrary, the handy approach and the Balkan mentality, which despises long-term plans and theoretical background were prevailing. Thus, the implemented projects in their majority were proved to be spontaneous or fragmentary, without provision for their future perspectives. The situation was partly saved by the patriotism of a handful of competent rulers or cadres.

Behind all these we can discern the symptoms of an indigenous pathology. The Greek State was structured upon an introverted ideology, influenced by the 19<sup>th</sup> century Neoclassicism and Romantism and characterized by the resource to a bright past in order to cover modern weakness. At the same time the people, "laos" in Greek, was considered as incapable of creating "high" cultural assets, being useful just for the completion of the chain of the ethnic continuation and the entailed national identification. Thus, the formation of the "cultural terrain" was a-priori based on the strange combination of a false self-confidence and a "raya" fear and at the same time, on worship to the outcomer, leading to a defensive tactical confrontation of the incoming promises.

In addition, the rural areas, deprived from the brilliant coating of the urban elite and urged by the complaint of the unprivileged were restrained to an inutile protest against injustice. The late incorporation of Thrace into the national body (1920), the distance from the capital and the other urban centers, as well as the centralized State system worsened things. The inconveniency becomes clearer when it is set in the historical frame of the disastrous civil war (1946-49) and the emigration flows of the 60<sup>ies</sup> – early 70<sup>ies</sup>, which dissolved the regions of the border Northern Greece.

The situation is reflected on statistics. Eastern Macedonia-Thrace still remains one of the poorest regions in the United Europe. According to the data given by the Eurostat for the year 2007, the region, with a 12.506 €

annual income per person, was at the 65,15% of the Average Greek Revenue (19.194 €) and at the 60,45% of the Average European one, while Attica, for example, had climbed to the 136,5 % of the Greek and the 126,7 % of the European average.(45)

### THE PROFITS

On the other hand some considerable profits came out from the accumulated experience:

- The concept and the parameters of culture entered the socio-economic life of rural areas.
- Rural regions obtained a new perspective, provided that the future activities will be serious and carefully organized.
- Activities, apparently not connected between them are tied with sustainable links.
- Sensitivization and a first mobilization of the local populations have been achieved.
- Potentially profitable relationships are developed, both on national and trans-border level.
- For the first time the remote Balkan provinces realized that the cynical, hydrocephalous State can be set aside, so that they alone will manage the matters of their own homes.

### CONCLUSION: THE KEY FACTORS FOR A LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

-The key words for a development policy are: "optimum" and "quality" instead of "maximum" and "quantity". Culture is not a mere economic parameter and even on the tourism field it should never lose its prevalent humane character. The maintenance of the authenticity of the proposed product and the relative legislative norms can ensure this priority.

- A healthy, optimist self-confidence can be developed, based on real and current data.

Innovation should be furnished for the "construction" of any proposal, the method applied and the final product.

-- A distinct, as far as it concerns its character and quality, organization of work has to be implemented through a serious planning, management and cooperation between different administrative levels, starting from a local Strategic Plan for tourism, as a part of a local Operational Programme, creating secondary generic plans, establishing principles and work conditions. (46)

- Management should include the whole procedure: identification – documentation of destinations and routes, market research (target groups, demands etc), development of

infrastructures, organization and orientation of the attractions, promotion and monitoring. (47)

- Inclusion of the activities in the local economic cycle is necessary in order to ensure sustainability. The local market can participate in a mutually beneficial manner.
- The local community should participate actively to the formation of the proposals. The role of the numerous local institutions, such as the Municipal Libraries, or associations, as potential supporters or even as co-organizers of the cultural proposals is crucial and can partly recover the lack of specialists.
- Cultural routes should be set together through common proposals, exploiting together common heritage where every area and ethnic or social formation will keep its cultural identity

-Modern economic environment demands a wider approach through the combination of cultural tourism with other tourism branches, such as environmental or agro-tourism, as well as the scientific support and the proper advertisement, the latter contributing considerably to the success of a project. Provided that some basic assumptions will be satisfied, the results, even not exhausting the local potential, may be proved to be surprisingly positive.

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