



CREATING A CULTURAL DIPOLE IN THE CITIES OF SERRES (GR) AND PETRICH (BL) IN THE FRAME OF INTERREG REGIONAL COOPERATION

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Abstract: *In the frame of the project “CULTURAL DIPOLE” funded by the Interreg V-A “Greece - Bulgaria 2014-2020” Cooperation Programme, the creation of a Cultural Dipole comprised by the cities of Serres and Petrich is envisaged. In particular, the project aims at the creation of: a) The Thematic Museum in Serres “Constantin Xenakis” which will host a collection of modern art works of the famous artist “Constantin Xenakis” and b) A Multifaced Museum in Petrich which will host the collection of valuable archaeological, historical and other objects, from the current Historical Museum. The “CULTURAL DIPOLE” will benefit the local population of Serres and Petrich as well as their wider area in economic and social terms, with the ambition to be a transferable practice and concept for many other cross border cities and areas.*

Keywords: *Cultural dipole, cultural heritage, regional cooperation, Serres, Petrich*

1. Introduction

Greece and Bulgaria, two neighbouring countries with a rich past and history, have entered an era of closer cooperation during the last decades, in the framework of INTERREG Programme “Greece-Bulgaria”.

Serres in Greece and Petrich in Bulgaria are sister cities since 2005, having cooperated in common E.U. projects, facing various common challenges such as preservation of cultural heritage, protection of environment, promotion of resource efficiency, cross-border entrepreneurship, development of tourism. In addition, initiatives in both cities are currently in progress aiming to utilise former military camps.

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Serres and Petrich have a time distance of approximately 40 minutes by private car, including border controls, thus a visitor of the area staying in one of the cities may easily visit the other one.

At present, the two cities have the opportunity to further extend and establish their cooperation towards preserving and promoting their heritage, through the participation of the Municipality of Serres and the Municipality of Petrich in the "CULTURAL DIPOLE" project, which started its activities in September of 2017.

More specifically, the "CULTURAL DIPOLE" project, funded by the Interreg V-A "Greece - Bulgaria 2014-2020" Cooperation Programme, aims at the creation of two cultural poles of European significance, one in Serres and one in Petrich, which will create synergies and attract visitors from their neighbouring, national areas as well as from abroad.

The project has a duration of two years and according to the official time plan, it will be completed by August 2019. The consortium of the project consists of four partners: Municipality of Serres (lead partner), Municipality of Petrich, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki/Transport Systems Research Group and Democritus University of Thrace. The "Serreon Politeia" Society and the "Society for the Study and Research of the Serres Region History" (EMEIS) will act as supporters of the project, without receiving any funding.

In order to ensure the successful implementation of the "CULTURAL DIPOLE" project and achieve the expected results, the following project objectives have been set:

- The restoration of two buildings: a listed building, of the Ottoman Period, which exists in a former Military camp, near the centre of Serres and a building which exists also in a former military camp, in the centre of Petrich.
- The creation of a Thematic Museum in Serres, which will host the modern art collection of "Constantin Xenakis".
- The creation of a Multifaced Museum in Petrich, which will host the collection of valuable archaeological, historical and other objects, from the current Historical Museum.
- The application of an exemplary study, in order to transform the Museum in Serres to a Nearly Zero Energy Building (NZEB).
- The application of provisions for creating an accessible Museum in Serres, in terms of physical (e.g wheelchair users) and sensory (e.g. blind people) accessibility.
- The application of provisions concerning energy consumption and accessibility of buildings in the Museum of Petrich.
- Promotion of cooperation among two near border cities, Serres and Petrich.
- Valorisation of cultural heritage and promotion of tourism in the cross - border area.

