

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH FOR INTEGRATING NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE FOR SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF ACTION PLAN FOR SOMBOR WITHIN DANURB+

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ABSTRACT

The protection and sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage in order to improve local identity and quality of life, as well as the positioning of Serbian cities on the global map of eco-cultural tourism, are still not sufficiently recognized as development opportunities and therefore are not prioritized in their development plans. Following the increase in interest, and thus the representation of various types of tourism based on the integration of tangible and intangible cultural heritage and natural values in the overall tourist offer, it is necessary to review the possibilities of such approach. Smaller towns and settlements, which are frequently declining, are a particularly important group of settlements whose sustainable development should be viewed through this perspective.

Many European countries have recognized the importance of cultural and natural heritage protection and their potential for sustainable (urban) development, so in recent decades a large number of national and pan-European projects have been launched with focus on this kind of approach and within which various methodological processes are developed and pilot projects for their verification are funded. Raising their capacities for formulating, initiating and launching natural and cultural heritage-based development projects, necessitates various types of training, participatory and collaborative workshops, and the organization of various events aimed at informing and mobilizing the public.

As part of the international DANURB+ project, an Action Plan for the protection and sustainable use of the natural and cultural heritage of Sombor was developed. The plan was created with the active and continuous participation of those responsible for , as well as those interested in development. The process is designed to help in the articulation of integral projects as well as their networking on a local, national, and international level. The paper will present the methodological procedure, the development process and the content of this plan.

KEYWORDS _ *Urban development, Action plan, Cultural and natural heritage, Collaborative approach, Integral projects*

INTRODUCTION

The Action plan *Integrating natural and cultural heritage for sustainable Sombor 2022-2027: network of eco-cultural routes* relies on the development concept of eco-cultural tourism, which represents a model for shaping new authentic tourist products and routes by combining natural and cultural heritage¹.

The Action plan and ten integral projects represent the result of the findings of the site analysis, the value-based approach and the initiatives of stakeholders. Therefore, the solutions are not comprehensive, and their implementation will not achieve all the present goals. Although resources are limited, these integral projects are applicable to the context in which they were formulated and represent a roadmap and illustration of how the document and practical action based on it could be developed in the future. The pilot action represents a successful outcome of heritage revaluation while contributing to strengthening local identity, specifically thanks to the local stakeholder engagement and knowledge transfer that took place in that process.

One of the most significant results in the process of developing the Action Plan and implementing the Pilot actions in Sombor is in the domain of social capital – a strong network of people was established. These people, organizations, local representatives, experts gathered new ideas and knowledge, and built an understanding based on common interests and opportunities for their integration and mutual benefit.

This represents a significant resource that we will rely on in further planning activities.

COLLABORATIVE AND INTEGRAL APPROACH FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

This collaborative and integral approach to sustainable development in urban planning is founded on the principles of good governance, which emphasize inclusivity, transparency, accountability, and participatory decision-making (UN Habitat, 2002; UNESCAP, 2009; UN Habitat, 2016). It recognizes the importance of engaging diverse stakeholders, including professionals from public administration, the private sector, and civil society, to collectively plan and manage the common affairs of cities. By fostering collaboration and partnerships, this approach enables the integration of various interests, influences, and resources within urban spaces. Through effective governance mechanisms, urban planning can address the complexities and challenges of contemporary society, promoting sustainable development that meets the needs of both present and future generations. Collaborative and integral approach to sustainable development in urban planning can pave the way for a more equitable, resilient, and prosperous future for all (Healey 1997, 2006, 2010; Innes, 1995; Innes & Booher, 2003, 2010).

An integrated approach is a fundamental characteristic of contemporary urban planning for sustainable development. This approach recognizes the importance of collaboration and partnerships, driven by the acknowledgment of various actors with diverse interests and influences within urban spaces. It encompasses multiple dimensions, including economic, social, environmental, and cultural aspects, and addresses themes such as urban mobility, social inclusion, resilience, employment, and more. Furthermore, it integrates different policies, strategies, and plans at various spatial levels, ranging from the neighbourhood to the regional and national levels. The integration extends to various administrative levels of government and involves diverse actors and institutions from the public, commercial, NGO, and civil sectors. Additionally, an integrated approach incorporates different forms

