

*Review*

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# THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL TOURISM WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS TO THE BIBLIOTHECA ALEXANDRINA IN EGYPT

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## **Abstract:**

Cultural tourism has grown rapidly in the past few decades as a result of more income, higher levels of education, globalization processes that make the world a smaller place, technology, the effects of media and telecommunications and new types of cultural attractions. Libraries, as cultural institutions, may contribute significantly to the development of cultural tourism. One good example is the role of Biblioteca Alexandrina in Egypt.

*Key words:* culture, cultural tourism, heritage, libraries, Bibliotheca Alexandrina.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Culture is a very important factor of economic development due to its links with lifestyle, geographic areas and close link between education and society. Bearing in mind the importance of the European cultural heritage, the EU supports a lot of projects. By digitalizing their working process, libraries have become one of the key factors behind the social development based on knowledge and run by digital technology. They have possibility to provide direct online access through personal computers, means for online studying, information important for e-commerce improvement and the like. Libraries can contribute to the development of local economies supporting local trade and tourism industry.

This paper aims to briefly show the role of Alexandria Library in the development of tourism based on cultural and artistic resources of a region.

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## **THE LIBRARY RESOURCES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL TOURISM**

In terms of cultural tourism, culture should be seen as part of tourism development. It means that culture, based on its links with lifestyle, geographic area and close link between education and society, is a necessary prerequisite for tourism development.

Culture and tourism are in terms of their basic characteristics two complex and layered fields of the modern civilization, and they have a positive effect on the overall social development. Making culture less important in terms of tourism is neither logical nor justified, because culture is overall intellect of society, and tourism is a sum of all material and spiritual resources and lifestyle of a nation.

There are several aspects for defining cultural tourism:

- From *economic point of view*, cultural tourism is the placement of culture on the market with cultural and artistic product, which has cultural and economic value.
- From *organizational point of view*, it is the integration between two sectors, culture and tourism, which should merge with a view to forming a mutual product.
- From *cultural point of view*, it is a promotion of revived cultural goods and the landscape of a town that will be etched on tourists' minds.
- From *educational point of view*, it is a journey full of longing to explore, get to know and learn something new about national and local cultural values of the region tourists are visiting.
- From *a viewpoint of marketing and PR*, cultural tourism is the managing of the reputation of a place, a region or a country based on cultural goods and landscapes.

The motives for traveling to and staying in cultural-social area contain aspiration for fulfilling a large number of deferent and vehement human needs and wishes. It can be a wish for gaining knowledge, discovering and getting to know various regions and civilizations, a visit to various cultural events, art, adventure, change, freedom, the change of the itinerary etc. Among the special ones are: a trip to the past, small town visits and other countries, a visit to natural and cultural areas, exploration trips, seminars, getting to know the life and work of an artist, and for the sake of rest, recreation as well as for health reasons and the like.

By definition, cultural tourism enables the places that are not primarily tourism-oriented and are not rich in tourist throughout a year to make a tourism offer owing to their cultural and artistic resources. Thus, the main aim of cultural tourism is to motivate people to travel and become acquainted with local cultural values in order to understand them and consequently respect them (1,2005:10)

Tourism is, in terms of the growth rate, the third fastest-growing field on the economic market with culture being the fourth. When these two get together, the result is cultural tourism. However, the terms cultural tourism and heritage tourism are not clearly defined. Hall and Zeppel (1990a: 87) realized the connection between cultural and heritage tourism, stating that the cultural tourism is based on performing arts, visual arts and festivals while the heritage tourism is focused on visiting landscapes, historic sites, monuments and buildings. Some other scholars made a clear distinction between these two terms. Moscardo (2000), for example, argued that the heritage tourism was focusing on the past, and cultural tourism on the present. Prentice (2004)

said that heritage tourism was one of the fastest growing forms of cultural tourism (5,2003:5)

Libraries, as cultural institutions, are an important factor behind the development and improvement of cultural tourism. By digitalizing their book holdings, libraries have become an important factor behind the social progress based on knowledge managed by digital technology. In such a way, they enable a direct online access to library material, studying accessories and other information that take an active part in the presenting a specific region to tourists.

