

# COMMUNITY ROLE IN HERITAGE MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABLE TURISM DEVELOPMENT: CASE STUDY OF THE DANUBE REGION IN SERBIA\*

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## Abstract

Destinations and cultural resources that are used and respected by both residents and tourists are the ultimate goal of sustainable tourism development. The sustainable tourism as an emerging paradigm seems to enhance the existing conceptual frameworks on tourism planning and development by making the residents its focal point. In that sense, opinions and attitudes of residents on the protection of cultural heritage and the possibilities of tourism development in their environment are very important. The Danube region in Serbia is recognized as a region of high quality natural characteristics and cultural resources which gives an outstanding opportunity for tourism development. The purpose of the study is to examine the current state of the heritage management in the Danube region in Serbia and to outline the tourism development potentials of the area. The objective of the study is to examine the role of the local communities in these aspects. The methods used in the study were a public opinion survey, a focus group interview of 12 experts and the evaluation of the sustainable cultural tourism development indicators. The results have shown that local population in the Danube region in Serbia has, in general, a positive opinion and initial enthusiasm when it comes to tourism development, but their role is marginalized in the process. This is the key proposition to start an initiative for the local communities to actively participate in tourism development.

**Keywords:** community participation, cultural heritage, tourism, sustainable development, Danube region.

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## 1. Introduction

The role of the local community is especially important in the development of the sustainable tourism that 'is deliberately planned from the beginning to benefit local residents, respect local culture, conserve natural resources, and educate both tourists and local residents' (Steck, 1999, p. 4). This role needs to be accordant with the triple bottom line approach that was initiated by Elkington (1998); this means that all activities and practice of the sustainable tourism are directly connected to all three aspects of organizing a local community environmentally, socially (culturally), and economically. The ideal development of sustainable tourism could not harm the local community in any of these aspects. 'It means running a business, an organization, or a government in such a way that it doesn't destroy the resources – natural, cultural, or economic – on which it depends' (Bien, 2006). Therefore, the local community should benefit and not have its role marginalized. The cooperation between all sectors is necessary so that the local stakeholders can be included. However, Serbia was a centralized socialist country for decades, with the maximal role of the central government and the minimal role of the local authorities. This centralistic tradition has been changing at a very slow pace in spite of the EU accession process. This is the reason why managing heritage and tourism development in Serbia is still centralized and local residents as significant stakeholders have not yet been acknowledged and fully included. However, the non-governmental organizations and academic sector make efforts to start a debate about the greater role of the local community, which becomes an important factor for sustainable cultural tourism. Since tourism services mostly depend on local institutions and participation of local citizens, 'support and pride in tourism development are especially important in the case of cultural tourism where the community is part of a product' (Cole, 2008, p. 58).

The main objectives of the research are to examine and evaluate: (1) the perceptions of residents concerning the state of heritage in the Danube region in Serbia; (2) the perceptions of residents concerning the information level, participation opportunities and the effects that tourism development projects have on the local community; and (3) sustainable cultural development indicators, with special focus on estimating the levels of resident participation and their role in the tourism development process. The results of the research should enable in depth view into the current situation in Serbia regarding the high level of centralization of the decision-making process in the development of tourism, as well as the extreme level of marginalization of the community's role in this process.

The structure of this study is divided in several subsections. The literature review section is focusing on the role of the local communities as important stakeholders in the sustainable tourism development process. It also outlines the need for measuring the attitudes and perceptions of residents in the process of tourism development. The next section is dedicated to describing the current situation in the cultural tourism development process in the Danube region in Serbia and outlining the necessity for sustainable development. This is followed by methodological issues, including the

detailed explanation of the survey process and the sustainability indicators evaluation method. The results of the survey and the evaluation process were then presented and discussed, after which the general conclusions were extracted, problems outlined and the proposal of possible solutions given.

## **2. Literature review**

Tourism and culture are recognized as two strong drivers of growth all around the world, especially in Europe, primarily through economic development and employment (Prentice, 1994). However, they have a crucial role in fostering understanding and preserving the richness and diversity of regional cultures, as well as greater valuation of a common heritage. The fast growing tourism development has recently made heritage protection and sustainability a major concern (Timothy and Boyd, 2003). It is believed that heritage tourism is often used as a strategy to assist heritage resource conservation and to improve sustainable local development, but in practice it is rarely properly applied. This is especially obvious in the underdeveloped countries (du Cros, 2001; McKercher, Ho and du Cros, 2005). A balance among resource conservation, tourism development and local community well-being becomes a big challenge in the economically oriented world (Bjeljac *et al.*, 2013). The Berlin Declaration (1997) made a strong normative point by suggesting that tourism should be developed in a way so that it benefits the local communities, strengthens the local economy, employs the local workforce, and wherever ecologically sustainable, uses local materials, local agricultural products and traditional skills. Mechanisms, including policies and legislation, should be introduced to ensure the flow of benefits to local communities (Choi and Sirakaya, 2005).

