

Analysing civic participation related in Romania's Danube region's multicultural tourism: a methodological approach

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Abstract. Objective: The civic participatory system is a means of involving citizens in decision-making processes and monitoring public policies, aimed at increasing the transparency, accountability and efficiency of public administration. The civic participatory system implies the existence of formal and informal mechanisms for consultation, dialogue, collaboration and co-creation between public authorities and civil society in order to identify, formulate, implement and evaluate solutions to problems of public interest. In the field of culture and tourism, the civic participatory system plays an important role in promoting the enhancement of cultural heritage, cultural diversity, access to culture and sustainable tourism development. This article aims to analyse the civic participatory system in order to outline a current situation at national and regional level for the development and valorisation of cultural heritage through tourism in the Danube region, which is characterised by great ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity. **Method:** This paper will use the systematic literature review method to investigate multicultural communities in the Danube area and how to improve institutional capacities, social inclusion and sustainable urban development. **Results:** Considering the decreasing capacities of public administrators to integrate the participatory approach into decision-making processes, this article will report on the conceptual delimitations of the civic participatory system related to the tourism and culture sector in multicultural communities in the Danube region and identify the relevant actors corresponding to this process. **Originality:** The article makes a significant contribution to the knowledge of the current situation of the civic participatory system in the Danube region and to the formulation of concrete proposals for its improvement. The theme is relevant and current, given the importance of cultural heritage and tourism for the sustainable development of the Danube region, as well as the need to involve citizens in decision-making processes and to promote intercultural dialogue.

Keywords: civic participatory system, participatory governance, multicultural communities, cultural heritage, tourism sector

JEL classification: Z32, M14

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1. Introduction

The civic participation mechanism at national level is not very well developed and accepted by public authorities, especially in disadvantaged areas along the Danube. The Danube region is characterised by a rich cultural and natural diversity, but also by a number of common challenges that are requiring a participatory and inclusive approach involving all public, private and non-governmental stakeholders in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of public policies in the field of culture and tourism, in line with the objectives of the EUSDR.

One of the main objectives of participatory governance of culture and tourism is to promote better integration of these areas into local and regional development strategies, given their potential to contribute to economic growth, social cohesion, social inclusion, quality of life and territorial identity. Another objective is also to stimulate innovation and creativity in these sectors by supporting cultural and tourism initiatives that respond to the needs and expectations of local communities as well as to global challenges.

With these global changes, both at international and national level, there are also changes in the behaviour of civil society, so there is a need for activities to ensure the development of solutions to increase the sustainability of cultural tourism in Romania through the use of digitization and civic participatory mechanisms in the awareness of cultural values.

Given that cultural heritage is a common resource and an asset for all, the European Commission recognises the need to further develop participatory models of interpretation and governance, suited to contemporary Europe, through greater involvement of the private sector and civil society. This would strengthen Europe's position in the field of conservation, restoration and enhancement of cultural heritage.

Explanations of the participatory governance approach are available in the 2018 report on Participatory Governance of Cultural Heritage. Building on this report, the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage mentions the need for a participatory approach to cultural heritage protection and management, and the need for new models that involve local communities and a wide range of stakeholders in open, participatory and inclusive processes.

There is a trend towards increasing interest and involvement of citizens in culture and tourism, due to the recognition of the added value these sectors bring to local and regional development. However, there are still many challenges and obstacles to effective and inclusive civic participation, such as: lack of financial and human resources, excessive bureaucracy, corruption, lack of information and education, and discrimination or marginalisation of vulnerable groups.

2. Literature review

The tourism product is created and delivered by communities, who are the primary hosts of destinations and have a vital function in tourism. Tourism development depends on community activities, which are often informal and unplanned.

Public participation was first introduced in the health sector in the 1950s, as reported by De Kadt (1982) and the United Nations (1981). In the 1990s, it was acknowledged as a crucial factor for the sustainable development of tourism, as it could reduce the adverse effects of tourism activities (Fiorino, 1990). Tourism and natural environments have a strong connection and require effective planning and management of the tourism sector (Gunn, 1994; Ioannides, 1995). Murphy (1994) contends that the cooperation of various groups (e.g., NGOs), industry actors and government is essential to preserve tourism resources and attain the objectives of sustainable tourism. According to Byrd, Bosley and Dronberger (2009, p. 693), stakeholder involvement is a prerequisite for sustainable tourism development in a community.