The role of libraries in the development of cultural tourism has rapidly increased in the last several years, because tourists more and more gather a lot of information on a destination before deciding to visit it. There are numerous ways for libraries to attract tourists. An example may be an organization of tourist visits providing them to get to know with cultural and historical heritage of a region, the history and structure of the library itself, its book holdings and its services. If libraries organize exhibitions, they should be part of the tourists' visit. Before the very visit tourists can be provided with a short video presentation as an introduction to the things they are about to see. Visits should be organized on several occasions during the day and adapted to different types of visitors. The programs of the visit should involve both adults and children and they should be made according to the type of visitors.

In terms of the development of cultural tourism, not only technical equipment and capabilities of the library but also the library staff, play an important role, primarily librarians. Educated and experienced staff is a library's the main asset. In order to provide high quality service both managers of the institution and the employees should be highly skilled. A librarian should be well-educated and well-informed.

An excellent command of several foreign languages is a necessary prerequisite for getting the work done successfully. As a combination of digital technology and the proficiency of the librarian resulted in the appearance of the service "Ask a librarian" in many countries all over the world. Libraries form networks and closely cooperate in order to provide a service. A user can write the information he/she needs and ask questions on the question page which are, then, forwarded to the department of one of the libraries that are part of the system in the form of an e-mail (figure 1).

A user is given a reply, also, in the form of an e-mail. The aim of this service is to make information available all the time, which is best achieved when libraries from different time zones are included in the system. Therefore, if a local library is closed, another one may provide a reply.

**Figure 1:** „Ask a librarian“ question page



Source: <http://www.loc.gov/rr/askalib/ask-business2.html>

## BIBLIOTHECA ALEXANDRINA AS THE FACTOR OF CULTURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

The Royal Library of Alexandria was the largest library in the ancient world. It is generally thought to have been founded at the beginning of the 3rd century BC, during the reign of Ptolemies dynasty of Egypt. Initially the Library was closely linked to a "museum," or research institution. Libraries were very important for textual research in the ancient world, since the same text often existed in several different versions of varying quality. The Library's collection was very famous in the ancient world. It was made of papyrus scrolls. It is impossible, however, to determine how large the collection was. According to some sources, the library had 700.000 scrolls.

The original library was located in the royal district of the city, with an additional building for storage on the harbor, and a "daughter library" located in the Serapeum in the southwest part of the city. The library was open to scholars from all cultures and both girls and boys. It is not clear exactly when the ancient Library of Alexandria was destroyed. It was probably damaged by fire during Caesar's conquest in 48 BC. In 391 AD, the bishop of Alexandria burned the Serapeum to the ground, which finally put the institution of the library to an end.

In 1974, the University of Alexandria began a campaign for the rebuilding of the ancient library. In 1988, the president of Egypt, Mubarak, took up the project at a national level and the Egyptian government organized an international competition. The Norwegian company Snohetta won the competition in 1989. The New Library of Alexandria was opened in October 2002.

Today, Bibliotheca Alexandrina is a very important cultural and educational center. It contains:

- a library that can hold millions of books;
- a center for the Internet and its archive;

- six specialized libraries for: audio-visual materials, the visually impaired, children, the young, microforms, rare books and special collection;
- three museums for: antiquities, manuscripts, the history of science;
- Planetarium;
- children's research center (ALEXploratorium);
- two permanent exhibitions;
- six art galleries for temporary exhibitions;
- a conference center for thousands of persons;
- seven research institutes.

Most of users are students from the University of Alexandria and local schools. Various conferences held in the complex have received regional and international attention, raising the profile of the whole city. Bibliotheca Alexandrina also organizes a number of cultural, scientific, educational, regional and international activities and events. The library has also influenced infrastructural improvements of the city, such as renovating roads, building bridges and upgrading hotels. The library is seen as a progressive landmark for the country as a whole.