Many studies in the tourism field focus especially on the estimation of local communities' reactions in the process of tourism development. These studies have examined residents' attitudes toward tourism and the impacts tourism can have on a community (Perdue, Long and Allen, 1990; Ap, 1992; Lankford, 1994; Andereck and Vogt, 2000; Gursoy, Jurowski and Uysal, 2002; McGehee and Andereck, 2004; Andereck *et al.*, 2005; Dyer *et al.*, 2007; Wang and Pfister, 2008; Anderleck and Nyaupane, 2011). Opinions and attitudes of residents on certain parts of cultural heritage in their environment are very important since they create local perspective for the evaluation of possibilities to involve geographically limited territory into wider social, cultural and tourism flows. There are also studies on the factors that influence the reactions of the local residents in tourism development, including economic support, length of stay in the community, quality of life and other issues. These seek to identify the social, political, economic and environmental implications of tourism development, taking into account the manner in which the reaction of the local population can be understood and taken into account in order to contribute as much as possible to the support of the sustainable tourism development. They suggest that it is not only important to involve the community in the development process in order to gain the support for tourism industry, but its sustainability also remains a goal. If this goal is

to be achieved, some measures must be carefully introduced to the local population, making possible to exploit opportunities within the tourism development. Moreover, attitude and impact studies are often concerned with tourism-related community changes and the associated level of support for tourism development. There is also an assumed connection between community characteristics and life satisfaction that has an important impact on the general attitude of residents towards tourism development. Finally, and most importantly, the perceived benefit of tourism to an individual and its impact on resident's attitudes towards tourism development has been established (McGehee and Andereck, 2004; Andereck *et al.*, 2005; Wang and Pfister, 2008). Residents who perceive greater levels of personal benefit from tourism are more supportive of tourism development than those who do not feel they receive benefits (Andereck and Nyaupane, 2011). The existing literature suggests that residents should be the major actors in the tourism development process since they are directly affected by it (Ap, 1992; Gunn, 1994; Choi and Sirakaya, 2005).

Sustainable tourism as an emerging paradigm seems to enhance the existing conceptual frameworks on tourism planning and development by making the residents its focal point (Choi and Sirakaya, 2005). Local governments, developers and community residents have been known to overlook or dismiss the importance of the surrounding environment and aspire only to maximize economic growth. For tourism to be truly sustainable, it needs to protect local and national culture, improve social and individual well-being, and conserve/preserve the surrounding environment (Figure 1 and Figure 2).

Evidently, sustainable tourism can reduce adverse impacts on the environment by reinforcing the management capability, implementing education and training programs and by developing monitoring systems (Choi and Sirakaya, 2005). It can also be stated that in underdeveloped destinations, without the publicly received acceptance for implementation of these measures, the tourism industry can gradually lose the support of the local community, which would jeopardize the sustainability of the destination in the future. It was observed that negative perceptions of the population regarding the tourism development, starting with a limited and non-existent possibility of

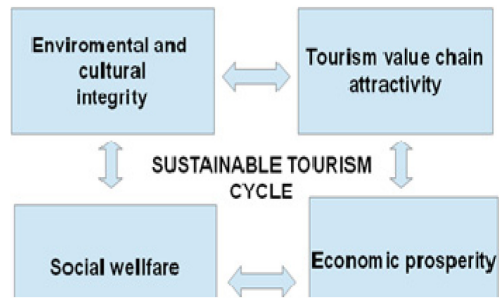


Figure 1: Dimensions of sustainable tourism

Source: Xiang and Wall, 2005.

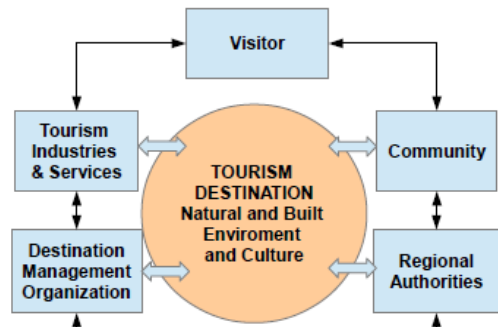


Figure 2: Sustainable destination management – conceptual framework

Source: Destination Management and Quality Programme (undated)

participation can slow down the development process and eventually reduce the number of visitors.

Cultural/heritage tourism has been growing at a great speed with the value of heritage being more and more recognized by various parts of society including governments, the tourism industry, visitors, and the local people. The principles for understanding the cultural/heritage tourism are defined as (Xiang and Wall, 2005): (1) it is based on cultural or natural heritage resources; (2) it provides a special visitor experience particularly of the unique cultural, natural or historical attractiveness of a certain site; (3) it undertakes an educative role in cultivating awareness of heritage conservation in both the visitors and the heritage managers and owners, including the local residents. Also, it contributes financially to the conservation of heritage resources; and (4) it generates economic benefits for local communities and helps them to sustain their life traditions and cultural identities which are an integral part of the heritage environment.

