

# **Heritage entrepreneurship and ecotourism. A new vision on ecosystem protection and in-situ specific activities for cultural heritage consumption**

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**Abstract:** *The local businesses can contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage assets. Therefore, it is important to support the development of local businesses that protect or do not alter the condition of local heritage assets. The heritage products and consumption addressed to youth are associated with ICT devices and interactive participation. In this way, a good platform for ecotourism development is created, due to non-invasive tools associated with cultural consumption. We designed the framework coordinates for eco-cultural offer based on less-known heritage assets, as a starting point for small/local heritage entrepreneurship development. For this purpose, we conducted an onsite qualitative research during Sagittarius Project implementation, using two research instruments: scope and satisfaction surveys. We conducted our research both on the supply and demand sides of the ecotourism requirements. The results support the idea that young consumers follow the value chain: knowledge about heritage asset acquired online → electronic cultural consumption → on-site interactive participation → offline and online feedback available for future consumers. Another conclusion of our research is that the tourism services associated are based on a combination of modern hospitality services and easy access to preserving natural ecosystems.*

**Keywords:** *ecotourism; heritage entrepreneurship; cultural heritage consumption; interactive participation*

**JEL Classification:** L26; L83; Z10

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## Introduction

Youth has a different attitude towards cultural consumption than other types of consumers. It uses ICT (information and communication technology) and in this way it can easily share experiences and influence people, thus leading to accelerated change in the cultural consumption model. In this paper, we present two important aspects that were studied during the research work. Firstly, we studied the relationships between changes in cultural consumption model and ecotourism, based on non-invasive forms of visiting cultural heritage assets and youth involvement. Secondly, the steps in developing the new cultural consumption model are analyzed, also based on trends that are shaped by youth behavior. The paper contains an important methodological approach section in which the main ideas behind two surveys developed in Sagittarius Project are explained, namely the scope survey (for entrepreneurs in cultural heritage area) and the satisfaction survey (for consumers of cultural heritage products). The results of our survey analysis are presented in a second section of this paper. This final section brings the all sections together creating some important ideas regarding possible ways to improve the youth cultural consumption behavior.

## Valuing cultural heritage through entrepreneurship, ecotourism and non-invasive forms of cultural heritage assets visiting

It is important to support the local business development because it can contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage assets. Information centers, handcraft workshops, shops where local artisans can sell their goods, exhibition areas and so on, can contribute to the development of local heritage consumption promoting customs and traditions. In addition, they could create jobs and organize trainings for local artisans, entrepreneurs in tourism, business management, etc. They will also increase the level of attraction and will contribute to the development of cultural heritage consumption in the area by actively promoting it through traditional products and actions with longer impact on consumers' satisfaction. Entrepreneurs can develop networks and collaborate with locals for creating brochures and guides for cultural heritage assets in targeted areas. Nowadays, ICT has a strong impact on almost everything, and the same happens in tourism products and services. The new types of brochures and maps are designed for digital devices to be easily accessed and used. The printed brochures, guides and maps available in information centers should contain QR codes, through which interested consumers can access detailed information about assets in the area. The consumers will find out unknown assets and more information about the well-known ones. If in the area of assets the infrastructure does not support Internet connections (mobile or Wi-Fi), the maps, guides and applications could be downloaded pre-visit. Consumers will find new places; will have better experience and will be better informed, which knowledge

they could not gain just by visiting the assets. ( *i.e.* Sarmisegetusa Regia, Hunedoara County, Romania , the most important military, political and spiritual center of the Dacians, hidden into the woods and accessible only to those that are informed about it. There are not tourist guides or banners with information for persons who do not know the importance of this asset.) Then, partnerships can be created in order to develop programs for informing visitors or programs for training the local artisans. The development of such partnerships may lead to the creation of permanent jobs as cooks, waiters or other jobs serving the tourism industry. Public decision-makers should adopt measures to support this sector, contributing and, at the same time, benefiting from the preservation of cultural heritage. Thus, it can support the local economy and the development of the local areas based on valuing cultural heritage.

