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Cultural heritage of Varna and its tourist recognisability in Europe

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Abstract: *Cultural heritage of the European civilization constitutes cultural and spiritual property of the ancestors, as well as current generations of the Varna city. It represents both material and non-material value, defines the European culture. It includes all the environmental consequences arising from the interaction between the man and the surroundings over the course of history. Assessment of tourist potential of Varna performed on 9-14th September, 2014, by the members of the “European Traveler” scientific circle, students of tourist and recreation, as well as heritage and culture tourism at Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz, made it possible to identify the main points of tourist recognizability in relation to the city and region. The staid points are predominantly based on the unique cultural assets of the city and the region – in large measure related to the origins of the European civilization – as well as current cultural events organized in the city.*

Keywords: *culture, history, tourist and EU countries.*

Introduction

Well-preserved cultural heritage is fundamental for European cities in order to be transnational and well-recognizable among tourists. Each city founded in Europe has its own cultural heritage consisting in achievements in the fields of archaeology, architecture, art and technology, which was created in the course of historical development [3]. The community-like approach of the European Union to city cultural heritage is evident in the policy of many European institutions. The Council of Europe and the Committee on Culture and Education of the European Parliament in particular, are the originators of numerous initiatives for all the EU countries, for instance European Heritage Days, the Night of Museums, Europa Nostra Awards, and European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. European cities are encouraged to get involved in such events in order to enhance their recognizability. Apart from providing the opportunity to learn about cultural heritage, the projects teach respect for identity and cultural diversity [1]. Many cities and towns of the national or regional significance have a chance to develop their tourist potential through the promotion of the European common cultural heritage and related cultural diversity.

Varna, which is the second largest populated city in Bulgaria, one of 28 member states of the European Union, stands out from other cities in the country in terms of cultural heritage. Polish- Hungarian king Wladyslaw III of Varna arrived there in 1444 at the head of Polish, Hungarian, Czech, Croatian and Italian troops. Varna was founded at the beginning of the 6th century BC, as one of the Greek colonies. The Greeks established the Odessos settlement at the site of the contemporary city of Varna and named it in honor of

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Homer's Odysseus. Soon after that, the settlement evolved into both a fortified stronghold and one of major urban centers.

Single objects dating back the period in question have been preserved to the present day and can be seen at Varna Archaeological Museum. A unique collection of gold objects discovered in the graves of a prehistoric burial mound in Varna is one of the most precious exhibits from the Greek times.

The Balkan Peninsula was conquered by the Romans in the 2nd century BC. The ruins of thermae constitute a remnant of the Roman times and a characteristic tourist attraction in the centre of the city [2].

1. Varna. History of the city and region.

The history of the city of Varna is inextricably linked with the history of the Balkan Peninsula, and to be more precise, with the antiquity of the west coast of the Black Sea. According to historical sources, the area of present-day Bulgaria was originally inhabited by Thracians. However, at the Archaeological Museum we may learn that the first human traces in Varna date back to the Palaeolithic era, i.e. approx. 100 000 years BC [7].

In the 7th and 6th century BC the Balkan Peninsula became a colony of the Greeks. Later, the settlement which had been founded in the 6th century developed into a city-state. Odessos became an important centre on the Black Sea coast. The city had a right to mint its own coins and conducted commercial exchange with Athens, the Ionian Islands and Asia Minor, as well as with the Thracian tribes [2].

The area of the present-day Bulgaria fell under the domination of the Roman Empire in the 2nd century BC. Odessos lost the city-state status but still remained an important centre on the Black Sea coast. It headed the so-called Pontic Association of Towns, composed of 5 Greek colonies.

Under the Roman rule, Odessos developed into an important trade centre. The Romans surrounded the city with fortifications and constructed numerous public buildings, including amphitheatre and gymnasium.

There are numerous traces of the Roman civilization in Varna to date. There is a unique architectural monument in the heart of the city centre – the ruins of Roman thermae built in the 2nd century AD. The visitors of the Archeological Museum have an opportunity to see Roman jewelers, dishes, and coins dating back to the Roman and Byzantine Empire period.