The general idea of the "CULTURAL DIPOLE" project is to promote the development of cultural tourism in the border region between Greece and Bulgaria. The World Tourism

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Organization has defined cultural tourism as “movements of persons for essentially cultural motivations such as study tours, performing arts and cultural tours, travel to festivals and other cultural events, visits to sites and monuments, travel to study nature, folklore or art, and pilgrimages.” (WTO, 1985 p. 131). Cultural tourism is usually related to trips that include visits to such places as museums, art galleries, historical and archaeological sites, festivals, architecture, artistic performances, and heritage sites (Hughes, 1996; Stebbins, 1996). It is important to consider that culture has arguably become a major driving force of the urban tourism system. (Andries van der Arka & Richards, 2005). The cultural tourism has gained a significant share in the global tourism market, during the last decades. Data provided by OECD indicate that worldwide, almost 360 million international tourism trips were generated by cultural tourism in 2007, accounting to around 40% of all global tourism (OECD, 2009). The dynamic interaction among culture and tourism has been identified by Richards (2009, p.1) who states that “Culture and tourism were two of the major growth industries of the 20th century, and towards the end of the century the combination of these two sectors into ‘cultural tourism’ had become one of the most desirable development options for countries and regions around the world.”

In this context, the “CULTURAL DIPOLE” project aspires to preserve and promote the heritage of the two countries, Greece and Bulgaria, by creating a powerful Cultural Dipole of European significance, in the cross - border region.

2. Creation of a Cultural Dipole in the cities of Serres and Petrich

The project follows a well-structured approach which includes the following activities: preparation and realization of procurements, implementation of the construction works and installation of the necessary equipment, preparation of the exhibition spaces and installation of the exhibits. After the completion of the above, the official opening of the two Museums will follow in Serres and Petrich.

During all phases of the “CULTURAL DIPOLE” project, various dissemination activities and publicity events will be implemented in both cities, towards promoting the project idea.

The workplan of the “CULTURAL DIPOLE” project, and consequently the realisation of all the foreseen actions, lie upon two basic axes: a) the creation of the Thematic Museum “Constantin Xenakis” in Serres and b) the creation of the Multifaced Museum in Petrich.

2.1 Thematic Museum “Constantin Xenakis” in Serres

Serres is a vibrant city in Northern Greece, close to the border with Bulgaria. It is the seat of the Municipality of Serres and it is also the capital of the homonymous Prefecture and Regional Unit. According to the most recent data (2011 census) the population of Serres is 58.287 residents (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2011).

Main poles of attraction in the city, concerning Monuments and Museums are: The old Metropolis of Serres Hagii Theodori, the Tzitzirli Tzami, the Archaeological Museum housed in “Bezesteni” the covered market of the Ottoman times, the Mehmet Bey Mosque, the Serres Ecclesiastical Museum, the Sarakatsani Folklore Museum, the Acropolis of Serres, the byzantine church of St. Nicolaos, the Monastery of St. George Kryonerites, the park of

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St. Anargiri's Valley. In addition to the above, Serres has a rich gastronomy tradition with special local food, lively night life and local market. Despite the fact that a great variety of cultural facilities and Museums exists in Serres, there are no tourist assets in the city exclusively related to Contemporary Art. Thus, the creation of a new Museum, which will host unique exhibits of Modern Art and will operate on a permanent basis, has a significant importance and added value for the city of Serres and the whole region.

The city of Serres presents also places of special interest for Serbian tourists. The Monastery of St. Ioannis Prodromos, where Stefanos Dousan is considered as second founder, the old Metropolis Hagii Theodori where probably Dousan was crowned as Emperor of Serbians and Romans having Serres as the center of his empire, the tower of Orestis (general of Stefanos Dousan).

A listed building, in the former military "camp of Papaloukas" in Serres, will be restored and converted to a Thematic Museum, which will house the modern art collection of Constantin Xenakis works. "Papaloukas" former military camp is situated near the center of the city and it is inactive, as it is no longer used by the army. It dates back to the Ottoman occupation of the region. The size of the former military area is approximately 124.759 square meters. Recently, thirteen buildings have been declared as monuments by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and the Municipality of Serres has developed an urban project to activate the regeneration of the "Papaloukas" former military camp.

