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The Role of Cultural Heritage in the Development of Small Towns in Burgenland

Abstract

The purpose of the study. To examine the factors that influence the innovative and sustainable use of cultural heritage in small towns and the contribution of cultural heritage protection to the development of small towns.

Applied methods. Literature review including the history of small town in Burgenland and the evolution of the concept of cultural heritage. We involved sources from monographies, census records and own experiences of study trips. The research framework is Burgenland's small towns.

Outcomes. The study highlights the specificity of the concept of cultural heritage in Central-Europe, in which the economic-socio-environmental classification of theories is also valid. The opportunity for culture-based development of small towns in Burgenland is presented as an opportunity, requiring an integrated approach: the strategic use of cultural resources in development is presented as an economic potential.

Keywords: Burgenland, small town, cultural heritage, development

Introduction

Europe has been facing the challenge of an ageing society, labour migration and depopulation for several years now. The demographic crisis threatens Central-Europe in particular, with population decline affecting not only rural areas but also cities³⁵⁰. The problem of shrinking cities is expected to multiply the number of small towns in the long term³⁵¹. In addition to the economic and social consequences of all these impacts, there are also strong environmental and cultural effects. We are living in an age of recession, and the Covid-19 period has redefined many social and welfare issues. Rural areas and small towns, which were the centres of these areas, have been re-valued, in many ways as an alternative to metropolitan life. The changed interpretative framework has refocused attention on smaller towns, on the inequalities that are usually hidden in comparison with big cities. Preserving the cultural heritage of a dwindling (disappearing) rural society could be a priority and could even play a role in stimulating the local economy.

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals³⁵² (SDGs) focus on 17 key priorities for the coming decades. This framework of global targets focuses primarily on the problems of developing countries, including social problems. From 2015 onwards, attention will be more

³⁵⁰ Enyedi, Gy. (2012), Csurgó, B. – Megyesi, B. (2016)

³⁵¹ Jelinek, Cs. – Virág, T. (2020)

³⁵² <https://sdgs.un.org/>

focused on the problems of developed countries, with a stronger role for environmental aspects. However, it is noticeable that the 169 sub-objectives and the 231 indicators assigned to them do not include any recommendations on the protection of cultural heritage. They have been included as a supplementary element, non-binding instrument, in response to recommendations from nation states. It is described as promoting intercultural understanding, tolerance and mutual respect; recognising natural and cultural diversity and that all cultures and civilisations can contribute to sustainable development. This includes the protection of cultural heritage in Objective 11 (Making cities and other human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable) and the local culture in goal 12 (Developing sustainable consumption and production).

A review of EU legislation shows that the issue of cultural heritage was addressed as early as 1972, taking into account the UNESCO recommendations: “whereas the cultural heritage is a major element of the identity and historical development of the peoples of Europe”³⁵³. A European Parliament resolution published in 2006 explains the contribution of cultural heritage to integration, the need for common protection measures, the vulnerability of rural areas and provides for financial support as an incentive. The Treaty of Lisbon is said to have made the Union more efficient, with a clear separation of powers between the Community and the Member States³⁵⁴, and to have set up a European Agenda for Culture, in which cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue have become a means of efficiency³⁵⁵. Declaring that cultural policies should promote social inclusion, encouraging cooperation and the sharing of experience and good practice between actors and levels in different fields³⁵⁶. In 2018, the new Agenda for Culture for the EU was adopted³⁵⁷. The development of the cultural sector is organised around three strategic objectives - economic, social, and external dimensions - to strengthen social cohesion and well-being. It should be stressed that Community resources thus create opportunities to promote learning in each country, to support cultural participation and to support the acquisition of skills required by the creative industries.

The cultural heritage in rural areas

In my research, I focused on culture as a site-specific and spatially dependent factor. The concept of heritage has emerged as a central element in the humanities and social sciences in recent decades. The theoretical framework for cultural heritage: can explore several aspects of cultural heritage as a factor for economic development and as a resource. It is important to keep in mind that cultural heritage is more than just material culture such as buildings, monuments and tools. Both tangible artefacts and intangible elements compose our cultural heritage. This framework naturally extends to consideration of how cultural heritage impacts on local development, both in terms of urban sustainability and, especially, in social and economic aspects. However, studies on this relationship have traditionally encountered difficulties in precisely defining the role heritage factors have played in local or territorial regeneration. This

³⁵³ EUR-LEX 2006/2050

³⁵⁴ Kecskés, L. (2011)

³⁵⁵ European Commission (2007)

³⁵⁶ Council of the European Union 2010/C 324/03

³⁵⁷ European Commission (2018)

wealth. The intergenerational balance may be upset as to who will benefit and whether cultural diversity can be sustained alongside economic benefits³⁶².