The use of ICT and social media tools creating and developing heritage tourism offer is an important aspect that should be taken into consideration by the heritage tourism entrepreneurs. The social media has an impact on the visitors' decision because it provides easy accessible information about heritage assets and creates expectations regarding the unique experiences in various destinations. (Surugiu, M.R. and Surugiu, C., 2015).

ICT and social media are active tools that can support innovative cultural consumption, and the Internet is a major source of information influencing the decisions of visitors regarding the cultural consumption, knowing that the new type of consumer is excited about the innovative cultural heritage products (Vasile, V. *et al.*, 2015a).

One important way to economic recovery it is to base the local development on innovative entrepreneurship, with focus on being innovative, promoting business models in cooperation with stakeholders and public-private partnership, and also remembering the aspects of the digital technology with strong impact on activities in economic, social and cultural domains (Vasile, V. *et al.*, 2015b). Tools as digital technology and social media may be used not only for facilitating travel organization, but also for creating cultural consumption forms in a new and innovative way. Such an innovative approach may be used also for heritage interpretation, heritage products dissemination and promotion, for renewing the supply of integrated products and services, *i.e.* cultural heritage products as participative visitation of cultural assets, etc. (Vasile, V. *et al.*, 2015a). Cultural consumption is a knowledge-based activity, and if cultural products and services possess widely recognized values then they are viable (Papathanasiou-Zuhrt, D. and Weiss-Ibáñez, D.F., 2014). Taking into account these aspects, the values of cultural heritage may change over time and heritage may have different meanings to various businesses in this area, as well as stakeholders. The activities developed by a cultural heritage entrepreneur refer to bringing to market goods and services, organizing the cultural heritage, involving also an important dimension related to the spirit of

creativity with priorities such as cultural values and economic values (Zaman, Gh., 2015). It is important that stakeholders from areas such as cultural heritage, environment protection and tourism collaborate in defining some interests that should be valorized, and discover various ways of developing strong relationships implying conservation of natural and cultural assets.

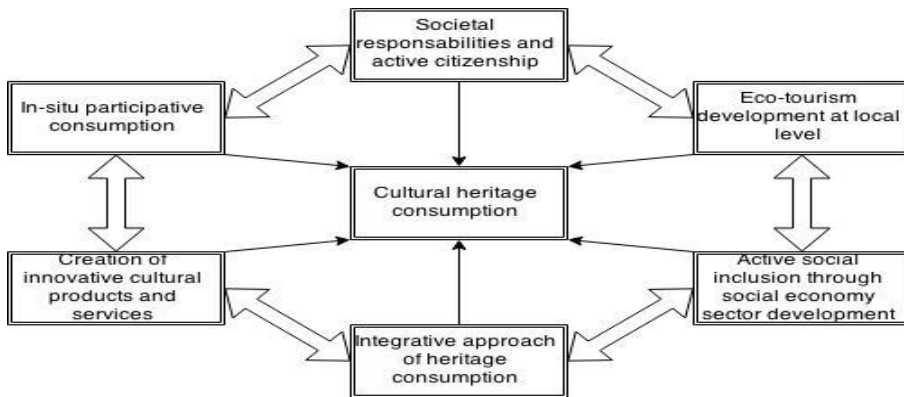
The consumption process of cultural heritage products is important to happen along with heritage protection and non-invasive means of promoting business development. This could be done by developing iPhone routes, Roving Museums, on-site visiting without invasive arrangements - routes furnished with natural materials, paths with wooden bridge and stone steps-, participatory games for specific ecosystems and so on. The usage of ICT devices could replace the invasive ways of informing tourists, such as banners. We should remember that it is a thin line between using non-invasive means of visiting the cultural heritage assets and online visiting. On one hand, it is important that tourists want to visit places (meaning developing businesses, creating jobs, etc.) and, on the other hand, it is important to be a non-invasive visit, but not just on-line one through digital devices, although this type has its own benefits. In addition, QR codes development represents an important way to transfer knowledge and more information to interested individuals (a QR code can be placed near a cultural heritage asset and may be accessed for more information; these underlines the fact that the present consumption model is oriented to interactive participation). The young consumers, attracted to new technologies and social media, are more interested into experiences that allow them to use ITC devices. The recent orientation in the tourism policy supports this kind of approach – digital and social media for new service products, targeted products (OECD, 2014, p. 12).