Sustainability of heritage resources cannot be achieved without the direct involvement of the local community. The physical state of resources is directly connected to the local community participation; if heritage is respected, used and managed by locals, it has better chances to be restored and protected. The sustainability of tourism is also highly influenced by the role of local communities, as the information, services, interpretation, safety, visual effects of the local environment, poverty indicators and overall attitudes of residents towards tourists have a great impact on visitor experiences. Moreover, if during the development of tourism, sustainability aspects concerning resident community well-being are ignored, there is a great chance that other aspects of the development process will be questionable.

The sustainability aspects which concern in particular the local community include the following: decent livelihood opportunities; numbers of tourism businesses owned and operated by the locals; local communities' share of profits from tourism; training of locals to acquire competence and skill for participating in heritage conservation and heritage tourism; respect for local intellectual property; locals' accessibility to heritage as tourism resource and use of tourism facilities; local community participation in decision making relating to tourism development of heritage resource (involvement in the planning, research and decision-making process, community satisfaction with tourism practice and heritage conservation, etc.) (Xiang and Wall, 2005).

### **3. The tourism development process in the Danube region in Serbia**

The concentration of cultural resources in the Danube region in Serbia is a great potential for the development of product offerings in the sector of the cultural/heritage tourism. The total area of the Danube region in Serbia is 13,693 km<sup>2</sup> (15.5% of the territory of the Republic). The Serbian part of the Danube catchment area comprises 381 settlements with population counting about 1,996,060 people (26.6%). Demographic characteristics of the population show diverse national and religious structure, with the domination of the Serbian population (85.7%), Hungarians (2.4%), Montenegrin

(1.6%), Croats (1.5%), Bosnian (1.1%), Romani (1.1%), Slovaks, Romanians, Bulgarians, Albanians (Terzić, 2014). The Danube region is also regarded as the economically strongest part of the country. Its natural characteristics refer to over 50 nature based resources (two national parks, 12 nature reserves, three nature parks, one protected wood) as well as cultural characteristics (over 658 registered cultural resources).

The Danube region gives outstanding opportunities for the development of attractive tourism product. It could be based on diversity of tourist offer represented in multinational and multicultural space. Compared to the neighboring countries as direct competitors in this type of tourism, the Danube area in Serbia in proportion to its size has a sufficient number of high value cultural resources. The cultural heritage in Serbia is registered and referred as most commonly tangible material heritage (as a monument or archaeological site) of special cultural or historical significance. Based on recognition of their exceptional value, cultural and tourism potentials, several tourism development projects were initiated, in order to promote the cultural/heritage tourism in this region. Among a great list of projects, the cultural projects 'Roman Emperor's Path' and 'Fortresses along the Danube' were launched by the Ministry of Culture of Serbia with support from UNESCO.

### ***3.1. Tourism Attractiveness***

The Danube river catchment area is recognized as one of the most important factors of the economic, urban, cultural and historical development of the Republic of Serbia. The Danube region in Serbia is in fact, recognized as quick-win tourist product and defined by several national strategic plans. Different studies point out that natural and cultural characteristics of the Danube region give outstanding opportunities for the development of attractive tourism products. This is concluded from the fact that in this area the greatest number of high quality natural and cultural attractions and large urban centers such as Belgrade and Novi Sad are located. Moreover, the best traffic connectivity is achieved in this area (roads, railways, airport, river ports), as well as the greatest number of accommodation facilities and tourist services.

In 2009, along the Danube, through Serbia passed 799 cruising ships with 56,000 tourists registered in Belgrade (Simović, 2011). The research conducted on international visitors on Danube cruises (386 anonymous passengers) has shown that during the visit to Serbia they liked the most 'interesting architecture' (27.2%), 'history and cultural heritage' (25.3%), 'hospitality and open minded people' (18.7%), and 'national folklore and traditions' (11.6%), only about 17.2% respondents gave the answers focused on nice landscapes, nature, climate, panoramas (Simović, 2011). Similar results were recorded in previous studies in this region, conducted by Stanojlović, Ivkov-Džigurski and Dragin (2010).

The development of tourism in this area is also outlined as a strategic priority, which is in line with the official European Danube Strategy. The Danube region in Serbia is considered to be suitable for tourism development and perceived as great potential for creating attractive tourist products on the international level (Terzić, 2014).



**Figure 3:** Territorial coverage of the Danube region at national level

**Source:** EC (undated)

However, the state government still failed to affirm the sustainable and cultural/heritage tourism, based on which the overall tourism development should be set (Stanojlović, Ivkov-Džigurski and Dragin, 2010).

