



Reshaping the city through tourism development project of Salt Lakes in Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Tuzla is a city that firmly decided to position tourism as one of the main drivers of further development, through concrete projects that have transformed the image of the city. Once an industrial center is now turned into a significant tourist destination. This was initiated in 2003 with the construction of Pannonian Lakes. Salt, as a natural resource whose exploitation had been detrimental to the city, has been utilized as an advantage for further successful development. This site used to be a marshy area without any content or purpose, and only 20 years later, it is a popular touristic site.

Organisation in charge of best practice

City of Tuzla and Public Enterprise "Pannonica" Tuzla

Location

Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Dates

2003 - to date

Description

Tuzla is a city that has firmly decided to position tourism as one of the main drivers of further urban development, through concrete projects that have transformed the image of our country's industrial center into a significant tourist destination. The story of the beginnings of significant tourism development in our city began in 2003, after the construction of Phase I of the Pannonian Lakes complex, although the roots of tourism in the city of Tuzla date back to 1914 when the first Salty Spa, known in Europe for treating various rheumatic diseases, was built.

Salt, as a natural resource whose exploitation had been detrimental to the inner city core for years, thanks to the city administration led by the mayor of Tuzla, Mr. Jasmin





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For the purpose of urbanization and development of this large space in the city center, the city administration came up with the idea of utilizing the natural resource in the immediate vicinity of the complex – saline water, with the aim of constructing a water reservoir in the form of a salt lake with healing properties, functioning as a city open-air bathing area. In this way, the combination of a natural resource, human ideas, and human effort created the Pannonian Lakes complex as a top-notch ecological project unique in Southeastern Europe, a project that will serve for the benefit of all citizens of Tuzla, our region, and our country.

After the realization of Phase I of the complex's development with the construction of the large (first) lake in July 2003, stage development continued in 2006 with the construction of the Archaeological Park – Neolithic Palafitte settlement with a museum exhibition that speaks to the continuity of life in the Tuzla area from the Neolithic era. At the beginning of the summer season in 2008, the capacities of the complex were significantly increased with the construction of the second salt lake, and by the end of September, another unique tourist product was created – Salty Waterfalls, in the form of an inhalation health center in the open air, unique to these areas. The third Pannonian lake was opened on September 1, 2012.

The Pannonian Lakes complex, as the only salt lakes in Europe, has won numerous awards, with the most notable being the second prize in 2012 UNWTO ULYSSES AWARD, the highest recognition of the United Nations World Tourism Organization for innovations in public policies and management, for the project "Valorization of Natural Heritage - Pannonian Salt Lakes in Tuzla," awarded for innovations in the field of tourism. In 2013, the city of Tuzla and the Pannonian Lakes received the International Tourism Award GOLDEN INTERSTAS 2013 for outstanding contribution to the development of tourism in the city of Tuzla and a significant contribution to the development of tourism in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole.

The current work of the Pannonian Lakes complex in Tuzla provides optimistic forecasts for future development plans. The Pannonian Lakes complex covers a total area of 75,000 m², with a shoreline length of 1,000 m and a sandy beach area of 22,000 m². Since its construction in 2003, the complex has been visited by over 5.5 million guests to date. The reasons for the high visits to the Pannonian Lakes complex undoubtedly include the absolutely pure medicinal saltwater (beneficial for bone and respiratory diseases), guest stay standards, and complex maintenance higher than the Blue Flag standards for seas and lakes (especially in the segment of guest health and safety care), good entertainment and guest animation, and very low prices for all services at the complex.

In the field of cultural tourism offerings, the Pannonica complex includes the Archaeological Park-Neolithic Palafitte settlement, a replica settlement from the Neolithic era with nine dwellings, a wooden platform, and an interior display of tools, utensils, and dishware for salt isolation. This setup testifies to the continuity of life in the Tuzla area for





thousands of years. Additionally, the museum Geological Exhibition Pannonica showcases the spectacular geological history of the Tuzla area to guests.

The uniqueness of the lakes lies in the water with which they are filled, representing a combination of technological water and high-concentration brine (300 mg/l). The proportion of saltwater in the total water volume is 30%, with a salinity of 30-35 gr/l., always at the level of seawater salinity. In addition to salinity, the water of the Pannonian lake contains minerals (calcium, sodium, sulfur, iodine, bromine, etc.) and has rightfully gained the image of "medicinal" water unique in our region and in Europe. The complex is open throughout the year for visits, walks, and recreation for citizens. It includes a modern open-air fitness center, a Street Workout Park, a giant chessboard at the first lake, and mapped walking/jogging trails around the entire complex. Adjacent to the complex is the children's amusement park "Saline Banja-Vrtić," equipped with entertainment and play facilities for children aged 3 to 12 years.

Public Utility Company "Pannonica" is active even during the winter period. The first Ice Skating Rink in Tuzla and the Tuzla Canton was opened in collaboration with the city of Tuzla in December 2006. Within the complex is a covered ice rink with an area of 660 m², with a capacity for over 100 skaters per session.

The development of this project has spurred a series of other tourist and cultural projects focused on developing additional offer in the city that meet the needs of numerous visitors and tourists. As a result, numerous festivals, entertainment and cultural programs, and events have been developed. The investment in the Pannonian Lakes project has completely changed the city's image and the structure of the local economy, with the number of available accommodation facilities in the city increasing by over 1000% in the past 20 years.