A clear comprehension of the perspectives and interests of stakeholders is vital for designing and managing tourism in a sustainable way. To enhance the quality of tourism plans, safeguard tourism resources, and balance the various advantages of tourism, it is necessary to implement effective processes of public participation (Tosun and Timothy, 2003). Tourism can foster economic growth and diversity, but it needs careful planning to involve the community (Byrd, Cardenas and Greenwood,

2008). Simmons observes that as tourism has become more significant as a means of regional development, it has to deal with the need for public regulation and participation (Simmons, 1994, p. 99). The government and the private sector should create opportunities for local stakeholders to participate not only in economic activities (France, 1998; Timothy, 1999) but also in decision-making processes (Haywood, 1988; Inskip, 1991; Keogh, 1990; Simmons, 1994). Engaging citizens in tourism planning can help protect local communities from the adverse effects of tourism and distribute/diversify the benefits of tourism development more fairly (Timothy, 1999).

According to Fiertag (1999), tourism development for any community, no matter how big or small, cannot rely only on the efforts of convention bureaus, chambers of commerce or city councils. It is essential that all business stakeholders, especially hotels, get involved. This is simply a smart business strategy.

Tourism affects the local culture and hospitality in both positive and negative ways, and this influences all members of the community. The destination is created by the collective efforts of small enterprises that offer community tourism products and services, even though they operate independently. Chambers (2004, cf. Hayle, 2005) argues that these small businesses are the core of the community tourism experience, as they allow many communities to participate in the industry and share the benefits of tourism. This creates a valuable opportunity to improve and diversify the tourism product. According to France (1997), community tourism is a form of tourism that is managed and owned by the local community. It can vary in its nature, ranging from alternative tourism to mass tourism, and it can include different types of packages and transportation.

The destination is the permanent home of local communities, but only a temporary stay for visitors. Hence, to ensure the long-term well-being of the residents, they should be involved in tourism development. Tourism development brings both advantages and disadvantages to the destination in terms of economy, society, culture, and ecology. Some of the advantages are enhancing the local economy by creating more jobs, increasing community income, and generating foreign exchange revenue, which improves the national balance of payments (Vujko and Gajić, 2015). Additionally, tourism development helps preserve cultural and ecological resources (Baral, 2014; Nayomi and Gnanapala, 2015). On the other hand, tourism development also entails some drawbacks. For example, economic growth leads to higher prices, which affect the living costs and the reliance on tourism income (Nayomi and Gnanapala, 2015). Moreover, tourism development influences the socio-cultural aspects, such as eroding the culture and inducing the demonstration effect (Yasothornsrikul and Bowen, 2015). Furthermore, tourism development causes environmental issues, such as waste management and pollution (Figuroa and Rotarou, 2016; Kaseva and Moirana, 2010).

A comprehensive awareness of the advantages and drawbacks of tourism development is essential for local communities. Eshliki and Kaboudi (2012) claimed that this awareness would affect how residents engage in tourism development. Moreover, according to Timothy (1999) and Tosun (2002) in (Jaafar et al., 2017), the community's involvement in tourism development would enhance the positive outcomes and mitigate the negative ones for the destination community. Gursoy, et al. in Jaafar et al., (2017) asserted that the community should cooperate with tourism development initiatives for sustainability.

Governance refers to the various mechanisms that control, coordinate, and safeguard the activities in a system, enabling it to cope with any challenges, disturbances, or situations arising from within or outside the system (Bramwell and Lane, 2011; Charlie et al., 2012; Cole and Browne, 2015; Hall, 2011; Heslinga et al., 2017, 2019; Parra and Moulaert, 2016; Partelow and Nelson, 2020; Sharpley and Ussi, 2012). Stoker (2018) argues that "the governance perspective is valuable because it offers a framework to comprehend the evolving processes of governing". Governance can take different forms, such as hierarchical, market-oriented, network-based, egalitarian, or mutual-aid governance (Moulaert et al., 2022).