Constantin Xenakis is a world-famous artist, who was born in Egypt, has lived in Paris and Athens since 1955, and has performed a large number of solo and group exhibitions, shows, activities, monumental constructions. In his works, Xenakis makes an extensive use of various signs, symbols of contemporary life, and old written scripts (Hebrew, Arabic and Greek alphabet, Egyptian Hieroglyphics). In addition, he uses many different types of visual media, either in three-dimensional constructions and installations, or in flat compositions. His work reveals a continuous state of opposition to established forms, without ceasing to be in dialogue with the cultural past. (available at: Contemporary Greek Art Institute, digital platform: <http://dp.iset.gr/artist/>). The artist has chosen Serres to donate a great part of his collection. The "Xenakis Donation" includes works from all periods and artifacts of the artist.

The Thematic Museum "Constantin Xenakis" in Serres will be a Nearly Zero Energy Building (NZEB), resulting in low zero energy operating cost. Via the "mimetic process" it is expected that the first Nearly Zero Energy Museum Building of the area, will be extensively adopted by other interested stakeholders, in South East Balkans.

Appropriate physical and sensory accessibility provisions will be applied to the Thematic Museum "Constantin Xenakis", with particular emphasis on perceptibility. A Wi-Fi application and a relevant software which will be installed, for providing information to the visitors through their mobile phones, will be accessible to visitors with restricted vision and will also include a video in sign language for visitors with hearing impairments. In addition, tactile representations of selected art works will be prepared and exhibited, in order to provide to people with vision impairments the opportunity to touch them and live the unique experience of visiting a Museum of Modern Art.

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The current view of the listed building in the “Papaloukas” former military camp which will be restored and transformed into the Thematic Museum “Constantin Xenakis” is illustrated below, in Figure 1. Figure 2 depicts the future view of the listed building, after the completion of all the necessary renovation works.

Figure 1: The listed building in Serres before the restoration



Source: Author

Figure 2: The listed building in Serres after the restoration



Source: Municipality of Serres

2.2 Multifaced Museum in Petrich

Petrich is a city in the Blagoevgrad Province in southwestern Bulgaria, near to the Greek borders. It is the seat of Petrich Municipality and according to official statistical data, the city has 27.587 inhabitants (National Statistical institute - Republic of Bulgaria, 2013).

Significant tourist assets of attraction in Petrich are: Heraclea Sintica (an Ancient Thracian, Greek, and Roman city, located near the city of Petrich), the Samuil Fortress, (approximately 15 km from the city), the Museum of History, the St. Holy Mother Church, the St. George Church and the St. Nikolas Church.

In the frame of the “CULTURAL DIPOLE” project, an old building existing in a former military camp of Petrich will be restored and converted to a new Museum of Petrich. This will host valuable collections of archaeological, historical and other objects, that are currently exhibited in the Historical Museum of Petrich. The restoration of the building will be fully consistent with low energy consumption and accessibility principles.

The current Historical Museum in Petrich was established in 2006 based on a museum collection arranged in 1996. It is housed in the building of the community center "Bratya Miladinovi". The Museum comprises over 18.000 items exhibited in five departments: 1) Archaeology, 2) Ethnography and "House Vanga", 3) Bulgarian lands from the XV Century to the XIX Century, 4) Contemporary and Modern History and 5) Samuil Fortress Department. In 2015 more than 27.000 tourists visited the Historical Museum of Petrich. During the last years, the Museum has been involved in organising educational programs and conducting archaeological research (available at: The site of the Bulgarian Museums: <http://www.museology.bg/en/museums>). However, many of the items and assets of the Museum have not been exhibited to the public due to space limitations of the existing building, that hosts the Museum. Thus, the city of Petrich strongly needs a new, larger and more appropriate building where all of its treasures will be exhibited open to the visitors of the city, who are specially interested in history and cultural heritage.

Figures 3 and 4 below illustrate the current and future view respectively of the old building in the former military camp of Petrich, which will be appropriately renovated in order to host the Multifaced Museum of the city.

