

‘Digitizing and digitalizing’ the tangible and intangible heritage in the cross-border Danube Delta

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Project description:

1. Clear overall aim

The research aims to create a cultural heritage database that will serve as the starting point of promoting cultural tourism in all three countries that share the Danube Delta: Romania, Ukraine and Moldova. There are a number of good models all around Europe on creating cross-sector and cross-departmental working groups that have become the driving force behind developing cultural and creative industries policies on local, regional, national and international level (*EU Commission, 2010*).

A review of arts-based activities in a protected and multiethnic area is the point of departure for this article. The products and activities offered and related issues on the economic sustainability of small villages situated on “islands” are examined. Challenges can appear in communities at risk of losing their unique character and attempting to protect their special sense of place. The role of arts is examined as a means for encouraging and strengthening sense of place and community identity, as well as building resilience. To combat social and economic inequity in this area, other relevant authorities, NGO's, communities, and policy makers should seek ways to empower local residents to find local solutions. This study would help maintain the sustainability of the tourism sector and enable future support in order to engage communities in the arts-based activities.

The process reunites the efforts and expertise of specialists from the fields of human geography, cultural heritage studies, ethnology and folklore, anthropology and cross border communication. The conclusions of their work will be used to raise awareness of the local population and the tourists about cultural heritage and cultural tourism. One of the methods of disseminating the database will be the form of an interactive mobile app that people can download for free in order to learn about tangible and intangible heritage in the areas of the Danube Delta they are visiting.

Cultural mapping is a valuable tool for identifying a community's strengths and its resources. This process can help as communities move into the planning and implementation phase by identifying early the resources, efficiencies and links between arts and cultural groups, as well as their common aspirations and values (*Honorable Stan Hagen, Minister of Tourism, Sport and the Arts*).

Tourists in the Danube Delta currently explore the natural landscape and most often don't pay attention to the cultural one. As seen in the examples of more developed countries, even on the upstream Danube shore, tourism can become a mean of revitalizing cultures when abandoned historical sites and almost extinct traditions are revived for touristic purposes.

A lot has been written and researched about the Danube Delta, both through disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches, yet if we follow the Danube from springs to the sea, it is still one of the most undeveloped regions, suffering consequences of human intervention (including upstream water management policies).

For the time being there is a general attempt from local and European authorities to shift local communities from fishing (their traditional activity) to tourism related activities, to conserve natural resources and promote sustainability.

The Danube Delta, the largest river delta wetland in Europe, has become one of the finest, wildest, and culturally diverse areas of the whole continent. Land use changes, rural exodus, loss of biodiversity and fading traditional culture have been turned into new opportunities, attracting both young and old entrepreneurial people as well as many more and better paying visitors from far outside the region. This area can provide new sources of income and pride for the people who live there, only by helping them assess the richness of the cultural landscape they possess.

Cultural mapping of the Danube Delta will enable us to understand and share culture; to re-think history; and to promote creativity and development. Where cultural mapping can be most valuable is in generating new perspectives, and preparing the ground for effective cultural planning.

Objectives:

- O1. To assess the history and the current state of human settlements in the Danube Delta by creating a Cultural Heritage Database
- O2. Raising awareness of stakeholders about cultural heritage (locals, authorities, tourists)

2. State of the art

Danube Delta's cultural heritage is rich and diverse but many sites were destroyed by wars, earthquakes or political decisions. The results of the archaeological researches indicate that Byzantine presence in Dobruja's mainland and on the banks of Danube lost weight in the end of the 6th century under the pressure of the Migration Period. In the coastal fortifications on the southern bank of Danube, latest Byzantine coin finds date from the time of the emperors Tiberius II Constantine (574–582) and Heraclius (610–641). After that period, all inland Byzantine cities were demolished and abandoned. On the other hand, some of the earliest Slavic settlements to the south of Danube were discovered in Dobruja, near the villages of Popina, Gărvan and Nova Cherna, and were dated to the end of the 6th and the beginning of the 7th centuries.