Protecting the cultural heritage is an aspect of business ethics in tourism, and it is important to develop initiatives and local collaboration networks between public and private stakeholders, and is based on specific entrepreneurship and small entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship in cultural heritage complementarily exploits other natural resources and preserves them for future generations (such as handicrafts, customs and traditions - local life events). In addition, various types of traditional households are preserved together with the organizational model of life of local people and specific recreational activities, such as winter gatherings, dances, the harvest holiday, wine celebration, etc., promoting authenticity, developing trans-regional and trans-national networks by cultural thematic trails. The cultural heritage entrepreneurship should be based on modern technology (online route planning without invasive marking of the route; real-time information; participation in activities that support local values), role-play, participation in traditional activities (wool spinning, preparation of traditional products, etc.). These types of entrepreneurs could also

contribute to the protection of cultural relics by microclimate and ecosystem conservation.

An opportunity for economic recovery is represented by local development based on innovative entrepreneurship. A business model based on cooperation between stakeholders and public-private partnership is important and therefore should be promoted and supported by interested parties. Also, heritage valorization implying new job creation and youth involvement should not be forgotten or ignored. (Vasile, V. *et al.*, 2015b).

**Figure 1. The relationships between various socio-economic aspects and cultural heritage consumption**

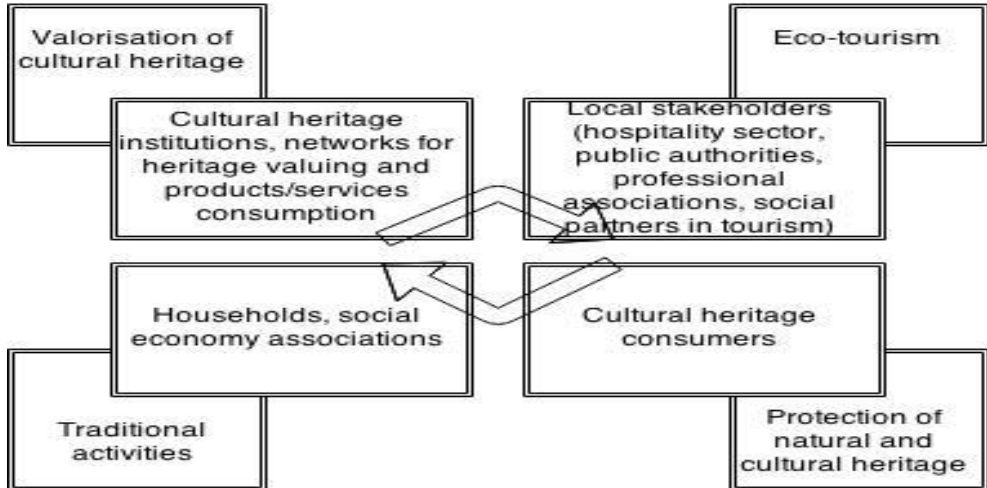


Source: the authors.

Cultural heritage is not an aspect that separates individuals from different continents and from different social classes, but something that creates links between locals, communities, assets, individuals who are seeking high quality experience in ecotourism, and so on. The individuals interested in ecotourism experiences and adventure travels may be also interested in local natural and cultural heritage, and in modern communication facilities that can provide a large amount of information in a short time, based on ICT.

Thus, individuals are travelling to learn more about the other's life, and to understand the natural and cultural environment that shaped the life in target areas. Through the activities of tourism in cultural heritage areas, ecotourism products and services develop an important connection. Natural and cultural resources may represent a driver for ecotourism and may be the aim of enhancing collaboration between stakeholders. They should aim to develop ecotourism activities that do not damage the lives and culture of the locals.

**Figure 2. The relationships between stakeholders from ecotourism and cultural heritage domains**



Source: the authors.