Figure 3: The old building in Petrich before the restoration



Source: Author

Figure 4: The old building in Petrich after the restoration



Source: Municipality of Petrich

2.3 Long term vision of the "CULTURAL DIPOLE"

The long-term vision of the project is the implementation of two Cultural Parks in Serres and Petrich which will act as a Cultural Dipole of European significance. The Cultural Parks will house significant collections and will actively promote art and cultural heritage in the Cross-border area.

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In Serres, the Cultural Park will contain: 1) The Thematic Museum “Constantin Xenakis”, 2) The Municipal Thematic Museum of Serres, 3) The Intertemporal Museum of Serres to be created at a concept similar to the one in Petrich, exhibiting findings from Prehistory to modern times, 4) A Folk-Art Museum, 5) A botanical garden, 6) Other exhibition buildings.

In Petrich, the Cultural Park will consist of: 1) The renovated building that will house the treasures of Petrich, property of the current Historical Museum, the future findings from Heraclea Sintica and the surroundings of Petrich, in permanent and temporary exhibitions. The building will also provide room for future art installations and handicraft ateliers, 2) A revitalised park around the Museum, where open exhibition sites for historical and art assets, will be situated.

The effects of the full realisation of the Cultural Dipole will be catalytic for the interborder area in social, economic and historical terms.

2.4 Impact of the “CULTURAL DIPOLE” for the cross-border area

The successful implementation of the “CULTURAL DIPOLE” project is a challenge with multiple benefits, not only for the partners of the project, but also for all the local stakeholders, entrepreneurs and residents primarily of the two cities and, consequently, of the whole cross border area. The expected outputs of the project can be summarized as follows:

The “CULTURAL DIPOLE” will enhance the attractiveness and tourist identity of Serres and Petrich. The annual number of tourists visiting the two cities and the cross-border area is expected to increase. The creation of the two Museums in the frame of the project, with the prospect of developing the Cultural Parks in the future, will have a positive effect on the tourist character of the wider region. As a result of tourism development, direct benefits will arise for the whole area, for example creation of new jobs and employment opportunities, but also indirect, related to the inspiration of locals and others, in terms of using designs and motives in local products and initiatives. The “CULTURAL DIPOLE” will act as flagship enforcing the tourist identity and branding of the two areas.

The “CULTURAL DIPOLE” will develop cooperation and synergies with Museums and relevant Institutions of the greater area and will seek to be included in relevant guides and programmes. The Thematic Museum “Constantin Xenakis”, the Multifaced Museum of Petrich and the whole concept of the “CULTURAL DIPOLE” will be promoted, through the participation in various cultural events and joint activities implemented in the wider region. In the frame of the project, a “Marketing strategy, exploitation and sustainability plan” will be prepared aiming at: a) The development of a marketing strategy for the creation of a common tourist product and the promotion of the “CULTURAL DIPOLE”, b) The sustainability and exploitation of project results throughout the whole project lifetime and after the project’s completion. Thus, new opportunities will be provided to the whole cross border area, for further development and cooperation.

In addition, the “CULTURAL DIPOLE” will promote the principles of sustainable development and energy efficiency. The Thematic Museum “Constantin Xenakis” in Serres

will be a Nearly Zero Energy Building (NZEB). Special provisions concerning energy consumption will be also applied in the case of Petrich. The renovation of the existing buildings will be fully consistent with the EU/regional/national strategies, instruments and policies related to reducing greenhouse emissions and minimizing the environmental cost of construction sector, through the implementation of energy efficient buildings and infrastructures.

The “CULTURAL DIPOLE” could be a transferable practice and concept, since other border cities and areas, via the “mimetic process”, will adopt the idea of Cultural Dipole, towards promoting their cultural heritage. This way the creation and establishment of new cultural bridges among different cities and countries will be encouraged.

The “CULTURAL DIPOLE” will also promote different readings of history in the two Cultural Parks, since the tourists will have the opportunity to get acquainted with the historic events and facts from different points of view, sometimes conflicting, but neutralized in the current reality of two countries working together peacefully and effectively within the European family. In this sense, art and culture are called upon to play a significant role as unifying factors.