A multiethnic community's history, as represented in the cultural and built environment serves as an important asset for the economic development in a sustainable way. Many of the studies done until now, cope either with the administrative division of the coastal area throughout the Late Roman and medieval period, or with the modern division of the west coast between Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey.

State of the art shows that although sporadic local efforts have been made to identify elements of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, a centralized project is needed to create a complex map that will serve tourists, tour operators, local, regional and national authorities and locals.

During the years, it was argued that development should only focus on specific economy sectors, but in the present day more authors argue that rural development should be tailored to the unique cultural characteristics and highlight the special elements (Dunphy, 2009). Richard Florida (2005) said that "Human creativity is the ultimate source of economic growth. Every single person is creative in some way. And to fully and tap and harness that creativity we must be tolerant, diverse and inclusive."

Local culture provides sense of identity for rural communities and residents (Hodgson, 2011, Keen et al, 2005). This identity facilitates common understandings, traditions and values, all central to the identification of plans of action to improve well-being (Brennan, 2009). The planning process plays an important role in assisting residents as they inventory and explore their community context. In this way, the planning process provides a grounding mechanism to ensure that the wealth of information latent in the community is revealed, enhanced, and maintained over time. This allows a narrative about the authentic elements of a community's talent to emerge and thrive (Murray & Baeker, 2006).

Regarding conservation status, it differs from one country to another and from one monument to another but maybe more than 50% are in bad condition. After 2008, the economic crisis, severe austerity policy and governments instability had a bad impact on cultural heritage protection. Existing heritage legislation is not entirely applied in real life in the absence of proper financial support and human resources (Vaidianu, 2013).

One of the main obstacles to the conservation of the cultural heritage and its historic road was the absence of an appropriate planning and legal framework or little action of the concerned institutions. Also, their ownership condition differs being either public property, private or mixed.

What is also innovative is the methods in which the research outcome of the project will be disseminated, as we rely on producing and communicating visual data content, in the form of a documentary film, info graphics and maps which explore the field of digital heritage, by creating an app. Cultural mapping is an attention-getter, and our inventory projected in a map can be used to tell the story to different types of interest groups in an innovative way.

This study will demonstrate that culture and the arts are pivotal in the development of Danube Delta's economy and in increasing community resilience, leading to community well-being and sustainability. Local vendors, artisans, craftspeople, hoteliers are kept busy and may indeed make large portion of their annual income promoting tangible and intangible heritage.

3. Scientific approach/methods

During the project, we will collect data from historical maps and by geo-referencing and digitizing the regional statistics. A comprehensive, well-designed inventory not only will provide indispensable data but helps us to structure our process. As well as listing the resources in certain categories, it can include characteristics we want to track, such as location, access, level of usage, types of users, and discipline. Responding to these issues, we will should found out, why some communities like Crisan can live of tourism, whereas others like C. A. Rosetti are facing a constant loss of inhabitants' due to the lack of tourist-infrastructure and working-places.

Furthermore, focus groups will be organized and relevant archives will be researched. Accessibility to the resource will be assessed directly by means of fieldwork, and indirectly through researching existing available data. It should be noted that the accessibility does not mean only physical approachability but also the level of cooperation of the involved stakeholders (local population, authorities etc). Photo, film and audio recordings will involve direct recordings in the field but also researching the historical archives. The analysis of the obtained data will be used to make an evaluation of the historical, cultural and economic value of the cultural assets. The obtained data must be transcribed and translated to relevant languages. As a second step, we will form expert-groups consisting of historians, economists, and experts on cultural heritage tourism for presenting the results and receiving feedback.

Proposed activities for each objective:

O1. To assess the history and the current state of human settlements in the Danube Delta by creating a Cultural Cross-Border Heritage Database

The database will consist of the following types of data:

- 1) geographic coordinates,
- 2) brief description and history of the cultural resources,
- 3) accessibility to the cultural resources,
- 4) producing photo-, film- and audio-records and finally
- 5) assessment of conservation status.

