Kitsch and Cultural Tourism

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Abstract
The urban area covers a high density of structures developed by man compared to the surrounding areas. Cultural tourism includes, on the one hand, cultural tourism in urban areas – particularly historical towns and cities with cultural sites such as museums or theatres – and, on the other hand, cultural tourism in rural areas – where its main goal is to focus on communities, festivals, rituals, and traditions. From the point of view of the practice of urban or rural cultural tourism, tourists are, in most cases, presented what they wish to see: thus, authenticity can turn into inauthenticity and what is promoted is vulgar art or improper beauty, surrogate art or even pseudo-art – kitsch, represented by souvenirs that have nothing to do with true art.

Keywords: cultural tourism, kitsch, rural, urban

1. Introduction
In different parts of the world, they are not yet aware of the fact that neither the value of the cultural heritage, nor the solutions advanced to valorise it properly – multiple forms of art both in the urban and in the rural area – have anything to do with the true culture of the area since they provide tourists with inauthentic elements, vulgar art that ignore any other attraction [1-3].

From the point of view of cultural tourism, there are very small differences between urban and rural areas since the only element that seems to differentiate the two is the presence of a theatre in the former one [4,5].

The cities, the towns and the urban agglomerations are considered urban areas, but not the metropolitan areas that cover not only urban but rural areas (villages and hamlets) as well. Some researchers consider that the definition of urban area differs from one area to another, but it seems that the minimal density necessary to qualify as such should be at least 400 inhabitants/km².

In Romania, the rural area is, usually, a vast and isolated area, with little population, that can be defined anything but urban (as it has been previously defined) [6].

Since tourists practicing urban cultural tourism or rural cultural tourism spend substantially more than standard tourists [8], it is easy to understand that they need to be provided authentic, genuine structure and not kitsch.

This type of activity is more and more popular worldwide and it plays an increasingly important role in the regional development of different parts of the world.

This is also the case of the Timiş County, where cultural tourism has to face two major issues: destination planning, a very tricking issue in the context of globalisation; and resources for the planning of the destinations.

The latter should start from the following three elements: culture and local community, planning instruments, and data sources – which should all play a decisive role and avoid kitsch with the risk of diminishing tourism flows.
2. Materials and methods

To carry out this scientific approach, we have documented several bibliographical sources – both national and international – trying to promote as urban and rural cultural tourism only those material and spiritual values that turn cultural tourism into an element of culture of the most authentic type now that kitsch has become an accessory of modern life in many areas.

3. Results and discussion

For any tourist – be it national or international – material and spiritual values of the area visited, landscape, hospitality, unaltered way of life and traditions are cultural elements that any tourism manager should valorise for the benefit of the community. But cultural heritage is not always the only one responsible for the quality of destinations and services provided, particularly if tourists are provided with only what they wish to see: many times, the local community has its own interests such as carrying out beneficial activities (rites that are beneficial to the community since they are supposed to bring rain, wealth, etc.) or its own needs (jobs, eradication of poverty, authentic resources, kitsch items, etc.).

Tourism managers should anticipate the pressure exercised on the communities by urban and rural cultural tourism activities and cut it down to a minimum to preserve the resources of the area and to prevent saturation of the destination through the presentation of traditions that are not specific to the area or through surrogate art, vulgar art or misplaced beauty [1] – kitsch (bad taste art). Though less used in French or English, this German term signifies something superficial, an improvisation, and a counterfeit of something authentic like turning modern furniture into Baroque furniture.

In fact, any natural or man-made tourism resource can turn into kitsch and carry a meaning. As a result of freeing from feelings, of rights and economics, kitsch is substitute for something, an artificial substitute made by man to supplant a tourist’s attitude and, at the same time, the local society [7].

Kitsch is the consequence of the reification of an idea: it is real, the fruit of aesthetic assessment that re-interprets the aesthetic; it can be considered authentic even if attempted by local communities where there is a shortage of resources and where kitsch is the only way to make a profit.

Some specialists in cultural tourism and not only consider kitsch immanent to nature, while others state that nature never creates kitsch since it is the product of society which seeks to solve the issue of the shortage of natural or man-made cultural tourism resources, altering material and spiritual values specific to a certain community. Created by others, kitsch is manipulated and copied indefinitely, again and again, after traditional patterns (ceramics, glazed pottery, woven items) as a surrogate meant to replace the authentic items (the folk costume in black and white from the Sibiu area).

The cases of some traditional food stuffs such as Mangalita bacon or sausages as well as clothes such as furs or folk costumes are well known; but cultural surrogates have become true issues for some tourism destinations because kitsch has always wanted to say something, to be a cultural vector, to have a meaning in itself. Sold to cultural tourists as authentic tourism items, it is looked for again and again and it is very often used to decorate the environment (hotel, dining room, reception desk). It opposes simplicity specific to rural areas and becomes a spiritual counterfeiter; such products can proliferate and overlap cultural traditions where they are rooted from times immemorial [8,9].

Where there are natural and man-made resources, such as the Timiș County – the site of Conști, the dendrologic park of Băzășul Nou, the Sat Chinez Swamps, the Metropolitan Cathedral, the Catholic Dome, castles and palaces in both urban and rural areas, works of art used in destination planning, there are also wastes that imitate customs and traditions that are not specific to the area and that can operate per se, based on lower impulses and bearing sub-cultural forms that have been called by specialists “fair art”.

Though kitsch means mainly production of items, replacing material and spiritual values cannot replace the beauty – which is something additional – a bottle wrapped in raffia or wickerwork can be a beautiful item, but not a bottle wrapped in plastic string.

This is why all material and spiritual values created by man in history as works of art are not and should not be treated as kitsch.
4. Conclusions

In order to preserve intact our cultural heritage, we need to conserve the resources of a region and to prevent saturation of urban and rural cultural tourism destinations, to plan tourism activities in such a manner that the members of society are also involved in tourism activities to promote the authentic without altering the sustainability of the destination.

Planning urban and rural cultural tourism activities should take into account cultural heritage, cultural activities and not kitsch, and material, spiritual and human cultural resources since the community is willing to make a profit which makes it open to kitsch, which is modern and varied, and made of fixed, multiplied authenticity.

References

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