Links

<https://panonika.ba/>

<https://tztz.ba/ba/panonska-jezera/>

Resources needed

The resources that were required for this project in all its phases were around 5 million EUR, and were invested from the Tuzla City Budget throughout the years, as the Complex of Pannonian lakes was growing and evolving.

Challenges encountered

In the early stages of this project, the major challenge was to get the public support as most people did not believe that it was feasible to realize such a project in Tuzla, which back in early 2000's seemed impossible. The City Administration gathered renown experts, engineers and technologists to prepare and design the project and also to ensure that the public understood the effects it will have on the entire city, without any risks. Later in the implementation of the project, the challenges were related to the technological aspects of the entire system at the lakes, which was also successfully ensured because special attention and care are taken in the maintenance (chemical and bacteriological) of the lake water through a specific technological process. The technological process involves 24-hour filtration of the total water volume of the lake (2.5 cycles) and its chemical treatment through a series of procedures such as maintaining pH levels, disinfection, algae destruction, flocculation (removal of water turbidity), and continuous physical cleaning of the lake complex. The most important segment of the technological process is water filtration, which is done through sand filters in two filter plants with 2.5 cycles in 24 hours



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for the total water volume. The process is automated with a constant supply of fresh technological water and brine. Disinfection of water, as the second most important process, is carried out with gaseous chlorine, and depending on weather conditions and the number of guests, the chlorine concentration is maintained at a level of 0.2-0.4 mg/l. All measurements and analyses of lake water (three times a week during the bathing season) are conducted at the Institute of Public Health of the Tuzla Canton, where all previous measurements have proven the absolute correctness and high quality of lake water during the bathing season.

Evidence of success

The Pannonian Lakes Complex, as the only salt lakes in Europe, with its tourism activities (attractiveness, water and environmental cleanliness, good and affordable services, location, a large number of visitors) decisively influenced the decision to award the Municipality of Tuzla (2nd place) in the competition for the best tourist city in BiH – the Golden Rose for 2006, as well as the Golden Hospitality Crown Award (the conceptual solution of the Archaeological Park-Neolithic Sojenica Settlement-Pannonian Lake) in the category of special care for traditional cultural-historical values of BiH. Then, recognitions in the field of tourism for the Best Manager awarded to Mr. Majid Porobić and the Best Company in 2012. As the culmination of 2012, the city of Tuzla and the salt lakes received the second prize in the 2012 UNWTO ULYSSES AWARD, the highest recognition of the United Nations World Tourism Organization for innovations in public policies and management, for the project "Valorization of Natural Heritage – Pannonian Salt Lakes in Tuzla," awarded for innovations in the field of tourism. In 2013, the city of Tuzla and the Pannonian Lakes received the International Tourism Award GOLDEN INTERSTAS 2013 for outstanding contribution to the development of tourism in the city of Tuzla and a significant contribution to the development of tourism in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole. Also, the proof of success lies in the fact that Tuzla now has significant number of tourists visiting the city (around 5,5 million visits to the Pannonian Lakes), while 20 years ago there was close to no tourism traffic in Tuzla. The investment in the Pannonian Lakes project has completely changed the city's image and the structure of the local economy, with the number of available accommodation facilities in the city increasing by over 1000% in the past 20 years. There are multiplier effects reflected not only in increased sales of goods and services that tourists consume here during the season but also in the opening of various infrastructure and facilities. Since the opening of Pannonica in 2003 until today, roads have been constructed, water supply has been improved, lighting has been installed, numerous parks have been opened, city square have been inaugurated, the Archaeological Park has been established, and various cultural events such as Kaleidoscope Festival have been organized. These developments have contributed not only to the attractiveness of Tuzla as a destination for tourists but also to the quality of life for us citizens who live here.

Potential for transfer

"This project is a perfect example how any local community, small or big, can identify its own potential or a resource which makes it unique and specific and turn it into its competitive advantage. In the case of Tuzla it was the salt and saline water, as a natural resource whose exploitation had been detrimental to the inner city core for years, thanks to the city administration led by the mayor of Tuzla, Mr. Jasmin Imamović, it has been utilized





as an advantage for further successful urban development. So, any local community can find its own „salt“ and transform it into a new tourism product that will reshape the whole community. In this regard, the project of Pannonian lakes in Tuzla has a great potential for transfer, because by identifying one strategic large-scale project of tourism infrastructure, the city of Tuzla has made a major positive impact on the quality of life in Tuzla and on local economy. Thanks to visionary Mayor and cooperation and joint work of numerous experts committed to achieving success, any dream can be turned into reality.

Further Information

Tuzla has a special geological past. Tuzla locals say that Tuzla is the "city on a grain of salt." That "grain of salt" consists of hundreds of millions of tons of rock salt and saltwater left behind by the ancient Pannonian Sea, which, more than ten million years ago, retreated from these areas. The city's name has always, throughout its existence and in the languages of all travelers, cartographers, historians, conquerors, been linked to salt. The river Jala, flowing through Tuzla, bears a name derived from the Greek word "Jalos," meaning salt. Throughout its history, the city has been called Castron de Salenes (Greek), Salenes (Greek), Ad Salinas (Latin), Soli (South Slavic), Memlehatejn (Arabic), Memleha-i Zir (Persian), Tuz (Turkish) ... until its current name, Tuzla, which means salt pans in Turkish.

