

Chapter 1

Communicating Cultural Heritage to Many and by Many: The Case Study of the Fertő/ Neusiedlersee UNESCO World Heritage Cultural Landscape

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ABSTRACT

Cultural heritage has been connected to identity, community belonging, and sustainability, all of which should be communicated effectively through and with the given cultural heritage. One key factor of effective communication is the involved actors. Communicating cultural heritage involves new actors if the given cultural heritage example receives more than local acknowledgement. The current research investigates the actors involved in communicating such a cultural heritage through the example of the Fertő/Neusiedlersee transnational UNESCO World Heritage site. One of the identified outstanding universal values is that there is multiculturalism printed in the cultural landscape. Accordingly, the investigation looks both at the diverse cultural communities communicated as heritage values, and at the actors participating in the touristification of the site by communicating the local heritage values. Two main findings of the investigation are that the dynamic character of the actors and their lack of cooperation threaten the heritage communication of the researched location.

INTRODUCTION

Everybody contributes his or her own individual share to the representation of a place. This individually added value allows us to shape the character of a given territory and our relationships with it. Such personalized perception promotes the given location to the position of a unique destination, which may generate pride, become cherished and viewed and protected as heritage (Szymańska et al., 2009, pp.15-

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30). Collectivities are shaped among others by the representations and symbols of the historical past of a given location (Whelan, 2005, p. 62). Accordingly, both personal and community involvement can be defined in the identification, evaluation and safeguarding steps connected to cultural heritage. Linking the social construction of the location and time with the manner in which they are experienced to the practices undertaken by diverse agents (Rapport & Overing, 2000, p. 1.) allows us to look at the location (in a physical and metaphorical sense), where social and cultural values are communicated as heritage.

This research concentrates on the interaction, transfer and interconnection of those actors and institutions that play a role in the communication of locations due to heritage management (and its predecessors') processes through one specific example. The aim is to conduct an actors-centered communication analysis of heritage dissemination. Who are or can be the participants in the formation and dissemination of cultural heritage narrative of a location, especially when the given site becomes acknowledged by supranational institutions as well? What are the advantageous and disadvantageous communication techniques in such complex situations, and what might be the influencing factors? These questions are addressed through the case study of a transnational cultural landscape in Central Europe.

The Fertő/Neusiedlersee cultural landscape as a UNESCO World Heritage site is described as "the meeting place of different cultures (...) [which] is geographically demonstrated by its varied landscape" (UNESCO 2001) containing both natural and cultural outstanding universal values. It is located on the border of Hungary and Austria. Its core area is the most western saline lake in Europe with rich flora and fauna (especially by being a resting place for numerous migratory bird species). Around the lake archaeological findings (such as a Mithras altar from the ancient Roman times), protected vernacular architectures and noble palaces can be found. The lake is literally on the border since the end of World War I and has experienced deportations and population changes. It used to be the Iron Curtain in the second part of the previous century, which changed the life and reputation of the area furthermore. Specialized organizations (such as National Parks and local heritage institutions) or individuals have been managing different aspects of the case study and it is also member of numerous supranational networks (such as EUROPARC, RAMSAR, IUCN TBPA). Accordingly, the Fertő/Neusiedlersee UNESCO World Heritage cultural landscape serves as a great example to discuss the importance of actors in communicating cultural heritage.

The chapter focusing on the Hungarian side, but involving the Austrian aspects and challenges as well, investigates the changes of the roles in heritage protection and management through time and the interconnectedness of the diverse actors. With the help of discourse analysis, the understandings, aims, actors and resources are identified within the official (such as the management plans) and marketing documents. Former investigations regarding the chosen case study are also investigated to identify already acknowledged challenges and best practices. Besides the textual analysis, on-site research projects have been also conducted to investigate the realization of heritage communication. Accordingly, participant observation, targeted interviews and in-situ visual communication research have been realized as well. Accordingly, the chapter looks at both the involved actors, documents and practices as well as the local, regional, national and supranational narrations of the location and its cultural heritage values.

The chapter starts with an overview of the characters and roles, diverse actors can play in communicating cultural heritage. Then the social history of the case study is reviewed as the source for one of the local heritage values: the multicultural coexistence. The analysis of the identified actors is based on both discourse analysis of the related documents regarding the dissemination of the local heritage values, and on-site investigations. The latter one consisted of field works, conducted interviews, and unstructured discussions with the inhabitants of the settlements within the UNESCO World Heritage site.

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