### **3.2. Heritage management**

The protection and preservation of the cultural heritage in Serbia is in a transitional phase. There are many problems in this area, especially connected to the extreme long-term economic crisis, starting from 1990s and still lasting. In this long period, there was a constant problem in lack of financing and avoiding the responsibilities of the governmental institutions. There was also a problem referring to lack of knowledge in management practices and alternative ways of financing and fundraising. Moreover, the level of preservation and conservation differs significantly from one site to another. In larger towns cultural resources are mostly conserved, reconstructed, revitalized and used for public and tourist purposes (Stanojlović, Ivkov-Džigurski and Dragin, 2010). On the other hand, the isolation of heritage sites from larger settlements is followed by poor infrastructure, uncontrolled and illegal constructions, demolitions and excavations. The lack of cultural programs and interpretation makes these sites unappealing to the public. This situation is often followed by the ignorance of the local communities caused by low standard of living and low educational level of the majority of residents.

The need for starting the sustainable heritage management in Serbia changed the old views of heritage, focusing on 'revitalization' instead of 'conservation'. Thus, the heritage sites are renewed, their original vision is restored, their old function outlined, and they become kept and used in contemporary society. In this context, the conservation is placed in line with the urban and regional development, with defined marketing strategy, in order to create the way of using the chances for social, cultural and economic synergy (Dragičević-Šešić and Stojković, 1998). This is regarded as a sustainable approach only if the heritage in the process keeps its original characteristics and values (Terzić *et al.*, 2014). The task that is given to management is to develop suitable community-oriented use of heritage site (using the cultural animation and tourism economy models). The rehabilitation of cultural heritage is one of the main tasks of the preservation of cultural identity of the region. The use of this potential through the promotion of cultural tourism is a factor of the sustainable development (Council of Europe, 2008).

### ***3.3. Stakeholders in the Cultural Tourism Development Process***

Although significant efforts have been undertaken to find adequate approaches and to modernize the legal and administrative systems in order to protect the cultural assets, there was no significant outcome. There were several attempts to integrate conservation into the planning process and to achieve greater cooperation between heritage protection and urban/tourism planning. However, by involvement of several jurisdiction levels and a great number of defined stakeholders, it only becomes more difficult to protect heritage sites. If we reconsider the 'global' problem of jurisdiction distribution between different sectors, we should take insight into the government organization on the national level. There are 18 Ministries in Serbia and each Ministry has its own jurisdiction over the management of economic fields to which they are devoted. In this particular case, regarding cultural tourism development, there are several Ministries that should be engaged in some parts of development activities: Ministry of Culture and Information (Sector for cultural heritage, Sector for cultural production and creative industry, Sector for information), Ministry of Economy (Sector for tourism, Sector for tourism inspection), Ministry of Regional Development and Local Government (Sector for regional development, Sector for local government, Sector for investment in infrastructure projects), etc. Besides, the local government has the jurisdiction over the distribution of ownership between public and private entities within their municipalities.

Key stakeholders should be identified early in the process of tourism development, mapped and analyzed in terms of their interest and potential influence over the process. The analysis should be used as a basis for the communication plan and for determining the level of direct engagement and role that each stakeholder may have in the process. The local communities are not usually involved or consulted in the decision-making process (previous research has shown that the citizens' participation is not a vital part of democratic processes in Serbia, as only 3% of the citizens in the local



governments are influential on political decisions making processes) (Vukelić, 2009). If this continues, along with the tourism development, it will surely bring to further marginalization of resident population. Only if the local communities take direct part in the process, pushing through the local government and institutions that need to be involved, more positive outcomes can be expected. The ideal type of direct participation includes constant public debates in order to make decisions on issues related to common interest. The sustainable development is not possible without cooperation and consolidation of activities of all these levels, which is at the moment 'mission impossible' in Serbia.

#### **4. Methodology**

There is no research on public opinions concerning heritage protection or tourism development process undertaken by governing bodies in Serbia. In this study, several methods were applied in order to indicate the role of the local community in the protection of heritage and sustainable development of tourism in the Danube region. This study used quantitative data gained from survey on public opinions and qualitative data gained from focus group survey by obtaining professional opinions on sustainable cultural/heritage tourism development in the Danube region in Serbia. We performed a two phase research in order to reach more closely the research objectives.

The first phase of the research activities included the survey on public opinion of residents of several settlements in the Danube region in Serbia. The face to face survey included 150 respondents, chosen among residents of the municipalities in the Danube region in Serbia and was conducted in June – September 2011. The survey process was based on the random selection of respondents, but the situation in the field showed that people directly involved in tourism (museum curators, tourist agencies' employees, hotel and restaurant employees and local government officials, which filled in 33 questionnaires) and people with higher education degrees were more willing to respond to the survey. The survey started with questions on general demographic characteristic of the respondents (place of origin, age, gender, educational level, income); the next section of the survey included questions regarding heritage in the Danube region (attractiveness of the cultural resources, perception of the current state of the heritage management and observed problems) and the third section included general attitude of the locals towards tourism development. At the end, the respondents were asked to measure the residents' level of information and involvement in the tourism development process that is ongoing in the area. A total sample size of 150 respondents was completed, but 24 questionnaires were excluded as invalid. After sorting out the invalid questionnaires, data were coded, computed and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences 19.0.