The present-day name was given to the city by the Slavs, who destroyed Odessos and founded a new city in the 6th/7th century. In the 7th century, Varna became the most important port in the first Bulgarian-Slav country. The Byzantine Empire regained the city for a short period of time in the 10th century, yet lost it to the revived Bulgarian state at the turn of the 12th and 13th century. In the 14th century, the city was captured by the Ottoman Turks and was subdued by the Turks. In the 19th century, after nearly 500 years, the country regained its autonomy. The Bulgarians tried to win independence throughout the entire period. One of the most important battles that went down in history of both Bulgaria and Poland was the so-called Battle of Varna. Wladyslaw III, the Polish king, also known as Wladyslaw of Varna, led the combined forces of Poland, Hungary, Czech, Croatia and Italy to fight the Turkish army. Having far more numerous armies, the Turks were victorious. To this day there is a mausoleum of Wladyslaw III at the site of the great Battle of Varna.

Varna regained its independence in 1878, after the Russo-Turkish war.

2. Architectural monuments as the subject of tourist recognisability of the city

The tourist recognizability made both the city and the region of Varna popular not only in Bulgaria but also in Europe [4]. It engages the local authorities in the organization of cultural events and significantly increases the number of tourists and visitors.

The architectural value, which generates the basic tourist flow, is the foundation of Varna's tourist recognizability. The ancient, medieval and modern cultures that existed and interlaced throughout the history made Varna so unique in terms of architecture.

2.1. The ruins of the Roman thermae

The imposing ruins of the Roman baths, surrounded by modern buildings, are located in the heart of the Varna's city center. These are the thermae – one of the most important architectural building and a must-see site in Varna. The baths were constructed in the 2nd century AD, during the reign of Emperor Antoninus Pius.

Originally, the building was approx. 20 meters high and covered an area of nearly 10 000 m². Nowadays, 5 rooms with bathing pools and the fragments of complex water supply system are all that remain

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of the ancient *thermae*. In the Roman times, the interior of the bath was marbled, the floors were decorated with mosaics, and the stone statues added variety to the appearance of the rooms. There was also an independent heating system in the *thermae*. However, it was devastated by a powerful earthquake in the 5th century.

The basic elements of tourism development were implemented in order to bolster tourist attractiveness of the *thermae*. The ruins were enclosed and the opening hours were set.

Right at the entrance gate, there is a plaque depicting the *thermae*'s history. There are also bath architectural plans on the walls. In addition, each bathing chamber has its individual name written on a board.



Photo 1. The ruins of the Roman *thermae* in Varna. Private source.

2.2. Archaeological Museum

Varna Archaeological Museum is one of the largest and the richest in exhibits museums in Bulgaria. The imposing Renaissance building, which in the past served as a girls-only high school, was founded at the beginning of the 20th century.

The collections of the Archaeological Museum cover the period from the first traces of a man in the land of Varna, i.e. from the Palaeolithic era, to the Ottoman rule. The oldest exhibits are primitive stone tools, which were found during the construction of a power plant in the valley of the Devinia River, and also during archaeological works in Pobiti Kamani, i.e. the Stone Desert. An exhibition of gold ornaments found in prehistoric tombs is the largest in terms of the exhibits. Visitors can also find many everyday items belonging to the Thracian tribes who lived here in the Bronze Age.

Around the 5th millennium BC, the local population entered a new period of development. A number of exhibits date back to this period, including tools made of bones, horns and stones, clay and objects of zoomorphic appearance. There are also original dishes of 4500 – 4000 BC. They resemble ornamented rectangular bowls with legs. Moreover, there was a breakthrough discovery of 3 graves dug out on the northern shore of Varna Lake. The find consisted of 1000 gold items, including 31 necklaces, and showed social diversity of prehistoric people living in these areas [7].

The so-called Varna Golden Treasure, discovered during archaeological works carried out in the prehistoric cemetery in Varna in the 1970s, constitute the most valuable exhibits in the museum. The discovery spanned 294 graves containing gold objects. It is worth noting that the archaeological excavations have not been completed yet. About 30% of the estimated necropolis are yet to be restored.