Participatory governance aims to enhance the relationship between cultural heritage institutions and professionals. It involves everyone who is interested or involved in cultural heritage. It is also an innovative approach that brings about real change in managing and valuing cultural heritage. Moreover, it can be maintained for a long time.

According to Philippe Schmitter, participatory governance is the consistent and assured involvement of the representatives of those groups that will be impacted by the policy outcome in the

decision-making process. He introduces the term “holders” to refer to these groups. The holders are the individuals or organisations that have some pertinent attribute or asset that is essential for addressing a specific governance challenge. In essence, anyone who has some attribute or asset that can contribute to solving a practical problem or settling a specific dispute should have the right to take part in the policy formulation and implementation process. Schmitter distinguishes between various kinds of holders, such as “right-holders”, “space-holders”, “knowledge-holders”, “share-holders”, “stakeholders”, “interest-holders” and “status-holders” (Schmitter, 2000).

Participatory governance presupposes some form of democratic institutional framework. The quality of the participatory governance actors depends on how well they represent their groups, as well as the decision-making methods they adopt to carry out the governance task. A key aspect of the quality of the governance task is to ensure that every holder group has a genuine chance to participate in the decision and that every holder within their group feels adequately represented (Gbikpi and Grote, 2002).

EU policies have gradually recognized the significance of the participatory aspect in managing cultural heritage. This is evident in Decision No 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council, which launched a Union initiative for the European Capitals of Culture for 2020-2033¹. According to this decision, one of the main aims of the ECOC is to protect and enhance the cultural diversity in Europe and emphasise the common elements they have, and to foster citizens’ feeling of attachment to a shared cultural space. Therefore, the participation of citizens is a key factor in the ECOC project, regarding local political commitment, public and attendee involvement, volunteering and actions for particular objectives. Between 2012 and 2014, some Council of Europe conclusions stressed the need for a change in cultural governance towards a holistic and people-oriented approach: reinforcing the participation of relevant civil society actors to make cultural governance more transparent, collaborative, efficient and consistent². The official acknowledgement of the role of the HCMP came with the Council Conclusions on participatory governance of cultural heritage³ and the 2015 European Parliament Resolution of 8 September “Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe”⁴.

A polycentric governance of cultural heritage as a common good is sustainable when social and economic sustainability are ensured, leading to the creation of local forms of economic democracy, with the positive aim of social and economic empowerment of vulnerable residents and local communities. Public authorities have a crucial role in this model (Bonini et al, 2015) to be defined as a favourable state (Foster, 2011). Participatory governance raises questions not only about the enhancement of civic capacity in participatory terms, but also about the scientific knowledge and skills related to the protection and valorisation of cultural heritage.

3. Methodology and data

This exploratory approach is directed towards describing the concept of participatory governance and its principles; presenting the importance of the participatory approach in cultural heritage management; describing the stakeholder involvement process and the role that each party has in the cultural heritage coordination activity. Through a comprehensive analysis, the research aims to support the awareness and role that the civil society consultation system has on cultural heritage management. The posited hypothesis asserts that to attain a heightened level of governance internalisation within a tourism destination organisation, a robust antecedent commitment to the conceptual framework is imperative.

¹ Decision No 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 establishing a Union action for the European Capitals of Culture for the years 2020 to 2033 and repealing Decision No 1622/2006/EC, OJ L 132, 3.5.2014, p. 1–12

² Council conclusions of 26 November 2012 on Cultural Governance OJ C 393, 19.12.2012, p. 8–10 (2012)

³ Council conclusions on participatory governance of cultural heritage, OJ C 463, 23.12.2014, p. 1–3 (2014)

⁴ European Parliament resolution of 8 September 2015 towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe (2014/2149(INI)), OJ C 316, 22.9.2017, p. 88–98 (2015)

Our approach involved conducting a systematic literature review to comprehensively examine existing scholarly works, encompassing both past and current research within the chosen domain.

Drawing inspiration from similar methodologies used in the field of tourism research, our approach aligns with established practices to facilitate a rigorous and systematic review of the literature in our specific domain.