The Bibliotheca Alexandrina joined the World Library Union which consists of 30 libraries from all over the world including the Congress Library in Washington. The Library of Alexandria was established as the first digital library following modern technological systems to spread knowledge. It participates with US Congress library in the project "World Digital Library". The aim of this project is digitalization of unique materials including: maps, manuscripts, books, music, audio records, films, engineering designs and photographs from all over the world. The project includes international partners: UNESCO, IFLA and many libraries in Asia, Africa and North and South America.

Another project is called "One million books". The aim of this project is digitalization of one million books during 3 years. The Bibliotheca Alexandrina works in cooperation with China, India and USA. The International institute for Information Studies (ISIS) plays a central role in implementing developments in these projects.

With all its potentials, the Library of Alexandria is a very important factor in the development of cultural tourism. The new edition of *Alexandria tourist guidebook* gives a complete file about the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in order to inform the tourists about its developmental and cultural role as well as its possessions and various capabilities. Alexandria tourist guidebook is issued in three languages: Arabic, English and French.

The library pays special attention to tourist visits. The Visits Department consists of tourist guides who have received intensive training to lead an entertaining and an enlightening tour for the visitors. The Tours Guide Desk is located in the foyer of the Library of Alexandria. Tours with professional tourist guides are organized every day in five languages: Arabic, English, French, Italian, and Spanish. During the tour, visitors are introduced to the historical background of the Ancient Library, the efforts made to build the new one, its organization and significance as well as other information about the different sections of the Library of Alexandria. The receptionists are responsible for prior reservation for individuals and groups.

The Library organizes three types of visits:

1. School visits are organized every day and reservations should be made at least 5 days in advance;

2. Public Tours are organized in Arabic, English, French, Italian and Spanish. The duration of the tour is about 30-45 minutes. Reservations should be made 2 days in advance.
3. Special Tours are offered daily except Fridays and Saturdays, in Arabic, English and French. The duration of the tour is about one hour and 15 minutes. This category of tours includes a more elaborate description of the Library facilities.

There are several rules established by the Library:

1. Neither the external tour guides nor the tour leaders of the travel agencies are allowed to explain inside the library, since the Library has its own guides who speak different languages.
2. Ages 6 – 16 years are not permitted inside the Library's Main Reading Hall unless they join guided tours.
3. Children under 6 years are not allowed in the Library, except for the Antiquities Museum, the Book Shop, and Day Care.
4. Photographs are allowed within the Library except the exhibitions (Impressions of Alexandria and the World of Shady Abd El Salam).

Due to many complaints from the visitors for not allowing children under 6 years old to accompany their parents in the Library, the Visits Department has provided Day Care to host the visitors' children with the presence of their parents. It is offered daily from 11am to 4pm except Fridays and Saturdays.

Bibliotheca Alexandrina organizes two types of special presentations:

1. The Culturama;
2. Children presentations.

Culturama is a cultural panoramic show portraying the history of Egypt with highlights and examples of Ancient Egyptian and Coptic/Muslim heritage. It was developed by CULTNAT (Center for Documentation of Cultural and National Heritage) and considered the first ever patented 9-projector interactive system. The presentation lasts 15-20 minutes and it is displayed on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday in three languages: English, French and Arabic. Prior reservation for Culturama is obligatory for school visits and groups. The reservation should be made at least 5 days in advance.