The treasure exhibition is displayed in three separate rooms. The museum staff restored one of the richest graves. Studies have shown that a man was buried there, probably a leader or a priest – as the tomb contained nearly 1.5 kg of gold, copper items, ornaments and tools made of stone.



Photo 2. One of the graves restored in the Archaeological Museum.
Source: <http://www.archaeo.museumvarna.com>

2.3. Council – the Theotokos Orthodox Church

The Dormition of the Theotokos Church located in the city centre is one of the most recognizable architectural symbols of the city. The temple founded towards the end of the 19th century is a symbol of the Bulgarian people's gratitude for liberation from Turkish servitude.

The church impresses with both its architecture and interior. Inside the church, there are icons, iconostasis and frescoes dating back to the mid-twentieth century.



Photo 3. The Dormition of the Theotokos Church. Private source.

2.4. Mausoleum of Wladyslaw III of Varna

The Museum of Wladyslaw of Varna is a unique building located in a park in the north-western part of Varna, at the site of a historical battle that took place on November 10th, 1444 [5]. During this battle, a young leader of the Polish, Hungarian, Czech, Croatia and Italian army – Wladyslaw III Jagiellonczyk, later known as Warnencyk, died at the hands of a Turkish warrior. The excavation was initiated by two Czech archaeologists. The festive opening of the museum took place in 1935 at the initiative of a Varna citizen – Petar Dimkov.

Right next to the main alley, there is a mausoleum of the Polish and Hungarian king as well as symbolic monuments and sarcophaguses of those who took part in the battle and the later liberators of Bulgaria – Russians. The symbolic tomb of Wladyslaw of Varna is an accurate copy of the monument located at the Wawel Castle in Cracow. According to Kostecki, residents of Varna funded a granite tombstone in 1924. It

was placed on the other side of the burial mound where the Mausoleum of Wladyslaw III of Varna was built. The tombstone was brought there on shoulders, in a festive procession. The main alley leads to the museum pavilion, which stores pieces of exhibitions.



Photo 4. The sarcophagus of Wladyslaw of Varna Mausoleum. Private source

2.5. Seaside Garden

The Seaside Garden in Varna is probably the largest park located in the Balkans. The origins of the park are connected with the Turkish mayor of Varna who set it up in 1862. The park had its heyday during the reign of His Majesty Franz Joseph, who put the park in the care of the conservator of Schönbrunn. Numerous valuable Black Sea and Mediterranean plants were introduced at that time, many fountains were built. Above all, however, the garden area was electrified. During this period, the park area was expanded to 90 000 m². In the 1960s, Varna imported plants from the Netherlands, Germany, Czech Republic and France. Yuri Gagarin was the guest of honor at the opening ceremony.

At the main entrance, visitors can find an interesting swan-shaped sundial. There are numerous captivating buildings thematically related to sea – Museum of the Navy, which extols the merits of the Bulgarian fleet, Aquarium of the Black Sea Museum, where tourists can see various specimens of the marine fauna. Furthermore, there is a Dolphinarium offering dolphin training shows. The park is not only thematically related to the sea but also to the outer space – there is the Planetarium and the Nicolaus Copernicus Astronomical Observatory. One of the most imposing attractions of the park is the Museum of the Navy, which features exhibits related to the history of the Bulgarian naval fleet.

3. Cultural events

Events organized in the city are certainly one of the elements that bolster tourist recognizability of Varna, i.e. increase tourist traffic. The city, when organizing such events, should encourage visitors to stay longer than one day, thus gaining the status of tourists. This can be achieved by offering appropriate accommodation and additional attractions.

Varna offers a rich selection of festivals, art previews and concerts. Events organized in the city are not only of local significance, but also national and international. The selection of events well satisfies both ordinary viewers and elite art connoisseurs. There is International Choir Competition organized by the end of May, International Theatre Festival in June held as part of the Varna Summer festival. Every second year in July the city organizes International Ballet Competition. Music lovers may take part in the annually-organized six-week-long Chamber Music Workshop – a folklore festival featuring artists and groups from Bulgaria and abroad – as well as International Jazz Festival. Cinema goers, on the other hand, can participate in the Romantic Film Festival held under the banner of “Love is Folly”, Golden Rose biennial and World Festival of Animated Film.