The systematic literature review method served as the primary approach for data collection in our research, guiding the formulation of research questions, the selection of relevant documents, the analysis of chosen literature, and the presentation of results, thereby contributing to the advancement of knowledge in the field of civic participatory system related to the culture and tourism sector. Before using the systematic literature review, a preparation process was undertaken by the authors, which involved defining the scope of the review, establishing inclusion and exclusion criteria, and outlining the objectives of the research. Afterwards, we searched for and selected previous studies and filtered articles related to the research themes and objectives.

4. Research results and comments

4.1. Defining the civic participatory system process

The civic participatory system is a form of citizen involvement in decision-making processes and monitoring of public policies, aimed at increasing the transparency, accountability and efficiency of public administration. It involves formal and informal mechanisms for consultation, dialogue, collaboration and co-creation between public authorities and civil society to identify, formulate, implement and evaluate solutions to problems of public interest.

Involving citizens in public decision-making is an evolving practice that aims to facilitate society's participation in government activity and process. At the same time, citizen involvement in public decision-making can be seen as a tool of modern governance, whereby society contributes to informing policy makers about the concerns, needs or values of citizens, in order to foster the best decisions and the most effective public policies.

In the field of tourism and culture, the process of civic participatory system is a concept that refers to the involvement of citizens, local stakeholders and civil society organisations in the definition, planning, implementation and evaluation of tourism and cultural development policies and projects. This process aims to promote sustainable, responsible and inclusive tourism that values and protects cultural and natural heritage, contributes to social and territorial cohesion, stimulates innovation and competitiveness and supports economic growth and job creation. Culture and tourism are strategic sectors for Romania's economic, social and territorial development, given their potential to generate income, jobs, innovation, social cohesion and national identity.

An example of a civic participatory system in the field of tourism and culture is Romania's National Strategy for Tourism Development 2023-2035, which was developed through a collaboration between the central public authority in charge of tourism development, the General Secretariat of the Government and the World Bank. This strategy was based on extensive consultation with public, private and civil society stakeholders, as well as national and international experts.

Civil participation should be promoted and implemented through the following principles, which apply to all actors involved in civil participation in policy-making:

- mutual respect between all actors as a basis for honest interaction and mutual trust;
- respect for the position of public authorities who have responsibility and accountability for decision-making;
- openness, transparency and accountability;
- responsiveness, with all actors obliged to provide appropriate feedback;
- non-discrimination and inclusiveness;
- gender equality and equal participation of all groups, including those with special interests and needs, such as young people, older people, people with disabilities or minorities;
- accessibility through the use of clear language and appropriate means of participation, offline or online, and on any type of device.

The tools and mechanisms that support civil participation throughout the decision-making process are diverse and depend on the context and level of involvement desired. In general, the following main levels of participation can be distinguished:

Table 1 Tools and mechanisms according to the level of participation

Level of participation	Tools and mechanisms
<i>Access to information</i> - this level of participation is essential to ensure transparency and accountability in decision-making.	official web portals, newsletters, annual reports, publication of draft legislation, requests for public information, etc.
<i>Consultation</i> - this level of participation is important to ensure the quality and legitimacy of the decision-making process.	opinion polls, online questionnaires, public hearings, debates, forums, workshops, working groups, etc.
<i>Active partnership</i> - this level of participation is essential to ensure effective and sustainable decision-making.	advisory councils, joint committees, dialogue platforms, co-creation, co-governance, participatory budgeting, etc.
<i>Dialogue</i> - is an overall institutionalised form of participation, which is long lasting and most sustainable when developed in a structured way	ongoing public hearings and public forums, multi-sectoral councils, key contacts with public authority, capacity-building events to increase knowledge and capacity relevant to public participation, etc.

Source: processed by authors.

The involvement of citizens is crucial for guaranteeing the quality, pertinence, and efficiency of strategies and initiatives in the realm of tourism and culture, and for fostering social unity, participative democracy, and proactive citizenship. Nonetheless, in developing nations, implementing this kind of participation frequently encounters challenges due to structural and functional issues, as well as cultural barriers in the advancement of tourism (Tosun, 2000):

- Operational limitations: Centralisation of public administration of tourism; Lack of coordination; Lack of information
- Structural limitations: Attitude of professionals, Lack of expertise, Dominance of the elite, Lack of an adequate legal system, Lack of qualified human resources, Relatively high cost of community participation, Lack of financial resources
- Cultural limitations: Limited capacity of poor/disadvantaged people, Lack of enthusiasm and low level of awareness in the local community

A civic participatory system has benefits for both local government and citizens.