¹ The Action plan was done within the international project DANUrB+ (2020-22) in which participated a large number of different actors from the six countries of the Danube region. DANUrB+ represents the continuation of the previous project (DANUrB 2017-19), within which the Development Strategy of the Danube Region based on natural and cultural heritage was defined, which represents the strategic framework of this Action Plan. Both DANUrB projects are financed within the INTERREG Danube Transnational Program (European Territorial Cooperation – INTERREG: The Danube Transnational Programme) intended to support regional cooperation.

of funding, such as local, regional, and national budgets, public-private partnerships, and international sources of finance (Milovanović, Čolić & Maruna, 2017, 2018). These changes in urban planning reflect the influence of European policies and structural funds, emphasizing the need for coordination and integration across various dimensions and stakeholders to achieve precise objectives for sustainable development.

THE CASE OF ACTION PLAN FOR SOMBOR

Sombor Region is located in the north-western corner of Serbia, on the border with Hungary (north) and Croatia (west – the Danube). The region consists of the city of Sombor and 15 nearby villages. The whole region has been in economic and demographic decline for 30 years. However, Sombor is the best-preserved historic medium-sized city in Serbia and the region is very rich regarding cultural (tangible and intangible) and natural heritage. Additionally, there are many active craft and hospitality enterprises, ethnic and religious events, local associations, and small cultural and leisure manifestations in the city and villages. Many of them have been well-established at the regional and national levels, but without significant cooperation across long national borders in the region. Furthermore, most of these entities have not been properly interconnected within the Sombor Region, to make an integrated approach to potential external partners.

The main aim of the Action plan *Integrating Natural and Cultural Heritage for Sustainable Sombor 2022-2027: Network of Eco-Cultural Routes* was to protect and improve the cultural (tangible and intangible) heritage and natural environment in accordance with local culture and available resources, knowledge and skills by engaging and supporting people to integrate their efforts.

The specific objectives of the plan were:

1. Identification, valorisation, protection, enhancement and promotion of natural and cultural heritage as a resource for the development of sustainable tourism and improvement of quality of life of local communities;
2. Raising the capacity of local stakeholders to formulate and launch development projects based on natural and cultural heritage,
3. Connecting stakeholders and their projects in order to improve existing and to enforce development of new eco-cultural products, services and destinations,
4. Improving the capacity of local stakeholders for cooperation and access to funds at the local and international level.

METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

The Action plan was developed in continuous cooperation with representatives of the local self-government and with the active participation of about 15 stakeholders from public, private and NGO sectors, as well as from the spheres of culture, tourism, heritage preservation, ecology, public administration. Cooperation with stakeholders in the process of developing the plan took place in the phase of data collection and understanding of the territory and, in the phase of generating project ideas. In each phase, the participation with the stakeholders was made in two ways: at workshops in the form of a round table held in the premises of the city administration and, by filling out an online questionnaire. Each workshop was preceded by a questionnaire that aimed to inform and interest potential participants and encourage them to join the following workshop. In addition, at the workshops that followed the questionnaires, their content was discussed, supplemented and corrected.

Stakeholders and the general public were enabled to submit information about the territory, their perception of problems and potential for development, as well as project ideas by filling out a digital online or analogue questionnaire.

The Action plan was developed within four interrelated phases (Table 1):

Table 1: The development process of an action plan

The planning process	Form of stakeholder participation	The outcomes
Phase of understanding the territory	Questionnaire 1	Questionnaire results: swot components, components of vision and goals
	Workshop 1 (Figure 1)	Verification, addition and integration of the contextual analysis of the results obtained by the questionnaire Discussion on the problems and potentials for the development of Sombor
Project formulation phase	Questionnaire 2	Project ideas
	Workshop 2 (Figure 1)	Discussion of project ideas, time frame, activities, sources of funding. Discussion of synergistic effects of projects.
Phase of designing the action plan	Conversations with individual stakeholders	Preparation of the Draft Plan based on the contextual analysis, the results of the I and II workshops)
Action plan finalization stage	Plan available to the public and Plan sent to all workshop participants	Made action plan

The first questionnaire had two goals: (1) to inform the citizens of Sombor about the process of creating the Action Plan, interest them and encourage them to join the process, and (2) to enable the attachment of information about the territory, components of visions and goals. It was possible to fill out the questionnaire online. The link of the digital questionnaire was sent by e-mail to 54 addresses of stakeholders, and the public call with the link was sent on the social networks of the City of Sombor. There were 25 responses received which were used in the process of analysing the current context (problems and potential for development) and generating the vision and development goals of Sombor.