3.1. Varna as the European Capital of Culture

The city selected to hold the privilege and title of the European Capital of Culture for one year becomes the cultural centre of Europe [9]. The programme provides an opportunity to the city, region and the entire country to present its cultural potential and heritage. For one year the designated city organises festivals, concerts, conferences etc., in hope to present itself to a broad audience. The concept of the European Capital of Culture arose, first and foremost, to support and strengthens European integration. Cities that seek to earn the title must prove their European character. The idea emerged in 1985 and currently constitutes one of the best-known concepts proposed by the European Commission. The initiative has positive influence on local communities of nominated cities because, according to studies conducted by the European Commission, it provides the citizens with the feeling of co-responsibility, pride and social energy. The celebrations of the European Capital of Culture were divided into two categories: “the European dimension” and “the city and citizens”. The first focuses on the cooperation between the people of culture and the cities of the member state, as well as other countries. The latter underlines the significance and value of the cultural diversity of Europe, and the fact that it should be honored and properly supported. The city that earns the title receives the prize of Melina Mercouri – the initiator of the event – in the amount of 1.5 million Euro.

In accordance with the decision of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, the European Capital of Culture of 2019 will be selected in Bulgaria and Italy. Bulgarian cities that compete for the title include Burgas, Varna, Veliko Tarnovo, Gabrovo, Plovdiv, Ruse, Sofia and Shumen. The city of Varna claims that “the initiative invites [us] above all to recognize culture as a dynamic, as a way of thinking, as a creative attitude towards the world and the individual” and seeks to “build over the narrower understanding of culture as a collection of various arts, and present it as the driving force for community development and improvement of the urban and economic landscape.” Varna anticipates that, should it be granted the title of the European Capital of Europe, it will not only be an opportunity to foster cultural activity in the city, but will also render it more charming and homely for the citizens, more open to the disabled, and more attractive a tourist destination to the citizens of the world. Experience of the past 37 European Capitals of Culture proves that effective and reasonable money management stimulates the inflow of tourists, positively affects industry and the service sector, and increases the quality and qualification of the human resource. The citizens of the cultural capitals tend to improve their self-esteem and, moreover, grow to understand that they have a privilege to live in an attractive and unique place.

3.2 World Festival of Animated Film in Varna

The festival was established in 1979 at the initiative of the International Animated Film Association. Similar to other film festivals of that time, this too was organized every two years. It was to be held in October every odd year. The first six editions of the event conformed to the rule, the last one being in 1989. That year the World Festival of Animated Film was organized in Varna. In 2011 the initiative was reactivated and since then the event has been organized in Varna on the annual basis.

The tenth edition of the World Festival of Animated Film took place in Varna on September 10–14th, 2014, offering a number of interesting screenings, lectures, presentations and workshops, as well as exhibitions, which flooded the city with the finest and newest pieces of animation art. The festival opened with two unique exhibitions – one devoted to the work of Jan Švankmajer, a celebrated Czech stop-motion animator and surrealist, and one exploring the concept of graphic novel entitled “Spiro – A 5-star hero”. The festival competition featured 86 films from 30 countries. “The Best of the World” category presented 26 films of 20 countries. The organizers, wishing to emphasize the connection of the event to its beginnings in the 70s and 80s, offer a screening entitled “Best Bulgarian animated films awarded during WFAF 1979-1989”.

4. Tourist assets of the Varna region

While exploring the Varna region, it is of importance to discuss the immediate vicinity of the city. Due to Varna’s geographical location, tourist attractions can be divided into natural and anthropogenic. While this chapter focuses mainly on architecture, Varna’s natural assets may not be overlooked [6].