For *local government*, a civic participatory system in tourism and culture can:

- increase the legitimacy and credibility of public decisions by consulting and involving citizens in the decision-making process;
- improve the quality and efficiency of decision-making by integrating the views and interests of different stakeholders, as well as relevant data and information, in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of tourism and cultural development policies and projects;
- increase the transparency and accountability of public administration by facilitating access to information and participation and monitoring mechanisms for citizens, local stakeholders and civil society organisations, and by ensuring effective communication and regular reporting on the results and impact of tourism and cultural development policies and projects;
- strengthen the institutional capacity and professional skills of public administration staff by developing tools, methods and practices of civic participatory systems and by stimulating the exchange of experiences and best practices between different institutions and levels of government at national, European and international level;
- stimulate innovation and creativity in solving local problems by harnessing citizens' potential and resources;

- strengthen relations and partnerships with local actors through dialogue and cooperation with civil society, business, educational institutions, etc.

For *citizens*, a civic participatory system in tourism and culture can:

- increase satisfaction and trust in local government by recognising their right and role in public life;
- develop citizens' civic and democratic skills by educating them for participation and civic responsibility;
- strengthen citizens' sense of belonging and local identity by involving them in projects aimed at improving the quality of life in the community;
- promote social cohesion and cultural diversity in the community by respecting the rights and interests of all social groups;
- improve the quality of life and well-being of citizens by creating accessible, varied and high-quality tourism and cultural opportunities that respond to their needs and preferences and by increasing the income and living standards of the local population;
- encourage active participation and civic engagement of citizens, by involving them in the definition, planning, implementation and evaluation of policies and projects for the development of tourism and culture, as well as by creating spaces and platforms for dialogue and the expression of their opinions and interests;
- develop citizens' skills and knowledge by stimulating formal and non-formal learning, facilitating access to information and educational resources and promoting cultural exchanges and mobility at national, European and international level;
- strengthen citizens' identity and values by recognising and valuing cultural and natural heritage and cultural diversity and pluralism and by supporting cultural expression and creativity and social innovation.

Participatory governance of culture and tourism refers to the process by which different actors in the fields of culture and tourism (such as public authorities, civil society organisations, cultural operators, economic agents, local communities, etc.) work together to define, implement and evaluate policies and programmes aimed at the sustainable development of these sectors. This type of governance implies an active and responsible involvement of all stakeholders and a recognition of cultural diversity and heritage values.

Participatory governance of culture and tourism is based on the following principles:

- *Dialogue and consultation*: all actors involved in the cultural and tourism fields should communicate and consult each other regularly, transparently and constructively, in order to share visions, information, experiences, best practices and solutions.
- *Partnership and cooperation*: all actors involved in the cultural and tourism fields should establish and strengthen partnerships and cooperation networks at local, regional, national and international level in order to mobilise the resources, skills and synergies necessary for the development of these sectors.
- *Participation and co-creation*: all actors involved in the cultural and tourism fields should participate actively and responsibly in the definition, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes targeting these sectors and in the creation of cultural and tourism products and services that respond to the needs and interests of local communities.
- *Accountability and evaluation*: all actors involved in the cultural and tourism fields must take responsibility for their actions, respect standards of quality and professional ethics, monitor and evaluate the impact of the policies and programmes they implement or benefit from, and report on the results achieved.

