

## TOURISM IN REGION OF ELBASAN – IT’S TIME FOR CHANGE!!!

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### Abstract

Tourism has grown tremendously in recent years, it has a significant impact on socio-economic development of our country. Sustainable development is now being recognized as an essential approach for achieving development goals without depleting natural and cultural heritage or degrading the environment. The aim of this paper is to show the opportunities & the necessity to develop a sustainable tourism in the region of Elbasan. Finally the paper will conclude with some findings & conclusions.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Tourism, sustainable development, environment impacts, tourism destination.

Tourism is one of the largest industry in the world in terms of employment and share of global Gross Domestic Product. Travel & tourism represents approximately 10% of total global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and covers 10% of world employment (direct & indirect). It has grown by giant steps these last decades. Nowadays is necessary to promote sustainable tourism development in order to minimize environment impacts and to maximize all its benefits from it. There are different definitions for “Sustainable Tourism” but the most known defines it as “Leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems (World Tourism Organization). Sustainable tourism is an attempt to improve the impacts for all types of tourism, and this implies seeking different ways to build partnerships between all parties involved. Absolutely the aim of sustainable tourism is creating a positive experience for all the actors such as local people, tourism companies and tourists themselves. On the other hand “Sustainable development” implies “meeting the needs of present tourists and host communities, while protecting and enhancing the needs in the future. The question that arises at this point is “Is it possible to have a completely sustainable tourism? Surely, it is impossible for tourism to be completely 100% sustainable, as every industry has its own impacts, positive or negative, but with a lot of work it will be more and more sustainable. An understanding of the tourism structure, its characteristics are essential for evaluation because this structure doesn't include only accommodation; the sector is generally defined as a network of inter-related businesses (e.g., outbound and inbound tour operators; air, ground, and sea transport; accommodation, tour guide, and related service providers) packaged for leisure or business travelers. Tourism businesses also require a series of support services and products (including food distribution, access, communications and other infrastructure, education, and training services) that are only partially dependent on the core tourism activities to operate as tourism is generally a seasonal industry. This interdependent network must function as a whole system. If we refer to tourism, it is excessive to write about the rare beauties that Albania possesses but Albania can use the resources in interest of tourism, much more than actually. If we refer to a detailed exploration, we can say that tourists not having the right

information, creates the perception that there is no much to see here. This perception, is not only in the eyes of foreign tourists, but from Albanian residents too. This highlights the need to promote more the Albanian resources. In my opinion despite the efforts made by the Albanian government in promoting tourism to international stations such as CNN, BBC, despite that there is a national strategy about tourism, the results are not where they should be. Arises as a necessity, working more in this direction. It is important to mention the main macroeconomic objectives relating to tourism. Through tourism is possible:

- To generate more new jobs and national incomes
- Accelerating the economic and social development in the country
- improvement of citizens living conditions
- to have improved services
- creating a positive image in the world as a tourism destination
- developing a sustainable tourism and environmentally friendly.
- Increasing benefits for the state in foreign currency

It generates higher incomes. The tourism sector is an important source for employment. In addition the development of tourism is accompanied by an improved structure with a lot of investments in roads, water and sewerage systems, telecommunications, etc. These investments improve the living standards for the local population. Tourism generates higher benefits as mentioned above but exists another side of the coin, not a positive one. Naturally, everyone can ask: what are the risks to this growing and developing industry? As we know, tourism development is associated with consumption of existing resources such as energy, water, oil which are limited. Transition towards market economy is accompanied by a total lack of environmental assessment and biodiversity. Tourism is putting pressure on ecosystems, so inappropriate constructions, massive cutting of forests, taking sand from the seas and rivers, uncontrolled hunting, different waste dumped at water is bringing irrevocable consequences to the environment. These consequences are erosion, deforestation, disappearance of habitats etc. Tourism generates high levels of pollution, ranging from air pollution that is intensified with the rapid growth of transportation, increasing noise, increase of solid waste and urban wastewater pollution. Since we got to the study of the Elbasan region, it is classified as the second city contaminated after Tirana. Elbasan presents many