The second phase of the research included the focus group survey, undertaken during the workshops organized by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Serbia. The participants were directly invited by the Ministry in order to take direct part in the project 'Fortresses along the Danube'. The workshops took place in July 2011 in Bač,

Novi Sad, Belgrade, Smederevo and Kladovo. The main topic was 'The Development of Cultural Route Fortresses along the Danube – Cultural and Tourism Aspects'. On this occasion, the authors took the chance to interview the participants (stakeholders) in order to determine the sustainability level of the cultural tourism development process in the Danube region. The evaluation is based on the panel discussion (focus group) and the survey of 12 experts (tourism organizations, museums, heritage protection centers, NGOs, local community representatives). The questionnaire included general demographic information of the respondents (age, gender, origin, educational level, affiliation), the second part included a list of sustainability indicators defined by Xiang and Wall (2005) (30 questions divided in three sections considering heritage management, tourism appeal and community participation, shown in Table 8).

The indicators were applied to a Likert scale (1-5), with mark 1 defining the worst situation (strong disagreement) and mark 5 defining the best situation (full agreement), considering the standards defined by personal perceptions of the respondents. The average mark is calculated for each indicator, based on estimation of a set of sub-indicators. According to the general score obtained, development sustainability is defined as Low 10-25, Medium 26-40, and High 41-50.

Qualitative data shows how the region is seen from professional viewpoints and measures all the aspects needed in the tourism development process for achieving sustainability. Quantitative data, gained from the public survey, show how the cultural resources in the region are perceived by residential communities, their opinions on tourism development, current problems and the level of their knowledge and participation in the tourism development process. By comparing the results, we can perceive the realistic situation considering the development potentials and the role local communities have in the process at the moment.

## **5. Results**

### ***5.1. Perceptions of residents regarding the state of heritage in the Danube region in Serbia***

Within the survey conducted, the following social-demographic characteristics of the respondents were analyzed: gender, age, educational level and residence (Table 1). Among 126 respondents (20 – 60 years of age), age and gender distribution was almost equal. Among them most respondents were generally highly educated (University and Postgraduate) with a share of about 70.6 %. Significantly high share of educated respondents is the consequence of the largest respondent group originating from the university centers (Belgrade – 13.5% and Novi Sad – 19.8%). The respondents employed in organizations directly or indirectly involved in development projects in the area contributed to achieving more positive results of the survey.

In order to determine the current situation of the heritage sites and tourist resources within the Danube region, according to the survey analysis several problems were singled out from a greater number of indicators: the lack of conservation and mana-

**Table 1:** Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

Demographic characteristics	Number (%)	Residence place	Number (%) 126 (100%)
<b>Gender</b>		Apatin	3 (2.4)
Male	55 (43.7)	Sombor	7 (5.6)
Female	71 (56.3)	Bač	2 (1.6)
<b>Age</b>		Bačka Palanka	5 (4.0)
Under 20	2 (1.6)	Sremski Karlovci	2 (1.6)
21-30	65 (51.6)	Indija	3 (2.4)
31-40	28 (22.2)	Stara Pazova	4 (3.2)
41-50	15 (11.9)	Belgrade	18 (14.3)
51-60	13 (10.3)	Smedrevo	8 (6.4)
Over 61	3 (2.4)	Veliko Gradište	7 (5.6)
<b>Educational level</b>		Donji Milanovac	4 (3.2)
High school	37 (29.4)	Kladovo	14 (11.1)
Undergraduate university	62 (49.2)	Other settlements	24 (19.1)
Postgraduate university	27 (21.4)		

**Source:** Authors' findings

gement, the low quality of infrastructure and signalization, the low quality of accommodation and tourist services, the lack of on-site interpretation and animation, the lack of tourist offers and marketing and small number of cultural events (Table 2). The respondents singled out several factors as the main reasons for this situation: the lack of finances, the lack of governmental and public care, the non-existence of management plans, the lack of experts, the lack of consciousness and care of the local communities. The answers were equally distributed among the respondents without significant differences according to gender, age or educational level, according to the Pearson Chi-square test.