If locals are becoming decision-makers on the tourist services in protected areas, the negative impact of ecotourism can be reduced, ecotourism does not represent a panacea, but an instrument for financing the protected areas, requiring cooperation and partnerships between government, locals, managers (Barna, C., et al., 2011). A business in ecotourism may take into consideration the active role of the community, locals have knowledge about the nature and the culture of the target areas, and this has an important value for tourists. In addition, the communities should be encouraged to be directly involved in the conservation of the area and its economic development, and this could be done by making it aware of the importance of the place and its potential.

There might be some aspects that are related to ecotourism, which also might be applied to heritage valuing. Thus, aspects such as the small or no impact of ecotourism on environment, the development of new experiences for visitors, new benefits for local communities, sensitivity to local communities and social responsibility, and promotion of active social inclusion are strongly related to ecotourism, but might be seen also in connection with heritage valuing.

**Figure 3. Aspects related to ecotourism, which might be applied also to heritage valuing**

**- Eco-tourism**

- small or no impact on environment
- new experiences created for visitors
- new benefits for local communities
- developing sensitivity to local communities and social responsibility
- promoting active social inclusion

**● Heritage valuing**

- modern interpretation of multidimensional impact
- participative interpretation and best practices from the past for the benefit of the future
- boosting local potential for business based on heritage enforcement as local value added for tourism and cultural consumption
- preserving local handicraft and other specific activities based on traditions and life model of households

Source: the authors.

Beside the above aspects, the following ideas may be related to heritage valuing:

- modern interpretation of multidimensional impact;
- participative interpretation and best practices of the past for the future benefit;
- boosting local potential for business based on heritage enforcement as local value added for tourism and cultural consumption;
- preserving local handicraft and other specific activities based on traditions and life model of households.

The connection between cultural heritage and ecotourism is important to be analyzed, due to the conclusions that might reveal the specific situation in a country or in a set of countries. Also, it is important that stakeholders from those areas work together on local or national level to underline some specific interests and ways to develop relationships for natural and cultural site conservation. Cultural heritage may represent an important component of ecotourism, and the connections between the two areas give a picture of the improvements needed to preserve the natural and cultural resources, which are the engine of the tourism sector.

It is important that stakeholders from ecotourism and cultural heritage areas try to improve collaboration, find ways to develop ecotourism that does not affect local

communities, find better ways to protect natural and cultural resources, discuss benefits and disadvantages with local residents, which might create stronger relations between parties, and so on.

## Methodological approach

Two surveys were developed in the Sagittarius Project, namely **a scope survey** (for entrepreneurs in cultural heritage area) and **a satisfaction survey** (for consumers of cultural heritage products).

The main objective of the **scope survey** was to identify main changes in cultural heritage consumption model, with emphasis on “active consumers”, *i.e.* those who want to interact in-situ and contribute/develop new/innovative cultural products based on ITC devices with their cognitive experience. The survey covered few aspects “*related to a better visibility of local cultural heritage, stimulating self-reflection, critical thinking, interaction, protection of collective local identities, and enforcing sustainability of cultural legacy. It addressed the topic of propensity for starting a business in a heritage consumption area*” (Vasile, V. et al., 2015b). The following assumptions were adopted in this research: authenticity is something important for knowledge-based consumers who use non-formal channels to explore contextual significance and reach lifelong learning; there is a cost-benefit relationship between education and the ability to use ITC devices, *i.e.* economic and social comparative advantages (Chan, T. and Goldthorpe; J. H., 2007; Lizardo, O. and Skiles, S., 2008). Some of the objectives of the scope and satisfaction survey underlined the new innovative approach in heritage interpretation and the efficient use of ITC devices and products for interpreting and valuing the cultural heritage, with the viral dissemination of knowledge related to heritage assets.

The **satisfaction survey** had a demand side approach, knowing that today's consumer values emotions, unique interpretation of the cultural heritage and interactive participation during *in situ* visits. The survey aimed to identify ways of defining the cultural consumption for a modern young consumer. It is important to find an offer model for young consumers that stimulate them for *in situ* visit, knowing their familiarity with internet facilities for information and virtual visits to cultural assets.