Owing to favorable climate conditions on the Black Sea coast, Bulgarian resorts became well-known across the entire Europe. The Bulgarian Coast is 378 km long. The coastline and land relief is diverse, which further increases its tourist potential. The coast line to the north is low and composed of loess formations. The Dobruja Valley to the south-west descends steeply to the Black Sea. The coast here features high cliffs, the

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tallest being in Kaliakra – an archaeological reserve. The place features numerous caves, rock niches and other beautiful formations. The term “Kaliakra” means “wonderful, beautiful”. The headland owes the name to its pink limestone.

The seaside flora found in the vicinity of Varna represents characteristic vegetation of the Black Sea, consisting of deciduous forests with various species of vines and evergreen shrubs. To the south, flora becomes enriched with Greek juniper, rhododendron, holly and firethorn. As far as trees are concerned, one may note the prevalence of red oaks, sweet chestnuts, walnut trees and oriental beeches. The most valuable areas that feature the most interesting clusters of vegetation were included in a nature reserve known as Golden Sands Nature Park.

In close proximity of Varna there is one of the largest resorts in Bulgaria called “Golden Sands”. The most famous anthropogenic attraction offered by the resort is the Aladzha Cave Monastery, owing its name to the color of karst cliff, in which it was carved. In the summer season one may experience a unique light and sound show that presents the impressive history of the monastery.

Approximately 18 km away from Varna there is yet another archaeological reserve, the Stone Desert. It is a cluster of stone columns, which resemble dead tree trunks. The Stone Desert was formed as a result of long-term tectonic movements, which lifted the rocks to the surface. The stone trunks initially rested on the bottom of the ocean, which can be concluded from the presence of numerous marine fossils.

When discussing tourist attractions of the Varna region, we must not forget about one of the most interesting archaeological monuments in Europe. The vicinity of the picturesque village of Madara offers a unique accumulation of the so-called cultural layers. Archaeological research indicated human presence in the area from the Stone Age to the beginning of the Middle Ages. A stone wall located approx. 1.5 km away from Madara indicated human traces dating back to the Neolithic period. Studies showed that one of the caves served as a temple of three nymphs – guardians of water, forests and soil – deities honored by the Thracian tribes. For its unique character, the highest value is attributed to a bas-relief depicting a knight triumphing over a lion, which likely dates to the 7th century. The item was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1979.

Conclusions

Cultural heritage of the European civilization constitutes cultural and spiritual property of the ancestors, as well as current generations of the Varna city. It represents both material and non-material value, defines the European culture. It includes all the environmental consequences arising from the interaction between the man and the surroundings over the course of history. Cultural value of heritage can be discussed in the local and regional context, but also in the context of the entire country, continent and even the globe [8]. Cultural heritage defines the origins of civilization, explains various processes and behaviors encountered in the contemporary world.

Cultural heritage of Varna and archaeological findings in particular show distinct origins of the European civilizations. The world-famous exhibits collected at the Archaeological Museum tell us what the life of the prehistoric people was like. Excavations greatly improved our historical knowledge on how the society was divided against the background of wealth, sex etc.

The city of Varna is located in the proximity of two most popular resorts of Bulgaria. The Golden Sands resort attracts tourists from all over Europe with its climatic conditions. It is of importance to promote tourist assets, and cultural heritage of Varna in particular, to be able to expand our knowledge and foster the awareness of the beginnings of the European civilization. Only then will it be possible to elevate most significant architecture monuments and Archaeological Museum exhibits to become the driving force of tourist traffic. The cultural heritage of Varna needs to become foundation of tourist recognizability, which will then evenly distribute tourist’s traffic that otherwise concentrates on the Black Sea coast.

High level of tourist recognizability of Varna arises from its unique cultural heritage, as well as the efforts of the city authorities oriented towards promotion. An important element of tourist recognizability involves numerous international cultural events, such as the World Festival of Animate Film, which attracts tourists from over 30 countries. One may also not neglect the positive influence that comes from the participation in the European Capital of Culture programme, as it is a great opportunity for Varna to present its cultural potential. The city, if granted the title of the cultural centre of Europe, could demonstrate its unique cultural heritage to tourist from all over the world. It would gain, apart from the financial support in the amount of 1.5 million Euros, tremendous promotion in the scale of both Europe and the entire world, which in turn would result in a considerable increase in tourist traffic.

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