**Table 2:** Problems of heritage sites from locals' perspective

What is the biggest problem for heritage sites located in the Danube region of Serbia		
	Frequency	Percentage
Bad level of conservation and management	37	29.4
Bad infrastructure and signalization	25	19.8
Low quality of accommodation and services	15	11.9
Lack of on-site interpretation and animation	27	21.4
Lack of tourist offer and marketing	15	11.9
Small number of cultural events	7	5.6

**Source:** Authors' findings

The respondents were also given an opportunity to express their opinions and give recommendations on how to improve the current situation. In general, responses included suggestions such as: reparation and restoration of the buildings, lightening the area, cleaning the area, placing benches and trash-cans, placing the information tables and signs, creating a parking space, opening shops and workshops, organizing cultural events, etc. There were significant differences between the general positions of respondents according to their residential area; the population of larger towns had more

optimistic opinions (Belgrade, Novi Sad, Kladovo, Smederevo and Veliko Gradište), while others were more reserved considering the heritage management aspects and possibilities for tourism development.

### 5.2. Potential of cultural tourism development from residents' perspective

The population of Serbia has generally been open-minded considering the possibilities for the development of tourism within their municipalities. Generally, they think that the creation of the cultural tourism products is a proper way for the revitalization of cultural heritage and creation of tourist attraction in the Danube region in Serbia. Based on the given responses on tourist attractiveness of the Danube region in Serbia, it can be concluded that the region is considered as generally very attractive for tourism development, with 92.1% of positive answers (Table 4). If we consider the overall attractiveness of the municipalities included in the research, as place of living and tourist destination, most respondents (74.7%) gave positive response, with the domination of negative opinions among the residents from smaller municipalities and villages (Apatin, Bač, Ram, Donji Milanovac, Kladovo). Similar results were obtained for the question on attractiveness of the heritage sites in the Danube region where 93.7% of the respondents gave positive answers.

**Table 3:** Descriptive statistics on resident opinions towards tourism development potentials

Items	Descriptive Statistics								
	N	Min	Max	Mean±SD	I strongly disagree	I disagree	I am not sure	I agree	I strongly agree
The Danube region in Serbia has tourist potential.	126	3	5	4.55 ± 0.640	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	10 (7.9%)	37 (29.4%)	79 (62.7%)
Heritage in the Danube region has tourist potential.	126	3	5	4.49±0.616	1 (0.8%)	0 (0%)	11 (8.7%)	37 (29.4%)	77 (61.1%)

**Source:** Authors' findings

In Table 3, mean value, standard deviation, minimum and maximum scores for questions defined as continuous variables are defined.

### 5.3. Residents' perception on levels of awareness and involvement of the local community in tourism development process

If we want to examine the level of awareness and involvement of the local community in development projects within the municipalities or region, we can generally say that the awareness and involvement of the residents is very low. According to the survey results, 40.5% of the locals are not aware of development projects within their municipalities, 33.3% of them are partly informed about these projects, while only 26.2% of the respondents were well informed on this matter. The information was obtained from newspapers and direct contact with tourist organizations and NGOs.

However, only a small number of residents are directly involved in such projects, and most of them are employees of public institutions (organizations) that have responsibilities for these sites. Moreover, the residents do not have great expectations

from tourism development, expressing some key issues: employment possibilities, more tourists, hotels and restaurants, new events in town, traffic jam and noise, higher prices of goods and services, etc.

Besides, the opinions on contribution of such projects to the local community welfare are divided. While 46.6% of the respondents believe that such projects do not contribute to the local community, 24.3% of them believe that the projects may have some contribution to the community, about 29.1% of the respondents stated with great confidence that these projects have a definite contribution to the local community (mostly government and institutional representatives, owners of accommodation facilities, restaurants, shops, etc.).

It can be concluded that even if residents can only speculate what tourism development brings, they are open-minded and welcoming all the activities that can improve the current situation.

#### 5.4. Evaluation of Sustainable Cultural Development Indicators: Expert survey

In order to ensure the sustainable development of tourism, some principles must be ensured. The assessment of the sustainable cultural tourism development is made on the basis of a set of indicators on three levels – Sustainability of heritage resources, Sustainability of tourism and Sustainability of local community, with great number of sub-indicators in order to determine to which level of sustainability they belong (Table 4). In order to determine to which extent real sustainability was ensured in the development plans for the Danube region in Serbia, the evaluation was undertaken within the survey process.