The main objective for both surveys was to design an evaluation tool for assessment of the impact on the consumer/business. As first attempt in this evaluation area and because of the financial and time restrains, the sample used was not statistically representative.<sup>1</sup> The Sagittarius Project partners (one from Greece, Bulgaria, Croatia

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<sup>1</sup> A detailed analysis of the survey was conducted within the Sagittarius Project; for more information, please send an e-mail to [inst.ec.nat@gmail.com](mailto:inst.ec.nat@gmail.com).



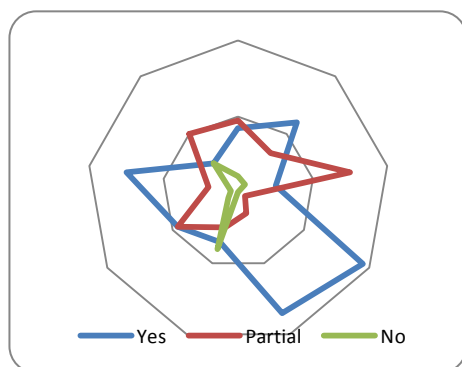
Hungary and Slovenia, two from Italy and Romania) applied the surveys in 2013-2014, in an impact-testing period<sup>1</sup> to each of the specific selected area.

The total number of **scope survey** respondents was 117 (F2F interviews). The survey outcome underlined the main challenges and opportunities for entrepreneurship development in heritage and understanding the factors implied by running business in this domain. The **satisfaction survey** was addressed (F2F interviews) to young consumers, users of ICT devices. The assessment was based on 164 valid *in situ* questionnaires conducted in specific areas mentioned above. The national experts made the selection of cultural assets included in the project (113 assets).

## Main outcome of the survey analysis

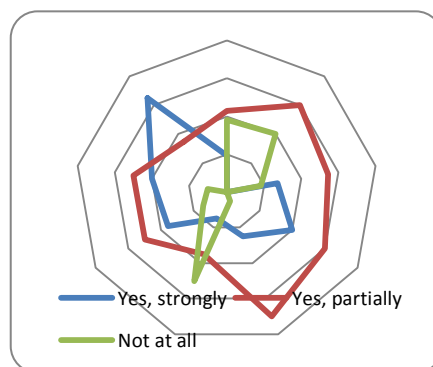
In the case of the **satisfaction survey** – applied to consumers of cultural heritage products – a high percentage of interviewed persons considered that the access to the Pilot Project assets is easy to be informed about, *i.e.* sufficient information can be found in brochures, at the location of the assets or on Internet. In addition, the Pilot Project story is significant for a business-oriented approach, *i.e.* according to the consumers, the stories from the Pilot Projects developed by Sagittarius Project Partners have the features needed by the development of a business in the cultural heritage domain.

**Figure 4. Easy information regarding the Pilot Project assets (%)**



Source: the authors' calculations.

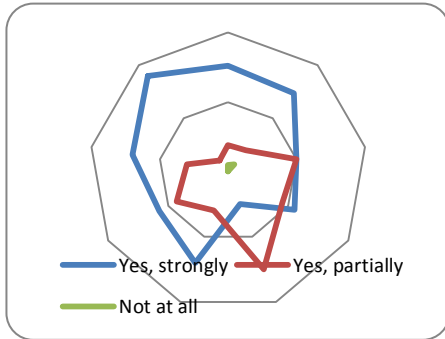
**Figure 5. The Pilot Project story is significant for business-oriented approach (%)**



Source: the authors' calculations.

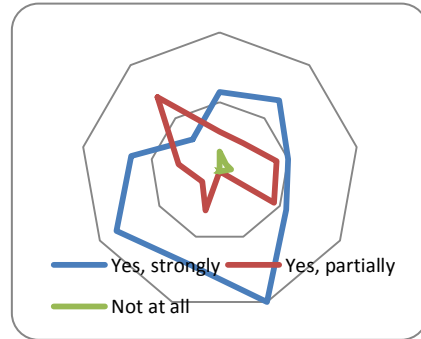
<sup>1</sup> The Pilot Project represents a thematic cultural route with at least 10 heritage assets presented in a new/innovative perspective – revaluing the heritage for the benefit of the present – “learning from the past” and/or rediscover the cultural value for the modern society.