The first workshop was held in the form of a round table after a brief presentation of the aim and role of action plans to stakeholders. 17 stakeholders participated in the workshop. The data and opinions obtained through the questionnaire were presented, and the current problems and challenges in Sombor Region were discussed.

The second questionnaire was intended to enable interested stakeholders to present their project ideas - explain the reasons, potential participants, expected effects (for them and the community), required resources and timetable. The questionnaire was filled out by 5 actors who presented their project ideas in detail.

The second workshop was held in the form of a roundtable. The 12 stakeholders participated in the workshop. The goal of the workshop was to encourage the participants to conceive new and describe existing project ideas (those that were submitted by questionnaire were presented). It was explained how the concepts of sustainable-eco-cultural-urban-rural-rural tourism, healthy lifestyles and business, collaborative-participatory-integral approach, result from connecting compatible mutually synergistic projects. The reasons why they should take an active part were clarified, among which are support in the articulation of projects in order to access the local, regional, national and international funds. Labelling, promotion, and inclusion in one of the following EU projects aimed at support development of Danube cities.



Figure 1: Photographs from stakeholder workshops

Based on the findings of the territory analysis, the value-conceptual approach and the expressed initiatives of stakeholders' ten integral projects were formulated:

- IP1_GREEN NETWORK: Creating a network of bicycle and pedestrian paths, public transport and water routes, roads, bus stations, and accommodation
- IP2_NEW PLACES TO STAY: Widening the accommodation options for tourists in Sombor and vicinity by developing new and improving existing accommodation facilities.
- IP3_A SEED FOR THE GREEN FUTURE OF A CITY: Creating the Arboretum as a place for gene pool of indigenous species, that will: (a) strengthen the eco-awareness of the local community, especially children, (b) enable their physical and mental development, (c) be a new space for education and recreation, (d) be a new tourist attraction.
- IP4_ON THE LAND OF MITHICAL BODROG: Rearranging the river Island "Langicet" in Bački Monoštor that will: (a) enable meaningful stay in nature and provide active connection with nature, especially for young people (b) enable their physical and mental development, (c) improve the inhabitants' quality of life, (d) be a new tourist attraction.
- IP5_BEECOOL: Creating a beekeeping camp in Bački Monoštor to: (a) enable education and the transfer of knowledge about beekeeping to all ages (b) enable a stay in nature that contributes to physical and mental development, (c) improve the quality of local inhabitants' life as a new space for education and recreation, (d) encourages cooperation among local beekeepers.
- IP6_COMMON SHOPWINDOW _ TOGETHER TO THE BAYER: Creation of a new model of organizing small local producers in order to increase the visibility and placement of local products on market in order to improve the stability and volume of business.
- IP7_GREEN SCHOOL: Creation of a pilot model for the development of curricular and extracurricular activities in cooperation with local associations and companies within the eco-cultural network, in order to improve the health of school children, improve the quality of teaching and improve the awareness and knowledge of all involved about the importance of natural and cultural heritage for the development of communities.
- IP8_STAPAR ROSE CENTRE: Adaptation of the Cooperative House in the village of Stapar in order to form a village cultural and social centre in order to improve the quality of life of the local community, increase the visibility and accessibility of local products and the tourist attractiveness of the village.
- IP9_OLD NEW SCHOOL - Reconstruction of the abandoned school in the village of Bački Monoštor in order to form a teaching-research, social and cultural centre of the village in order to improve the quality of life of the locals, increase tourist attractiveness and attract pupils, students and researchers for study stays.
- IP10_ ECO-CULTURAL NETWORK'S GOOD GOVERNANCE: Establishing an agency that will

support the realization and coordination of the projects defined by this Action Plan, their integration with the environment and encouraging the articulation of new projects in accordance with the goals of the Action Plan.

The set of projects is not comprehensive, and their realization will not achieve all the set goals. They represent a roadmap and an illustration of how the Action plan could be further developed by adding new ones due to mechanism for future projects generation and development (Fig. 2).