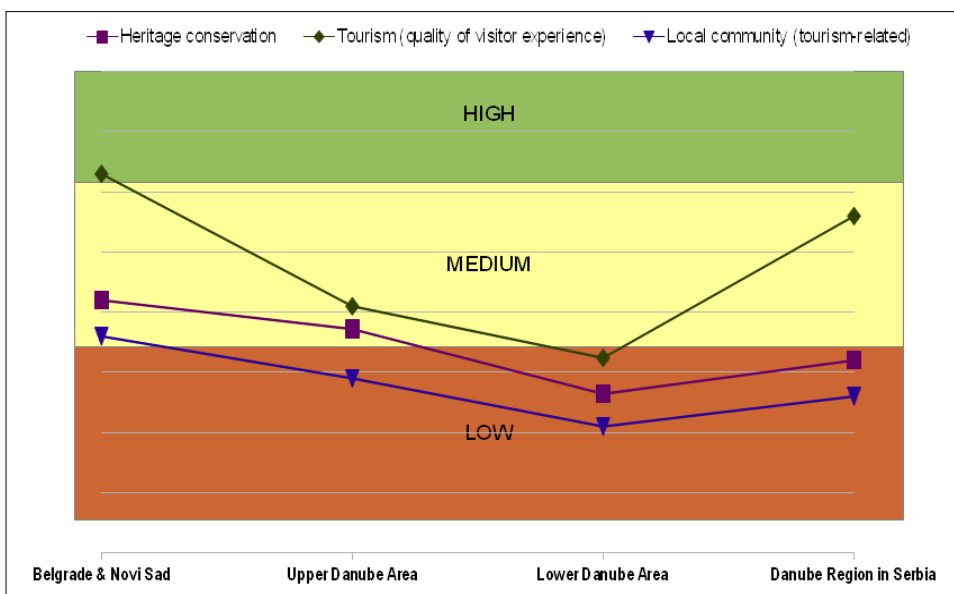


Figure 4: Assessment of sustainable tourism for the Danube region in Serbia

Source: Authors' findings

Sustainability indicators show to which extent the participation of local communities in the tourism development process is ensured and the extent to which their role is perceived as important from the developer's perspective. According to the results of the study represented in Figure 4, we have divided the responses into four territorial aspects in order to provide the better insight into the actual differences present in the area. The respondents evaluated the sustainability indicators for great urban destinations (Belgrade and Novi Sad), destinations within the Upper Danube Area in Serbia, destinations in the Lower Danube Area and the Danube region in Serbia in general.

The heritage preservation and management in the area have been regarded as quite bad, ranging from medium to low level of sustainability, with an average score of 26.2 points (max 50). Tourism attractiveness of the Danube region is in better position ranging from medium to high level of sustainability (38 points). The situation is regarded as relatively positive only within large urban conglomerations of Belgrade and Novi Sad, based on the high tourist attractiveness of destinations and higher levels of heritage protection and community involvement. This is the result of a lack of proper management of cultural resources in Serbia as well as the total absence of community involvement in the protection of cultural heritage, which are in formal jurisdiction of governmental institutions.

According to the results, in the whole Danube region (and in Serbia in general) the level of community involvement in the tourism development process is very low (with average score of 23). Decent livelihood opportunities for resident communities, on which the sustainable tourism development depends on, were not ensured (average mark 2.5). Moreover, the local communities' share of profits from tourism is rather small (with average mark 1.5). According to the results the local community's participation in the decision making process is totally absent (Table 4).

## **6. Further discussions**

If we want to further explain the current situation in Serbia by defining the role of local communities in protection of cultural heritage and tourism development, we can only say that the future is not bright if great changes do not happen fast. It is very important to determine the role of cultural heritage in the daily life of locals; if we exclude the importance of cultural property in the two largest urban centers in Serbia, Belgrade and Novi Sad, the cultural heritage of other settlements in Serbia, especially in the rural areas, play only a marginal role (Stanojlović, Ivkov-Džigurski and Dragin, 2010; Terzić, 2014). It should be noted that the results show that the local population is aware of the problems and the potential of cultural tourism development. They are also quite aware that they are marginalized in the development process. Given that the existing system of management is highly centralized, they are emphasizing the responsibilities of public institutions and highlighting their own inability to participate in the process. Moreover, based on the assessment of sustainability indicators, it is evident that the key stakeholders (representatives of public institutions, local authori-