**Figure 6. The Pilot Project contributes to providing new type of cultural heritage product (%)**



Source: the authors' calculations.

**Figure 7. The Pilot Project contributes to stimulating young audiences (%)**

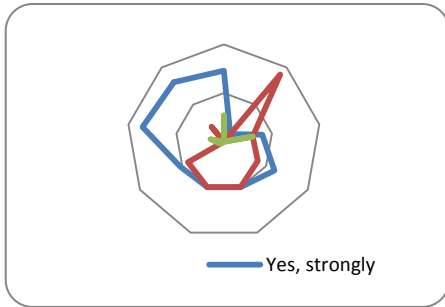


Source: the authors' calculations.

The majority of respondents agreed that the Pilot Project contributes to the development of a new type of cultural heritage product and stimulates young audience. This means that the stories created within the Sagittarius Project are oriented to innovative ways of heritage valorization, especially created for youth persons, who are more flexible, prone to widespread use of ICT in finding information, and have a thirst for knowledge and understanding of past history and culture of the country and the world to which they belong.

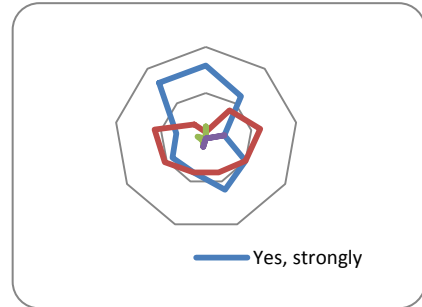
In the case of the **scope survey** – developed for entrepreneurs in the field of cultural heritage – the main conclusions underline the fact that, indeed, the Pilot Project Story represents a catalyst for: a) attracting consumers/tourists oriented to innovative consumption based on heritage interpretation and valorization (soft activities, network development), b) small entrepreneurship development and creative industries. By this co-participation to the cultural products (re)interpretation, the “clients” contribute to a specific market segment development by recognizing the perpetual cognitive and spiritual values of the heritage assets. In this field, it is important to understand that the entrepreneurship may be developed in small-scale businesses, always having in mind the idea of networking, of including stakeholders and locals in developed activities, because they know what is important to the beneficiary communities.

**Figure 8. The Pilot Project Story is a catalyst for attracting market segment development in heritage interpretation and valuing (soft activities, network development) (%)**



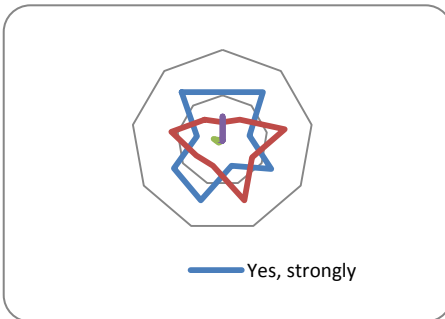
Source: authors' calculations.

**Figure 9. The Pilot Project Story is a catalyst for attracting small entrepreneurship development & creative industries (%)**



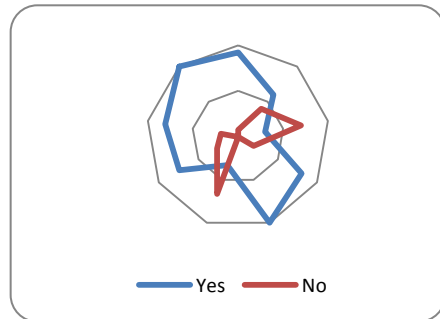
Source: authors' calculations.

**Figure 10. The Pilot Project Story is a catalyst for attracting increased cultural supply based on innovative interpretation of the well-known assets (%)**



Source: authors' calculations.