Activity 1. Inventorying tangible heritage from each settlement and surroundings

Every cultural resource will be briefly described in terms of its history and present state by conducting interviews with local population and experts (home researchers, museum workers, historians): Buildings (houses, mills, former prison, Danube Delta Commission 1856), Former factories and industrial sites, shipyard, shipwreck, Monuments, Churches, Art objects, Traditional Boats, Fishing tools, Fortresses, Lighthouses, Cemeteries, Archeological Sites, Open air museums

Sub-activities:

- designing the inventory
- drafting survey questionnaires and interview questions
- assembling the inventory

Methods:

- using flexible software such as a spreadsheet
- fieldwork campaigns
- investigation of historical maps
- analyses of old photos and postcards
- interviews with experts and locals

Deliverables: List of tangible sites and their conservation status for each country

Activity 2: Inventorying intangible heritage from each settlement and surroundings: food preparation, music, dance, language, religious practices, clothing, oral history

Sub-activities:

- designing the inventory
- drafting survey questionnaires and interview questions
- assembling the inventory

Methods:

- qualitative and quantitative fieldwork-research: interviews, focus-groups, participative observation
- visual documentation through photography
- folklore and traditions review
- using flexible software such as a spreadsheet

Deliverables: List of intangibles values and a repository with photos, songs, recipes, dances etc. for each country

Activity 3: Digitizing and mapping the cultural heritage

Once we will have a basic list of resources we will start to think in terms of what we want to know about them – our data categories. The design of the database will anticipate the structure and legend of our target-product: the map.

Mapping will make cultural heritage more visible so that it can be utilized in new ways, like exchanged, linked, and further developed, but we will take into account that mapping process requires some discipline and judgement.

Sub-activities:

- creating the map in each country, overlying all shapefiles
- analyzing the results
- interpreting the environmental history and location choice

- roughing out the map and previewing it
- presenting the results to the expert-groups

Methods: determining and collecting data with the communities, geo-referencing and digitizing the sites, assembling mapping in GIS through shapefiles overlays, comparative analysis within the three countries

To obtain the geographical coordinates, experts in the field will conduct fieldwork to record GPS data processed using adequate tools (Geographic Information Systems) and delivered as a map. As a vehicle of information, the map will be extremely versatile. It can be loaded with many kinds of data that can then be unpacked, isolated and reconfigured.

O2. Raising awareness of the local population about cultural heritage

Activity 1. Producing a documentary film for screening in targeted communities in the 3 countries.

A team of specialists in video production will accompany the research team to document their work and later present it in a manner that highlights the importance of patrimony and heritage to the communities. The screenings will take place with the support of our partner, “Cinemobilul” a Romanian association that owns mobile cinemas, that can work even in the most remote areas of the Danube Delta. At the end of the project, the movie will also be available online on the project webpage.

Methods: visual anthropology, video production, partnership with a mobile cinema association (Cinemobilul)

Deliverables: website, DVD's (100 in Romania/Ukraine, 50 in Moldova)

Activity 2. Tour guide summer schools for young locals.

We plan to train a group of young locals from each of the 3 countries by organizing 3 summer schools, each in every participant country aimed to teach them how and why natural and cultural tourism work together. They will learn through theory and practice how to accompany tourist groups and what their community must offer in terms of natural and cultural landscape.

Methods: Partnering with local NGO's, lectures and focus groups, field trips

Deliverables: written and visual data and materials (workshop structure and materials, info graphics, maps) for 70 participants from Romania, Ukraine, and Moldova

Activity 3. Digitalization - Transferring all analog content to digital

From maps, to photographs, to oral history, all collected data (tangible and intangible heritage) will be digitally processed, thus creating both the database and the interactive map. This will later lead to the development of the mobile app that visitors can use to find out what are the main attractions from any area or human settlement in the Danube Delta.

Methods: Scanning, web developing

Deliverables: Mobile app, website, social media accounts

4. Added value for the society/science

The project aims to create a complex map of all cultural heritage sites and material patrimony found in the DDBR, by specific means, to develop the framework and the premises for shifting towards cultural tourism in the Danube Delta. This is the first initiative of its kind and its complexity, as it involves mapping all human settlements and their tangible/intangible heritage from Romania, Ukraine, and Republic of Moldova.