4.2. Identifying relevant actors in the civic participation system

In general, civil society actors are defined as individuals and groups who engage in voluntary participation in activities and public life focused on common interests, goals or values. Civil society actors promote awareness of human rights, assist communities in identifying concerns, develop strategies, influence policies and laws, and insist on accountability. Civil society actors collect and channel the views of communities so that public policy decision-making is fully informed. They also provide services for those who are at risk and vulnerable in many ways. There are several relevant actors

in the civic participation system, depending on the context and level of participation, which can be classified into three main categories:

Table 2. Relevant actors in the civic participation system

<i>Actors</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Examples</i>
<i>Political actors</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - are those who participate in the electoral process and in the formation of public policies; - their role is to represent the interests and opinions of citizens, influence government decisions and ensure transparency and accountability. 	include voters, candidates, political parties, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) dealing with political issues, interest and pressure groups, the media and state institutions.
<i>Social actors</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - are those involved in voluntary work, social work, education, culture, sport, the environment and other areas that contribute to the well-being of the community; - their role is to provide social services, promote social inclusion, support vulnerable groups, educate and train active citizens, protect and enhance cultural and natural heritage and stimulate creativity and innovation. 	include NGOs dealing with social issues, community organisations, professional associations, trade unions, employers' unions, churches, schools, universities and other educational institutions, cultural and arts centres, sports and leisure clubs and others.
<i>Economic actors</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - are those involved in economic, production, consumption, investment, trade and other activities that contribute to the economic development of the community; - their role is to generate income, create jobs, boost competitiveness, support local initiatives, uphold quality and ethical standards and contribute to social well-being. 	include entrepreneurs, employees, consumers, investors, traders, banks, chambers of commerce and industry, business associations and others

Source: processed by authors.

All these actors have an important role to play in the system of civic participation, because through their actions they can influence and change the social reality in which they live. In order to have effective and sustainable civic participation, there is a need for constant collaboration and communication between these actors, as well as an awareness and empowerment of their civic role.

5. Framework methodology for analysing the current situation

The Danube region in Romania comprises 12 counties (Caraș-Severin, Mehedinți, Dolj, Olt, Teleorman, Giurgiu, Călărași, Ialomița, Brăila, Constanța, Tulcea and Galați) and is characterised by great ethnic, cultural and religious diversity, being inhabited by almost 20 ethnic groups, which preserve their specific traditions, languages, religions and customs. According to the 2021 census (see Annex 1), the ethnic groups in the Danube region are: Romanians (3,477,921 people), Roma (146,196 people), Turkish (17,789 people) and Tatars (17,186 people), Russians-Lipovians (14,234 people), Croatians (4,574 people), Serbians (4,199 people), Ukrainians (2,686 people), Hungarians (2,226 people), Germans (1,772 persons), Czechs (1,221 persons), Macedonians (836 persons), Greeks (765 persons), Italians (586 persons), Armenians (266 persons), Bulgarians (243 persons), Jews (159 persons), Albanians (144 persons), Slovaks (76 persons) and Polish (31 persons). Each of these communities contributes to the diversity and cultural richness of the region through their artistic, culinary, folkloric and spiritual manifestations.

The framework methodology for the analysis of the current situation of the civic participatory system in the multicultural communities of the Danube region in Romania aims to assess the degree of involvement and influence of civil society from different ethnic, religious and linguistic groups in the decision-making processes at regional, national and European level, in areas of common interest for the Danube riparian states, and to identify opportunities and challenges for strengthening this system. This methodology is based on the principles of democratic participation, transparency, accountability, cooperation and solidarity, in line with the values and objectives of the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR).¹

The methodology involves the following steps:

- Analysis of strategic and normative documents relevant to the civic participatory system in the Danube region, at regional, national and European level, with a focus on the EUSDR priority areas: connectivity, environmental protection, social and economic development, institution building and security.
- Carry out a case study in each county along the Danube river, assessing the current state of the civic participation system, using indicators such as: the number and type of civil society organisations active in the region, the degree of their representation and involvement in decision-making processes, the level of knowledge and use of civic participation tools, the degree of cooperation and coordination between different stakeholders, the existence and effectiveness of mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the impact of civil society activities, etc.
- To produce a summary report containing the main findings and conclusions of the desk and case study analysis and recommendations for improving the civic participation system in the multicultural communities of the Danube region, with a view to achieving the EUSDR objectives and improving the quality of life of the population in the Danube basin.