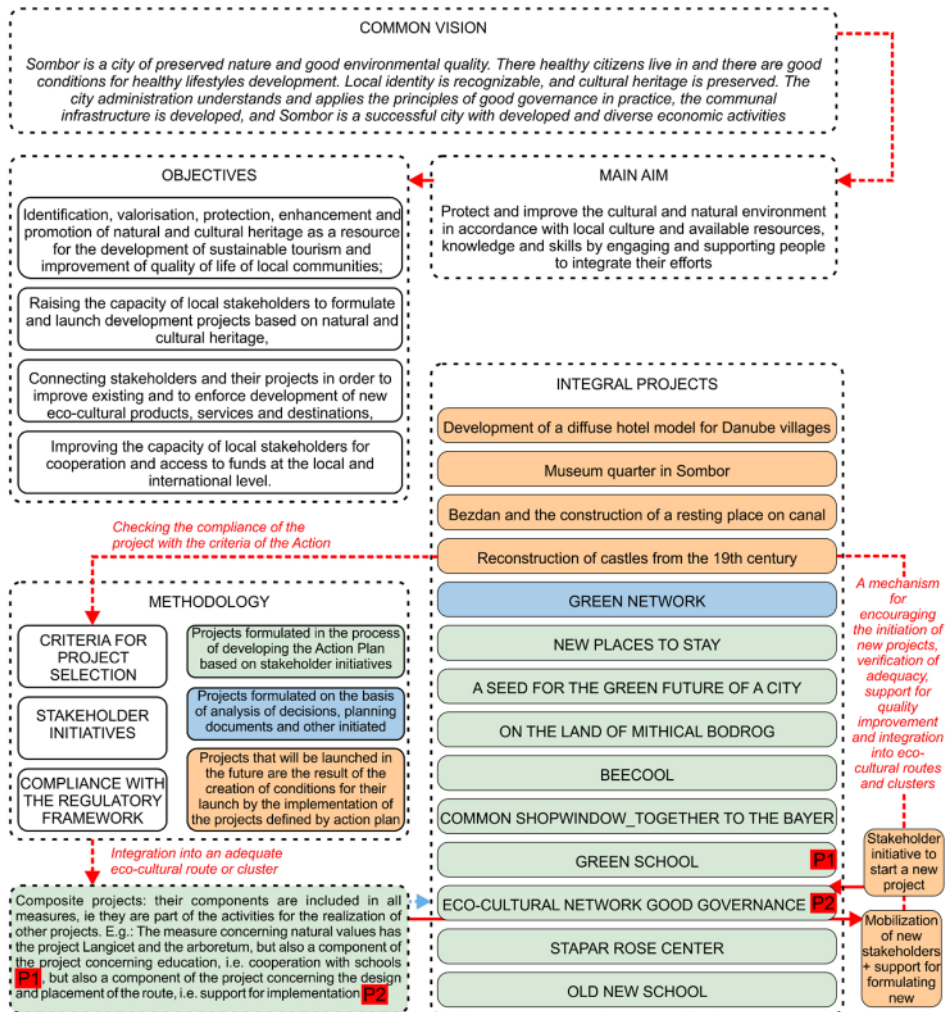


Figure 2: Methodological and content diagram: Action plan as a set of integrated integral projects and a mechanism for future projects generation and development

Projects differ in terms of topics and type of outcomes, the size of the territory they cover, the number of people included, the necessary funding, the type of resources that can and should be engaged, the number and type of partners, etc. However, they are all based on intersectoral, interdepartmental and interdisciplinary connections and cooperation.

CONCLUSIONS

Cities serve as catalysts for social and cultural advancement, stimulating their own growth as well as that of regions and states. In order to enhance their position within the global network of cities, urban centers are increasingly focusing on entrepreneurial activities. By actively participating in initiatives, cities gain support in project development, facilitating access to local, regional, national, and international funding opportunities. They also benefit from labeling, promotion, and inclusion in EU projects aimed at advancing the development of Danube cities. Through workshops and questionnaires, numerous ideas were generated and subsequently integrated into a comprehensive Action Plan consisting of ten projects. Crucially, the establishment of a planning culture is emphasized, emphasizing effective communication, empowerment of stakeholders, integration, and networking. This approach aims to build a cohesive system where different elements harmonize and collaborate seamlessly. By embracing these principles, cities can effectively drive their own progress and foster sustainable development.

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