**Figure 11. The Pilot Project inspires new business ideas as a competitive supply (%)**

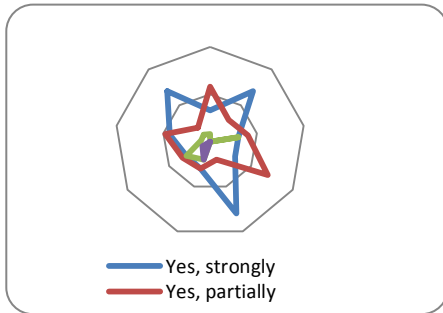


Source: authors' calculations.

In addition, the Pilot Project Story is a catalyst for attracting increased cultural supply based on innovative interpreting of the well-known assets and inspires new business ideas as a competitive offer. This means that the Story developed within the Sagittarius Project may represent a starting point for creating unique cultural heritage products by a business in this field. This guarantees a successful business on this market, but it is

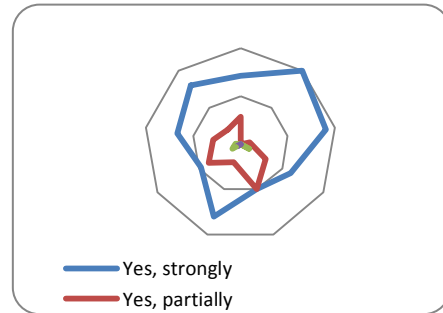
important to develop new products that will represent also non-invasive ways of visiting the heritage assets.

**Figure 12. For a better valuing of the Pilot Project assets, the information source (Internet, mass media) needs to be improved**



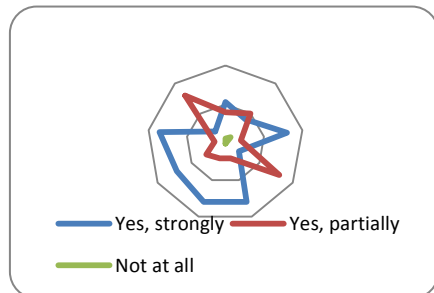
Source: authors' calculations.

**Figure 13. For a better valuing of the Pilot Project assets, the specific activities organization in the Pilot Project area (cultural events, seasonal activities etc.) needs to be improved**



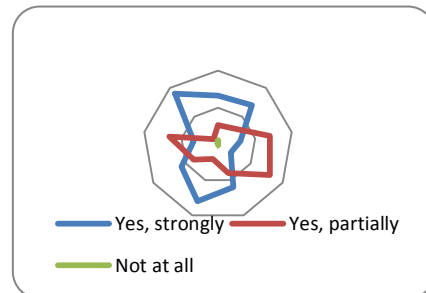
Source: authors' calculations.

**Figure 14. The Pilot Project stimulates a new approach to the well-known assets (%)**



Source: authors' calculations.

**Figure 15. The Pilot Project provide a new type of cultural heritage product (%)**



Source: authors' calculations.

Always, for better valuing the Pilot Project assets, the information source (Internet, mass media) has to be improved. This could be done by creating new ways of providing the requested information, using methods of grouping the provided facts related to

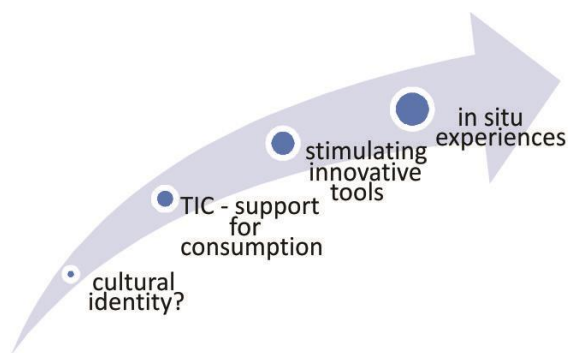
something or someone according to various sets of classes. The organization of specific activities is also important for the valorization of the assets. Cultural events, seasonal activities and so on could be organized to attract persons interested in this kind of activities, at the same time promoting traditions and creating new ones (for example, a festival to be organized every year). Year by year, the stock of information that can be found, for example, on the Internet may be improved with new facts and news about cultural heritage assets, which may attract tourists and persons interested in assets non-invasive visiting.

The interviewed persons agreed that the Pilot Project stimulates a new approach to the well-known assets and provides a new type of cultural heritage product for people prone to use ITC and non-invasive ways of visiting the selected cultural heritage assets.