The process of civic participatory system in Romania in the field of culture and tourism, especially in the Danube region, aims to increase the quality and effectiveness of public policies in the field of culture and tourism, by involving all relevant stakeholders in the Danube region. The civic participatory system process contributes to the development of a strategic and coherent vision for the cultural and tourism sector in the Danube region, responding to the common challenges of the region and exploiting the opportunities offered by the Danube as a shared resource. The civic participatory system process supports the implementation of the EUSDR as a macro-regional strategy for the integrated and coordinated development of the Danube region.

A civic participatory system process in the field of tourism and culture can include the following steps:

- Identification of issues and needs of public interest in the field of culture and tourism, through consultation with relevant stakeholders in the Danube region, such as local and regional authorities, cultural and tourism organisations, economic operators, non-governmental organisations, academic and research institutions, representatives of local communities, etc.
- Formulate solutions and proposals for public policies in the field of culture and tourism through dialogue, collaboration and co-creation between stakeholders in the Danube region, taking into account the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality, complementarity and synergy with other public policies at national, European and macro-regional level.
- Implementation of solutions and public policies in the field of culture and tourism, through the establishment of mechanisms for funding, monitoring, evaluation and reporting of projects and programmes carried out in the Danube region, involving all stakeholders from the public, private and non-governmental sectors.
- Evaluate solutions and public policies in the field of culture and tourism by analysing their impact on the economic, social and territorial development of the Danube region and on the achievement of the EUSDR objectives. The evaluation is based on quantitative and

¹ <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocument/253159>

qualitative indicators that measure the extent to which the needs initially identified have been met.

6. Conclusion

The current situation of the civic participatory system related to the culture and tourism sector in the multicultural communities of the Danube Region is varied, depending on the degree of democratic, economic and social development of each Member State. In general, a trend of increasing interest and involvement of citizens in the field of culture and tourism can be observed, due to the recognition of the added value that these sectors bring to local and regional development. However, there are still many challenges and obstacles to effective and inclusive civic participation, such as lack of financial and human resources, excessive bureaucracy, corruption, lack of information and education, and discrimination or marginalisation of vulnerable groups.

In order to improve the current situation of the civic participatory system related to the culture and tourism sector in multicultural communities in the Danube Region, a series of integrated measures are needed, targeting both the institutional and civil society levels, as follows:

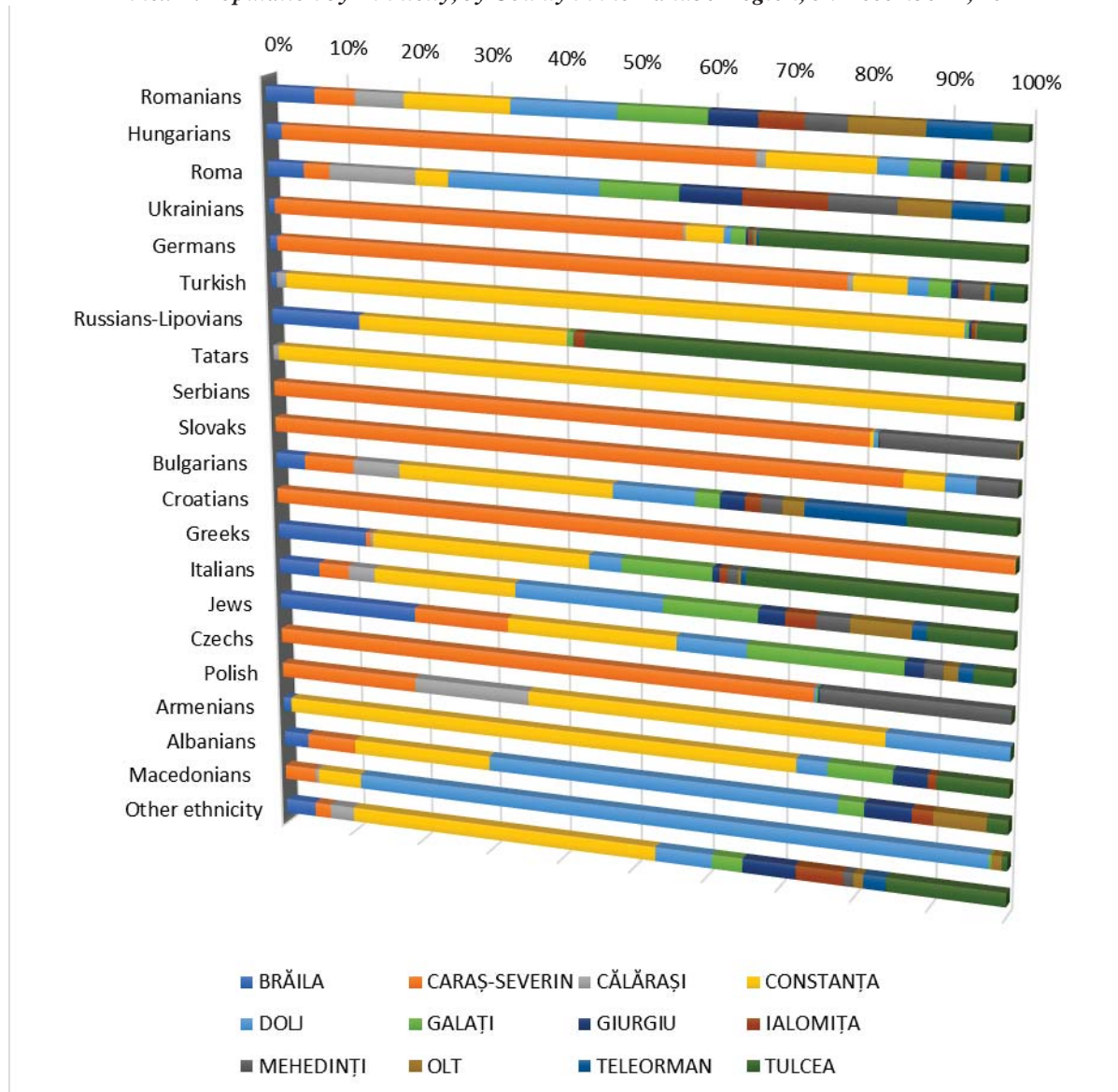
- creation or strengthening of formal and informal mechanisms for consultation and dialogue between public authorities, cultural and tourism organisations, economic and social actors and representatives of local communities;
- enhancing the administrative and technical capacity of public authorities responsible for culture and tourism through continuous training, exchange of best practices and cross-border cooperation;
- allocating adequate financial resources to support cultural and tourism projects with local or regional impact, by accessing European funds available under the EUSDR or by creating alternative funding mechanisms such as private sponsorship or crowdfunding;
- raising citizens' information and awareness of the importance of culture and tourism for the sustainable development of the Danube Region, through communication, education and awareness-raising campaigns that enhance cultural diversity and promote intercultural dialogue;
- encouraging active and voluntary participation of citizens in cultural and tourism activities in the Danube Region by creating opportunities for involvement, such as volunteering, mentoring, co-creating or co-managing projects or initiatives;
- combating discrimination and marginalisation of vulnerable groups, such as ethnic, religious or sexual minorities, people with disabilities, young or elderly people, by ensuring equal access to culture and tourism, promoting human rights and cultural diversity, and creating spaces for meeting and learning from each other.

These measures can contribute to strengthening the civic participatory system related to the culture and tourism sector in the multicultural communities of the Danube Region, with multiple benefits for the economic, social and cultural development of the region. Through civic participation, citizens can become active and responsible actors in the process of transforming the Danube Region into an area of cooperation, innovation and diversity.

Future research directions will include case studies on the current situation of the civic participatory system related to the culture and tourism sector in multicultural communities in the Danube counties of Romania.

Annexes

Annex 1. Population by Ethnicity, by County in the Danube Region, on December 1, 2021



Source: processed by authors.

Authors' contribution: All authors conceived and designed the study, participated in data collection and performed the analysis. All authors participated in contributing to text and the content of the manuscript, including revisions and edits. All authors approve of the content of the manuscript. Introduction, M.P.M., L.C.C.F.; Literature review, M.P.M., L.C.C.F.; Methodology and data, M.P.M., L.C.C.F.; Research results and comments, M.P.M., L.C.C.F.; Conclusion, M.P.M., L.C.C.F.

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