Exemplary provisions concerning physical and sensory accessibility will be applied to both Museums, providing equal opportunities to all tourists visiting the area. Thus, the “CULTURAL DIPOLE” aims at the establishment of accessible tourism in the cross-border area and the elimination of discrimination attitudes against visitors with disability.

Serres and Petrich cities, cooperating as a Cultural Dipole, will attempt to attract, among others, tourists from Serbia and Romania on their route, via Bulgaria, to the summer resorts of northern Greece, such as Kavala, Thasos, Chalkidiki.

The basic impact of the “CULTURAL DIPOLE” project, as derived from all the above, is that the implementation of the two Museums and the creation of the Cultural Dipole will benefit the local population of Serres and Petrich in economic and social terms. The development of cultural tourism in the two cities will actively promote employment and entrepreneurship. The reputation of the two cities will be enhanced through their active involvement in various cultural and social events. Different empirical studies have shown that tourism is a tool that enables the improvement in the socio-economic conditions of the population (Fayissa et al., 2008; Rosentraub & Joo, 2009; Sanchez-Rivero, et al., 2012). It is worth mentioning that UNESCO is focusing in particular on the connection between cultural heritage and development through the Mexico City Declaration on Cultural Policies (UNESCO, 1982) and the Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development “Our Creative Diversity” (UNESCO, 1996). Today, cultural heritage, in particular, is perceived as an important vehicle for development, since “cultural tourism contributes to economic development” and “cultural heritage builds social cohesion” (UNESCO, 2010; Van der Auwera & Schramme, 2014). The facilities and services that will be developed for the visitors (health and transport infrastructure, restaurants, sport and leisure facilities, public spaces) will result in the improvement of the life quality for the local communities.

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3. Conclusion

The “CULTURAL DIPOLE” project addresses the challenge of preserving and promoting cultural heritage through the creation of two Museums, the Thematic Museum “Constantin Xenakis” in Serres and the Multifaced Historical Museum in Petrich, which will act as two poles of European significance. The restoration of the old buildings, and their transformation into cultural assets of great value for local communities, will enforce the cultural identity of the two cities and will raise their attractiveness to the tourists.

The two Museums in Serres and Petrich will implement various marketing and synergetic activities in cooperation with other Museums and relevant Institutions in the region, in order to disseminate the “CULTURAL DIPOLE” and enhance the tourist character of Serres and Petrich.

The creation of the Cultural Dipole is expected to positively affect the two cities and the cross-border region in both economic and social terms. The long-term vision of creating two cultural parks will provide new opportunities for development and cooperation among Greece and Bulgaria.

The “CULTURAL DIPOLE” concept and practice aims to be transferable to other border cities and areas with the aim to promote cultural tourism and stimulate the relations among the involved regions.

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IZGRADNJA KULTURNE DIPOLE U GRADOVIMA SERESA (GR) I PETRIHA (BL) U OKVIRU INTERREG REGIONALNE SARADNJE

Sažetak: U okviru projekta "KULTURNA DIPOLA", finansiranog od strane programa Interreg V-A "Grčka - Bugarska 2014-2020", predviđeno je stvaranje kulturnog dipola u sastavu gradova Seres i Petrič. Konkretno, projekat ima za cilj stvaranje: a) tematskog muzeja u Seresu "Constantin Ksenakis", koji će biti domaćin kolekcije savremenih umetničkih dela poznatog umetnika "Constantin Ksenakis" i b) multiflikiranog muzeja u Petriču, koji će

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biti domaćin zbirka vrednih arheoloških, istorijskih i drugih predmeta, iz aktuelnog Istorijskog muzeja. "KULTURNA DIPOLA" će koristiti lokalnom stanovništvu Seresa i Petriča, kao i njihovom širem području u ekonomskom i društvenom smislu, sa ambicijom da bude prenosiva praksa i koncept za mnoge druge prekogranične gradove i područja.

Ključne reči: kulturni dipol, kulturno nasleđe, regionalna saradnja, Seres, Petrič