



## International Conference

### **Culture, Heritage and Tourism as Factors for Sustainable Development of Small and Medium-Size Cities (SMCs): the European Perspectives**

**Department of Cultural Studies at the Faculty of Arts at the South-West University,  
the Bulgarian Sociological Association,  
and Blagoevgrad Municipality  
supported by the Scientific Research Fund**

at the **Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science** – Contract КП-06-МНФ/11

**29-31 May 2019, Blagoevgrad**

### **Call for papers**

The conference invites researchers and experts, city leaders, cultural managers, artists and community activists to discuss how to strategize cultural resources of SMCs to creatively address the challenges and risks of the contemporary neoliberal world. Although SMCs represent over 60 percent of European urban settlements and give shelter to the majority of the European urban population, they receive disproportionately less public attention and funding in comparison to big cities and metropolises. While in the past they have been relatively protected by national structures from competition, “smaller cities now confront greater challenges than has ever been the case”, while the need to plan strategically and mobilize assets has never been greater (Kresl and Ietri 2016: 7).

By highlighting good examples from different European cities and towns and identifying their key success factors, the conference will explore the potential of culture, heritage and tourism to create jobs and prevent the youth migration by transforming SMCs into hubs of cultural entrepreneurship and social integration, but mostly – into good places for life and work.

Creating a viable cultural strategy for sustainable development of any city is a process requiring first and foremost a holistic vision. The conference will be focused around the following thematic blocks discussing various approaches and strategies for sustaining SMCs through culture, heritage and tourism which should be thought and considered in their interrelation:

### **Open Cities**

Good city life is impossible without vibrant public spaces considered today a public good, an opportunity for socializing, public encounters and exchanges. Public space is a window into the city's soul, as poetically noted by the urban sociologist Sharon Zukin, and a key element to make city "human", "inclusive" and "friendly". The transformation of streets, squares or urban parks into nodes of public life can increase the ambiance of a place, but can also create new rules of its use and restricted access. How to achieve then really lively and open cities by animation of their public spaces with the means of arts, sculpture, design and architecture?

### **Co-creating, Co-operative and Networking Cities**

In times of economic austerity, collaboration platforms and participatory spirit, fuelled by social media, cultural co-operation and co-creation seem both, a necessity and opportunity, especially for smaller cities that suffer from depopulation and material and financial deficiencies.

The possibilities of joining resources by connecting different groups of people in creative projects and of linking and collaborating with other cities in the "we-economy" (Hesseldahl 2017) means that cities, according to Greg Richards (2018) should increasingly think about their role as platforms for a wide range of economic, social, and cultural processes that can combine to develop new business models, new ways of doing things. For small cities it is not just about falling behind in a competitive race, but also about seizing the new opportunities offered by a rapidly changing world.

### **Authentic cities with protected cultural heritages**

In their striving for new image and upgraded identities, SMCs are endangered to lose their authenticity and become 'more of the same'. The problem, according to Evans and Foord (2006), is "reliance on flagship cultural buildings, iconic cultural institutions, cultural and heritage quarters alongside cultural events, festivals and markets [...] to kickstart both physical regeneration and visitor economics" (p. 152) – a reliance which is pushing cities towards a consumption-based economy and ignoring social goals. The good cultural projects are therefore those that respect the *genius loci*, that have grown out of the place, and that reflect the traditions of local communities.

### **Knowledgeable cities**

SMCs can be regarded also as knowledge hubs and research laboratories stimulating the elaboration and application of new research methodologies of "human scale": participatory methods of research and collection of empirical data; action research; participatory mapping of cultural resources, just to list few of them. How to harvest this knowledge and to apply it in practice to assist smaller cities in their struggle for a better and more sustainable future?

**To submit a proposal for paper presentation or poster** please send an abstract of up to **300 words**, along with your affiliation and a short biography. **To submit a proposal for session** you have to present the general framework of the topic which will be discussed (up the 300 words) and a list of at least three session participants with the titles of their presentations, and their institutional affiliation.

Official languages will be Bulgarian and English. The conference proceedings will be published in both official languages, as well as a special issue of *Journal of Tourism, Heritage & Services Marketing* is foreseen, devoted to the conference topic.

**Deadline for abstracts:** no later than **15<sup>th</sup> of February 2019** to [sv.hristova@swu.bg](mailto:sv.hristova@swu.bg). The applicants will be informed about the decision of the Scientific Board by **28 of February 2019**.

Participant taxes which will cover the conference materials, coffee breaks and official reception:

Category	Master and PhD Students	Researchers, Academics, professionals, experts
Registration date		
Until 31 <sup>st</sup> of March 2019	-	40 Euros
1 <sup>st</sup> of April – 15 <sup>th</sup> of May 2019	30 Euros	60 Euros