**Table 4:** Assessment of the sustainability indicators of cultural tourism development

Sustainability indicators	Belgrade and Novi Sad	Upper Danube*	Lower Danube **	Mean
<b>Sustainability of heritage resource conservation</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>28.6</b>	<b>22.99</b>	<b>26.17</b>
Resource integration and authenticity	4.0	4.0	4.5	5.00
Condition of existing cultural and natural heritage resources	3.0	3.0	2.0	3.00
Condition of the resource environment	4.0	3.0	3.4	3.50
Laws and institutional guarantee for conservation	3.0	3.5	4.0	3.50
Respect for local heritage and intellectual property	3.0	3.0	1.0	2.00
Participation of local communities in conservation	3.0	2.0	1.0	2.00
Resource and environmental education	3.0	2.0	1.0	2.00
Monitoring mechanisms	3.0	2.0	1.5	2.17
Defined jurisdiction and management system	3.0	1.5	1.5	2.00
Share of tourism revenue to finance conservation	2.0	2.0	1.0	1.00
<b>Sustainability of tourism (quality visitor experience)</b>	<b>41.5</b>	<b>30.5</b>	<b>26.2</b>	<b>38</b>
Development of competitive quality tourism products	4.0	3.0	2.0	4.00
Information availability for tourists	4.0	2.0	1.5	3.00
Quality of guides and interpretations	4.0	2.0	1.5	3.00
Tourist purchase of local commodity	4.5	3.0	3.0	4.00
Frequency of tourist-local interactions and attitudes	4.5	3.0	3.5	4.00
Tourist perception of the authenticity	4.0	3.5	3.5	4.50
Safety for tourists	4.0	4.5	4.5	4.50
Extent of use of transport	4.0	3.0	3.0	4.00
Methods of waste disposal	4.0	3.0	1.0	3.00
Architectural style and material used for building	4.5	3.5	2.7	4.00
<b>Sustainability of local community (tourism-related)</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>24.5</b>	<b>20.5</b>	<b>23</b>
Decent livelihood opportunities	3.0	2.0	2.0	2.50
Poverty incidences and alleviation in tourist areas	3.0	4.0	4.0	4.00
Number of tourism businesses owned by the locals	3.0	4.0	3.5	3.00
Percentage of locals employed by tourism businesses	2.0	3.0	3.0	3.00
Local communities' share of profits from tourism	2.0	2.0	1.0	1.50
Training for locals to acquire competences	3.0	1.5	1.0	2.00
Locals' accessibility to heritage and tourism facilities	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.00
Local community participation in decision making	2.0	2.0	1.0	1.00
Resettlement and compensation	2.0	1.0	1.0	1.00
Educational opportunity of the local people	4.0	2.0	1.0	2.00

ties, non-governmental organizations, etc.) are also aware that the local community is marginalized. They agree that local community participation is not ensured and that community interests in the development process are often overlooked, but there are no initiatives to resolve this problem and to mitigate its consequences from either side.

Furthermore, when forming the cultural tourism product, sustainable development is possible only within destinations with high or medium value in all defined aspects. The cultural destinations that have low level of conservation, low or medium quality of tourist experiences (with small market appeal) and lack of direct involvement of local community in the development process cannot be considered sustainable. This indicates that at the moment, regarding the policies and practices in the development process in Serbia, the local community has only a marginal role. This leads

to the identification of a certain degree of frustration of the local population caused by the marginalization of their role and interests.

By disregarding the overall attractiveness of the Danube region as a tourist product with great development potential, the terms of sustainability are not achieved. However, the survey results show that local population in the Danube region in Serbia has in general a positive opinion and initial enthusiasm when it comes to tourism development. This is the key precondition to start an initiative for the local communities to actively participate in tourism development projects.

## **7. Conclusions**

The attractiveness of the Danube region and the sensitivity of the natural and cultural resources, as well as social-demographic aspects of the region require fast change in the regional management. There is a need to change general stands of the government towards more responsibility and actions in order to achieve sustainable development of cultural tourism in the Danube region in Serbia. Ensuring the attractive living area and well-being of the residents, along with having representative and well-preserved natural and cultural heritage, leads to the increase of tourism attractiveness of the area. Destinations and attractions used and respected by both residents and tourists are the ultimate goal of the sustainable tourism development. The partnership and rational planning of the cultural tourism development is based on networking and cooperation between stakeholders in different levels – governmental institutions, heritage protection, tourism business and local communities (de Rojas and Camarero, 2008). The long-term competitiveness and sustainability of the tourism sector should be ensured. It should be done through legislative measures and strengthened by multi-level cooperation, ensuring local and regional benefit brought along with new investments in the Danube region.

The research has shown that the residents are aware of the problems referring to the protection of cultural heritage and the potentials for the sustainable cultural tourism development, but such awareness is not sufficient in this case. The main issue is the possibility of participation of members of the local communities in decision making processes related to cultural heritage and cultural tourism. The opinion of the local community members is very important for functioning of this community. However, the process of the citizens' participation should include several phases: informing, consulting, suggesting and decision making (Vukelić, 2009). The lack of inter-sector cooperation and distance from responsibility of different subjects in processes of government are a direct consequence of ambiguity and inconsistency among normative, legislative and regulatory frameworks. Therefore, deficiencies in the area of cultural heritage preservation and problems in the creation of the platform for sustainable tourism development are present. Our research showed that local government did not satisfy even the basic level of informing the citizens, so those initiatives are very rare examples of direct involvement of citizens in the work of the local government. Hence, the attention should be directed to communication strategies between the local



authorities and the local community members. It is the first step for the citizens to participate in decision making processes referring to the cultural heritage management in order to provide the basis for sustainable tourism. From this perspective, the following suggestions can be directed to the local authorities as important steps:

- Need for more transparency in the work of local governments;
- Ensuring the communication system between local governments, public institutions and local communities;
- Continuous surveys with the members of the local communities;
- Making long term strategies in the area of promotion of cultural/heritage tourism in the communities of the Danube region; and
- Education of citizens in the area of understanding the benefits of living and working in tourist areas.

Therefore, a stable relationship can be created between the organization of successful work of the local governments in the area of the cultural heritage management and the sustainable tourism development.

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