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Confronting growth challenges in Dubrovnik

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Confronting growth challenges in Dubrovnik

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A popular tourist destination, the City of Dubrovnik in Croatia is pursuing projects to revitalize its old city centre and distribute the benefits of tourism across the city.

The City of Dubrovnik, as we know it today, is one of the most prominent tourist destinations in southern Europe. However, in the past it has also been known as one of the leading cities of the Mediterranean and many have fought for its ownership.

Initially part of the Byzantine Empire before coming under the sovereignty of Venice (1205–1358), Dubrovnik was granted the right of self-government in 1358 as part of the Hungarian Croatian Empire, reaching its peak as a free state in the 15th and 16th centuries. In 1806, Dubrovnik surrendered to French forces led by Napoleon before it was annexed to Austria (later Austria-Hungary) in 1815. It remained annexed until 1918 when it became part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

Part of the Independent State of Croatia as World War II broke out, Dubrovnik came under Italian then German occupation. In 1945, Dubrovnik became part of the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia and, as the republics of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia reached their independence in 1990, the Socialist Republic of Croatia was renamed the Republic of Croatia.

On 1 October 1991, Dubrovnik was attacked by the Serbo-Montenegrin army. The Serbo-Montenegrin siege of Dubrovnik lasted for seven months. In May 1992, the Croatian Army liberated Dubrovnik and its surroundings, but the threat of sudden Serbo-Montenegrin attacks lasted for another three years.

A new development context

Today, Dubrovnik is renowned as a safe and independent town that is a popular global tourist destination. However, the city's contemporary way of life, higher living standards and the development of the tourism industry have brought new issues to the fore.

The old city centre is slowly losing its function as the heart of Dubrovnik. Until recent times, the old centre was an administrative, political, social, trading and

housing hub, but the city's urban development has seen these functions transferred to the other areas.

Tourism has contributed to a rise in real estate values and changes in the number of city residents and housing structures. These new circumstances have influenced the movement of the population to other parts of Dubrovnik where housing is more affordable. Since 1817, the number of people living in Dubrovnik's city centre has halved. The pursuit of profit throughout the tourist season has also contributed to changes in the function of inner city urban areas. For example, many inner city residents have given up their homes and transformed them into accommodation facilities for tourists.

Addressing challenges and offering solutions

Besides implementing projects based on the revitalization of the old city centre and connecting urban decision makers and citizens to promote mutual collaboration, the City of Dubrovnik and its development agency, DURA, have made significant strides towards addressing new urban development issues. These efforts include the renovation of old and forgotten historical sites such as the Renaissance Aqueduct and the Summer Residence located in the Rijeka Dubrovacka area.

Another project has been to relocate tourists from Dubrovnik's overloaded old city centre by encouraging the development of new tourist activities on the outskirts of the city. This has assisted with dispersing the growing number of visitors to the old city centre and improving living conditions for inhabitants.

In 2014, the City of Dubrovnik decided to participate in the competition for the title of the European Capital of Culture for 2020. Various actions have been undertaken to work toward achieving this goal, including supporting endeavours aimed at fostering creative cultures and industries. These activities aim to create and organize a solid foundation for urban development and revitalize areas such as the old city centre.

Proposed solutions are in large part based on enticing younger generations and families to move back to the city's centre by creating more convenient living spaces and business opportunities. In this way, the City of Dubrovnik has sought to emphasize that an increase in permanent residents in the city's centre is critical to assist with urban revitalization.

Through a European Union financed project, EUPLETT, the City of Dubrovnik and DURA have compared and shared experiences with other cities facing similar issues and sought to find solutions to adapt historical sites to suit new modern trends whilst including inhabitants and local community members in the development process. The aim is to reconcile two seemingly irreconcilable facets of modern life in Dubrovnik – people's lives and tourist activities.

The EUPLETT project has demonstrated the significance of dialogue between authorities and citizens and the importance of exchanging experiences with similar neighbouring cities. This project has served as an 'eye opener' for issues encountered by modern cities with old centres. It has also highlighted the importance of creating an appropriate management plan that sets out suitable guidelines for the revitalization of delicate and historically valuable old town centres.

The City of Dubrovnik committed to the Ten Principles of the United Nations Global Compact in 2014.



Through an EU-financed project, Dubrovnik has shared experiences with other cities facing similar urban issues and sought to find solutions to adapt historical sites to suit modern trends in a participatory way. Image: City of Dubrovnik Development Agency.