### Developing a new cultural consumption model

An important idea can be underlined: no matter how important the ecotourism development is, taking into account environmental protection and so on, as long as tourists do not have an incentive/a motivation to go *in situ* to visit a specific asset, the cultural consumption will be delayed indefinitely time. Also, the tourism and related activities will be postponed. For the youth, the decision to complete the on-line cultural consumption with *in situ* experience is associated with an intellectually exciting, and participatory activity. Moreover it is also related to an affordable (cost-benefit oriented) but comfortable enough (accessibility *in situ* and specific hospitality services in vicinity).

**Figure 16. The methodology of cultural consumption / the route of cultural consumption for youth**



Source: the authors.

For the youth, cultural identity at individual and group levels is based on knowledge from general education and/or by informal or non-formal education. In most cases, it is associated with ICT devices and services for previous background or in-depth information. In situ experiences involve new knowledge and exciting experiences, rediscovering the cultural heritage aspects and defining a personal perspective. Thus, it supports and promotes the new model of cultural consumption, both in specific and multiplying ways. The specific way is underlined by active involvement of cultural consumers in heritage valorization and interpretation, based on the new model of youth consumption. The experience of the tourists is shared on social networks and, in this way, the rate of future/potential consumers is increasing as a snowball effect.

Regarding the youth and their cultural consumption model, the technology and the Internet changes the development of new cultural consumption model. In addition, nowadays the youth is “under siege”, considering the rate of the innovative technological change. Today youth can find easily cultural information through ICT devices. Sometimes, they find even more than they wanted, because the Internet search engines and social networks have a feature called “making suggestions” that provides some information that was not searched previously.

The cultural consumption by the youth is customized and follows some patterns that might be difficult to forecast. There are differences between the youth consumption model and the cultural consumption model of the rest of the population, mainly because the youth is in contact with technologies and devices (smart phones, tablets, laptops, etc.) at an early age. Therefore, youngsters make connections that a grown man was not able to make when he/she was a child. Thus, studying youth cultural consumption model and understanding this model might allow the development of a broader picture related to the reality of tomorrow.

## **Conclusions**

The youth defines a new model of cultural consumption mainly due to the use of ICT and innovative technology devices, which constantly and rapidly change this model from a day to another. Thus, youth may share easily experiences and influence people around them. Therefore, we can say that the youth consumption model has a great impact on the other people’s consumption model, somehow the latter being shaped by the former.

Local entrepreneurs should take into consideration this new type of consumption model and create tourism products and services according to new demands (Vasile., V., 2015). Also, it is important to use the new technologies in a way that will not affect the natural environment and the heritage assets. The benefits of technology and ICT devices

should determine the local stakeholders to include these elements in their development plans.

The main conclusions of our study are:

- it is important to provide information about cultural heritage both offline, through brochures or guides, and online, to be easily accessible, especially to the users of new ICT technologies;
- the cultural heritage assets need powerful and meaningful stories in order to be interesting for potential visitors, and the entrepreneurs developing businesses in the cultural heritage domain should take into consideration such aspects;
- those stories must be disseminated through innovative ways of valorization of heritage, especially created for the youth; they are a true starting point for creating unique cultural heritage products;
- the information sources should to be improved and periodically updated, creating new ways of sharing the information.
- the youth cultural consumption model is based on the development of everyday's experiences *in situ*. New aspects are shared with experts and/or are debated with friends using social media. They are supported by a critical and responsible approach to significance and relevance for own life. How much do we have to trust in the efficiency of this new type of cultural consumption? Are the cultural values alliterated by this active implication of the consumers? Such risks have to be assumed by the providers and the initial education has to capitalize the responsibility for heritage.

## Acknowledgement

This study was developed in the Project - SEE TCP Sagittarius - Launching (G)Local Level Heritage Entrepreneurship: Strategies and Tools to Unite Forces, Safeguard the Place, Mobilize Cultural Values, Deliver the Experience, Contract: SEE/B/0016/4.3/X SEE Programme.

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