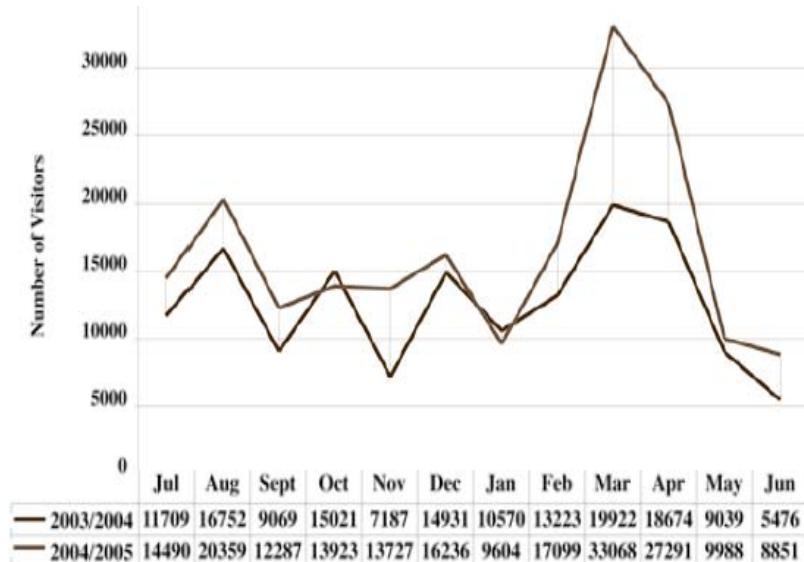
Children presentations are designed for children ages 4-9 in order to explain and describe the history of the Ancient Library of Alexandria, and the building of the New Library in a simplified manner using animation. The presentation lasts approximately 45 minutes including the tour of the Library building. These presentations are offered every day except Fridays and Saturdays and prior reservation is obligatory.

The Visits Department has a very important task - assessing the needs of their visitors both within Alexandria's Library and the city at large. At the entrance of the library there is Alexandria Monuments Plasma Screen which gives tourists an overview of the archeological sites in Alexandria. Bibliotheca Alexandrina, also, assists tourists in enjoying their trip to the city of Alexandria by preparing a guidebook about the city, including information about archeological sites, hotels, cultural centers, consulates, shopping malls and other information.

The Visits Department has been working hard towards increasing the number of tourists by implementing an effective marketing strategy. Once a week the Department sends a representative to the various target groups, like schools, universities, social and sports clubs, hotels, professional associations and travel agencies to explain the facilities and services at the library, and encourage them to plan visits to the

Bibliotheca Alexandrina. In order to improve the overall quality of service offered, the Visits Department makes use of the suggestions and comments of its visitors. All suggestions from the public are acknowledged either by telephone, e-mail or regular post. Once a year, the Visits Department creates statistical reviews of library visits and compare obtained results with those of previous years.

**Figure 2:** Total number of visitors in 2004/2005 and 2003/2004



Source: „Annual report July 2004-June 2005“

The Antiquities Museum has got a very important role in stimulating public awareness about history and culture. It introduces programs on Egypt's heritage through media and electronic publications and promotes the historic role of Alexandria through its production of booklets, flyers and postcards.

The integral parts of Bibliotheca Alexandrina Administration Department are Travel Unit and Transportation Unit. The Travel Unit is responsible for the travel and accommodation arrangements for both Bibliotheca Alexandrina staff and guests, nationally and internationally. From July 2004. till June 2005. this unit attended to 2,254 different requests. The Transportation Unit is responsible for the transportation arrangements for both Bibliotheca Alexandrina staff and guests, within Egypt. It is equipped with: three vans, four 15-seater buses, two 28-seater buses (donated by Chrysler), seven cars, one book mobile car, two small motorcycles.

Realizing the importance of web technology and the role of Internet, Bibliotheca Alexandrina formed the Website Unit which closely monitors and manages the content and overall look of the website. It presents information about the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, its services, activities and news as well as other useful information for tourists visiting Egypt and Alexandria. All these information are available in three languages: Arabic, English and French.

## CONCLUSION

Libraries may be a significant factor in the cultural tourism development of a region. There is an increasing number of tourists who look up the information on a destination prior to the trip/journey, chiefly via the Internet. Libraries have a lot of material that can be presented through web sites. Although has considerably provided the number of services that libraries can offer to the public, business community and tourist, the role of the workers is still invaluable. The educated and skilled staff is the key to providing quality service. In order to introduce all the library services to tourists and the local community it is important to develop an excellent marketing strategy. It involves a well-designed and accessible web-presentation, since it can be accessed to from all over the world: the sending of e-mails to potential users; visiting travel agencies, educational institutions and companies; active part of the staff in the media; the printing and distribution of promotional leaflets, brochures as well as other methods.

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