This form of sustainable cultural tourism is necessary to balance the need for resource conservation, community well-being and tourism development at a local level. This new database becomes an important resource for tourists, tour operators, local representatives, public authorities, and ethnic minority groups, because it serves as the starting point for possible projects in developing infrastructure, accessibility and awareness toward new, cultural interest points that are not currently assessed. The dissemination of our conclusions will be widely accessible as we intend to explore promoting it by creating a mobile app, a youth guide summer school and a documentary film that will travel along the Danube shore and beyond. We find it important to share the conclusions of our study not only with the academic community, but also with the communities that can also benefit from the database.

5. Long-term perspective

During our project research, we consider the long-term perspectives of the Danube delta human settlements. By raising awareness about the material and immaterial heritage of the region and achieving our project goals, we aim to support locals, regional authorities, and tour operators in raising the number of visitors on a long-term basis.

We believe that the conclusions of our project will create a tool that will enhance the cooperation between authorities both on the regional and cross-border level and their public relations (Romania, Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine).

Our project will serve the future generations because it's output is presented in a digital, interactive technology, that makes it accessible and cheap. By creating a digital interactive map that takes the forms of a documentary movie and a mobile application, the research findings are shared with everyone, locals, and tourists alike.

The effort that the researchers will make to create the digital database will create a science based framework that many disciplines and fields of interest may use.

We hope that the research outcome will influence the 2020+ planning of Romania-Ukraine and Romania-Moldova cross-border cooperation programmes in a direction to include more future projects on intercultural and economic cooperation to revitalize the border regions and enable the movement through the border in the Danube Delta. (cross border boat-lines, common touristic projects)

6. Consortium structure and competences

As we are interested in human made assets our project-coordinator will be the National School of Political Science and Public Administration Bucharest, department of Sociology. The experts from this department have extensive knowledge and experience in the field of cultural heritage within the Danube Delta. This includes tangible and intangible cultural assets. The members of this institute are experienced in describing and analyzing cultural activities like traditional food preparation, playing traditional music and showing folk-dances. Other members of the institute examine old languages/dialects and religious practices, often by using oral history as a possibility for getting first-hand information. Another focus of the institute is to describe the production and symbolic meaning of traditional clothes.

The geographical experts of the University of Constanta are professional in mapping cultural heritage sites. Thus they can give an overview of the sites, located in the Delta and mapping them.

The Chernivtsi (Czernowitz) University will play an important role in the trans border-cooperation between Romania and Ukraine. The social scientists from the university have a great knowledge about the cultural heritage in the Ukrainian part of the Delta (e.g. settlements of Vilkovo, Izmail, Kiliya and Primorskoje). In collaboration with the Romanian partners their role will include analyzing the similarities and differences between the CH assets in both parts of the DD.

The institute of Geography in Chisinau can obtain valuable information about the sites in the very small Moldavian part of the Danube Delta.

The members of the Institute for Eastern European history of the University of Vienna have an historical and cultural knowledge on the whole Delta and know languages like Romanian, Russian and Ukrainian. They can transcribe the interviews with both individuals and focus-groups and analyze the information, obtained from these interviews.