The bridge between rural and urban: small towns in Burgenland

The development and expansion of the city-network is also the result of historical traditions, with most of the oppida, the agricultural towns in the region having been given the status of small towns. So, we can see the proportion of the urbanisation in Central-Europe is nearly half of the population. Suburbanisation and urban sprawl are becoming more pronounced around rapidly developing regional centres. Post-socialist urbanisation is characterised by a decline in the population of cities and their peri-urban areas, while urban sprawl is accelerating. The main challenge is the shrinking cities and empty villages - because population decline and disappearance also means traditions disappearance, too. The number of small towns in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was constantly changing; this was largely influenced by the development of the agrartowns (oppida), the 1871 and 1886 town laws. The changes after the Treaty of Trianon and the socialist industrialisation were not aimed primarily at small towns. History is an important factor influencing the development of small towns, with the employment profile, the composition of society and the availability of local resources generating growth. Regional and national changes also have a significant impact on the life of small towns. Small towns that have achieved their status in areas of urban deprivation play a more important role, especially in the south of Burgenland. In addition to the basic infrastructure, various urban functions have emerged in these municipalities, and society has also benefited from their urbanisation, in addition to the economic advantages.

In my previous research³⁶³, I have used different methodological approaches to present an interdisciplinary approach to the concept of the small town, which is characterised by constant counterpoint. I have highlighted that it carries a positive connotation when it is identified as the centre of the countryside, along the lines of rural romanticism and cultural identity; and a negative one when it is treated as backward, peripheral, inferior. I have argued that the small town cannot be clearly delimited by population size, as it is both a settlement size category and a functional and settlement hierarchical category.

Austria's provinces are extremely diverse, their development influenced by both natural conditions and political and historical influences; in terms of tradition and historical continuity, internal dividing lines sometimes act as stronger boundaries than external ones³⁶⁴. The province is characterised by a combination of an ageing population and increasing immigration, typically with below average levels of tertiary education, which is associated with a loss of local values (community knowledge). The province represents 3.3% of the country's population and 8.1% of its municipalities³⁶⁵. The size of the settlements within the province is not homogeneous, mainly shaped by natural conditions. Smaller settlements can be found in the mountain and hill areas. The northern areas are characterised by a higher average population, in line with the flatland conditions. The territorial unit, created in 1921 by political will, had no major metropolis or sub-centre. Its two free royal cities (Eisenstadt: 3073 inhabitants in 1910 and

³⁶² Del Espino Hidalgo, B. – Horeczki, R. (2022)

³⁶³ Horeczki, R. – Egyed, I. (2021)

³⁶⁴ Palkó, K. (2009): 208.

³⁶⁵ Statistik Austria (2018)

Rust: 1535 inhabitants) were among the smallest towns in the Empire. Eisenstadt, the most populous municipality in the province, became its seat in 1925. The designation of district seats was also based primarily on population. It was characterised by an urban settlement structure and relative backwardness within the country. Between the two world wars, four municipalities were granted urban status (Mattersburg and Neusiedl am See (1926), Pinkafeld (1937), Oberwart (1939). From the 1980s onwards, Vienna's suburbanisation area also began to grow, which had a positive impact on the province. Tourism has become a prominent economic sector in the province, which has also raised the standard of living in the area. There are 13 municipalities with urban status in the region, but only the provincial capital (Eisenstadt) has a population of more than 10,000. One fifth of the provincial population lives in these small towns.

Summary

In essence, cultural heritage is one of the cornerstones of European identity, and its content is extremely rich and extensive. It includes the architectural monuments of towns and villages, the value of cultural landscapes, the historic centres of large cities, etc., which form the backdrop to everyday life and enrich people's lives. The creative management of this heritage can contribute to Europe's global competitiveness and provide a new model for small towns and cities (the model of culture-based small town development). Most development documents consider cultural heritage as a development tool, a specific resource, and it is often included in development priorities, objectives, plans and policies. Indeed, at the highest level, cultural heritage is one of the three development principles of the European Spatial Development Perspective. Its preservation and strategic application will remain a key area for the future.

So in the next phase of the research I will find some examples for culture-based small town development in Austria and especially in Burgenland. The results of this project have helped a lot with good examples, solutions and innovations. Especially in the case of settlement located on the border, there is an opportunity for strategic and integrated use of cultural resources in development plans. However, innovative and sustainable strategies can particularly contribute to strengthening the socio-economic fabric of vulnerable but heritage-rich territories through nurturing employment opportunities, the training of qualified personnel, bolstering the service sector and rooting younger populations, among other eventual outcomes.

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