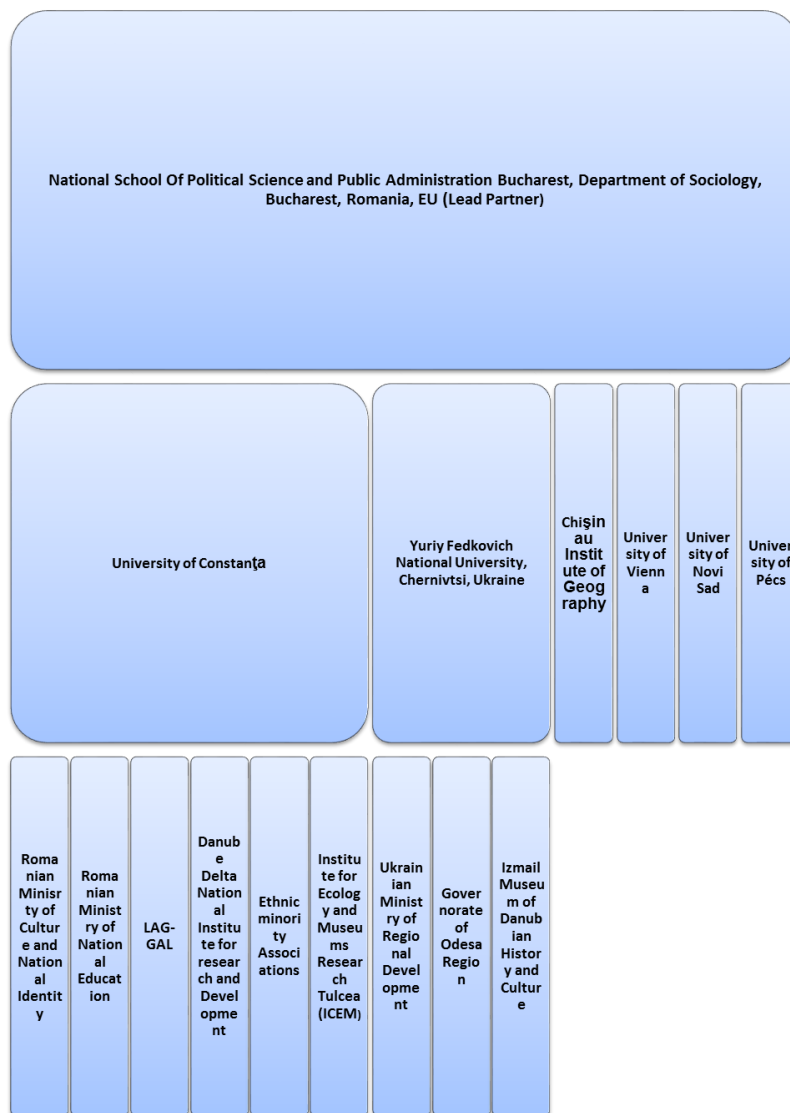
The university of Novi Sad –Laboratory for materials in Cultural Heritage - provides outstanding experts on project-management in CH field, which can help organize and finalize the work-packages. The interdisciplinary team of the Laboratory consists of material scientists, project managers and experts in facilitation of cooperation between art historians, conservator-restaurateurs on one side and scientists/engineers on the other. As citizens of the multicultural region of Vojvodina they are very involved with minority-issues.

Our expert at the Doctoral School of Regional Political and Economic Studies at the University of Pecs has conducted research on cross-border projects between Romania and Ukraine in the region of Bucovina. The research emphasized on the description and location of cultural heritage sites and the need of more social and economic interconnection between the people on both sides. In the recent project, the expert provides his expertise in organizing the budget-related issues. Moreover, he has knowledge to overcome difficulties in the trans-border cooperation between Romania and Ukraine that are also raised by the different legislation of the two countries.

Our proposed side-partners are the Romanian Ministry of Culture and National Identity (RMCNI), the Romanian Ministry of National Education (RMNE), the LAG-GAL, the Danube Delta National Institute for Research and Development (DDNIRD), the Institute for Ecology and Museums Research Tulcea (ICEM), LEGAL COUNSELLING NGO, IT company Levi9 and diverse ethnic minority associations. The RMCNI can give a general overview on the Danube Delta as a multicultural, multiethnic and multiconfessional livelihood and define the main-challenges of the people in the Delta. The RMNE can participate in establishing education programmes and organized tours for school-children that enable them to explore and describe the cultural heritage of the Danube Delta. The tasks of the Local Action Group are facilitation of Focus Groups, finding interview partners, management of public relations with the local stakeholders such as citizens, authorities etc. The DDNIRD and the ICEM will deliver explanations of the CH sites history and will be part of the expert groups evaluating the value of the CH sites. The Ethnic Minority Associations of e.g. Russian Lipovans, Ukrainian Hohols and the Greek inhabitants of Sulina organize various events like concerts and workshops for traditional food, clothing etc., which can greatly facilitate the intangible CH data gathering process.

The subcontractors will be the following: 1) Levi9 company, 2) legal consultancy NGO, 3) Cine Mobilul.

Levi9 company with its offices in both Romania and Ukraine will be responsible for the technical execution i.e. the digitalization of the database. Legal counselling NGO shall provide help to the researchers and project management staff in obtaining necessary authorizations for conducting the research and will also deal with issues regarding privacy that may come up during the data gathering. The CineMobilul provides a mobile cinema, which can be used to show short-films and public relation materials about CH sites.



7. Project outputs dissemination:

There are two major directions towards which we aim to communicate the results of our research. We address two different categories, both of them are highly important in order to receive feedback on the scientific value and social relevance of the project.

7.1 Academic outputs

Academic outputs shall consist of peer-reviewed scientific papers published in relevant international journals which will present results of the scientific methods applied during the project. There shall be no less than 10 papers published during the duration of the project, with primary focus on leading journals in the field, such as the Danube Delta Journal (Eco-Muzeum Eco Research Institute Gavrilă Simeon, Tulcea), Scientific Annals of the Danube Delta Institute (Danube Delta National Institute for Research and Development, Tulcea), Danubius Journal (Universitatea Danubius Galati, Galati), Outward Bound International Journal (Outward Bound International, Aviemore, United Kingdom)

Furthermore, the results shall be disseminated via conference presentations (oral and/or poster) after the completion of each project stage. The main tasks of the academic outputs are informing the academia about the project results and drawbacks, as well as obtaining feedback.

7.2 Education or PR outputs.

Educational outputs shall consist of “classic” dissemination tools such as information boards on sites, school campaigns for elementary and high-school children, a documentary film, flyers/brochures and similar publications.

Apart from these, the project will be presented online via the project website and social media (Facebook, Instagram etc.). The main target group for the online presentation are the tourists with an interest in the areas and the inhabitants of the human settlements and the main task is raising awareness of the importance and relevance of cultural heritage in order to increase interest in cultural tourism.

8. Time schedule and feasibility

Project life-time: 3 years

This project is complex and all proposed activities need time to be realized. Surveys and interviews will be done over a short period, due to the fact we will involve students, at the beginning of the summer, with data entry in late summer. The phase of sorting and synthesizing data collected from the field is one which will take time, since we will want to explore alternative profiles. The time allowed for the transfer of your data to a map will be quite long, because we will have to go through a few drafts before we arrive at the best representation. In this respect, a thorough mapping process will take up to a year to complete, building in time for planning and design, implementation, analysis and presenting the results.

A challenge after this project will be to find other funds to maintain the map and app operational, because things change and the deliverables can lose their currency, sometimes very rapidly.

- Gantt diagram (will be presented in the upcoming slideshow)

9. Project costs estimation

WP/Figures	Base amount	Quantity	Period	Total (EUR)
WP1				
Direct Personnel Costs	1500/Month	5 Project managers	36 Months	270,000
IT hardware and software	80 000/Project			80,000
Setting up Project Center	20 000/Project			20,000
Monthly rental and material costs	800/Month	1 Central office	36 Months	28,800
WP1 TOTAL				398,800 €
WP2				
Setting up Field Work				
- Infrastructure (IT, voice recorders, Internet)	30 000/Project			30,000
Monthly material and travel costs	1500/Month		36 Months	54,000
Student workers (incl. Accommodation)				
-Romania	30/Student/Day	15 Students	90 Days/year (3 years)	121,500
-Ukraine&Moldova	15/Student/Day	15 Students	90 Days/year (3 years)	60,750
Cine Mobile	30 000/vehicle+equipment			30,000
WP2 TOTAL				296,250 €
WP3				
Organization of Conferences	50 000/year		3 years	150,000
Printed documents (brochures, scientific papers)	30 000/year		3 years	90,000
Online presence	25 000/year		3 years	75,000
Documentary movie	90 000/movie	1 movie		90,000
WP3 TOTAL				405,000 €
PROJECT TOTAL				1,100,050 €

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