environmental problems .Pollution is inherited from pre-industrial development before 1990 from sources such as Metallurgical Combine, Ferro-chromium plant, Cement plant. As possible sources are mentioned not only the heavy industry but also poor road infrastructure, the rampant growth of construction activity etc. Data on measurements made from the Regional Environmental indicators such as NO<sub>2</sub>, PM<sub>10</sub>, SO<sub>2</sub>, BP are relatively high. Flora & fauna have been damaged , this doesn't help tourism. In conclusion can be said tourism and environment are both dependent on each other ,so not only uncontrolled tourism could lead to environmental degradation, but also environmental degradation is a threat to the degradation of tourism .How are we prepared to reduce the environmental impact of tourism in order to ensure sustainable development? Primary task should be the protection of cultural and natural heritage and not destroying them. Identification of positive and negative sides leads to the necessity that people should become more conscious, establishing a ambigüe relationship, in which everyone can benefit . Challenges for central& local government in Elbasan is to encourage the development of sustainable tourism that will maximize profits, retain and protect features,this means being sensitive to the environment, not destroying, not changing the ecological processes. The participation of all of these entities, without excluding anyone from planning to implementation step, is critical to the success of any tourism-related project. Tourism, especially the sustainable type, needs careful cooperation by public&private sectors,local people especially at the design and feasibility stage.

#### PROFILE OF THE CITY

Elbasan is a major center of trade and transport on the road Egnatia, which builds activity through agrobusiness, light industry and mountain tourism. Throughout its existence over two thousand years this city has been and remains one of the major cities in Albania.We can identify it as a transportal node.The economic activity dates from year 1381 by organizing various exhibitions. In the period 1924-1939 were created several companies, branches of light industry and food as that of cigarette tobacco, oil-soap, alcohol. In the period 1945-1990 was installed heavy industry with the creation of metallurgical combine which gave to Elbasan, industrial profile.This was a bad decision for the city.As you might guess although it brought more employment in that period but negative consequences for the environment were incalculable. The presence of the biggest factories in the city, have brought such a pollution that today we are classified the second contaminated city in Albania.Despite the industrial profile ,Elbasan city is rich of resources. Although not having sea Elbasan, it can utilize mountain tourism, cultural tourism based on cultural and historical heritage. Efforts ,made by local governments for tourism development have been concentrated in two directions: Firstly rehabilitation and development of historical values of the city and secondly in their tourism promotion.

#### Characteristics of Sustainable Tourism

- **Differentiation- what you offer more than others.**

Sustainable Tourism tries to maintain the importance of local culture and tradition.It is important for a successful tourism development offering unique things to the others. Some natural spaces that surround the city are incredible.Here are included mountain sites (Gjinari,Bysheku), the Thermal Bath area known for the curative values, Belëshi ,Dumrea with its lakes, etc.

- **Authenticity**

Successful destinations are those related to history, industry, culture, natyral resources Authenticity in itself creates a sense of continuity from past to present and from present to the future.

- **Destination Assets**

Building a sustainable tourism mean to rely on current resources. It is worthy to mention the resources offered by the Elbasan area ,which are:

- **Places with historical value**

Elbasan Fortress which together with its surrounding walls are historic part and principal symbol of town The hamam of the Pazar,the hamam of the castle

The clock Town

The museum house of Kristoforidhi

Etnografic Museum

- **Cult objects with historical and architectural value**

The church of St. Mary within the fortress , church of Lleshanit, Valshit, Shelcanit

The monastery of Saint John Vladimir, Nazaresha Mosque

- **Places with natural values**

Gjinari, about 1300 mr above sea level Belëshi and its carstic lakes

Bysheku, which is located about 2 km away from the city

Llixha (thermal Bath area with curative values)

Required more work from local institutions to promote these values. Absent a genuine marketing in this regard until now from local institutions.

- **Sustainable Tourism is informatory**

Not only tourist have information about the destinations but also it helps locals knowing about the culture and civilisation of tourists too. Initially, assessment of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats should be explored in this study. The vision of sustainable development in the future should rely on its strengths,while eliminating and managing the weakness.

#### SWOT ANALYSIS FOR ELBASAN CITY

##### STRENGTHS

- Favorable geographical position as an arterial center for road transport.
- Strong historical & cultural resources around the city with high potential for the development of historical ,cultural tourism
- Considerable spaces in derelict economic areas that could be recuperated for other functions.
- Abundant vacant areas .
- Large green areas are still existing.Existence of pine forests that support the city microclimate.

## **WEAKNESSES**

- Dilapidated physical infrastructure ,lacking investments .
- Poor public transportation service.

Poor promotion of any competitive advantage at national levels.

High levels of air,ground,water pollution despite the measures that are taken.

Lack of capacities and knowledge in providing services in tourism sector.

Neglect of historical heritage and inability to promote cultural resources.

Poor quality of offered services.

Deforested green areas.

Lack of a city guide,office information for tourists,tourism journals.

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

- A plenty of historical ,natural resources in Elbasan,enabling the development of natural ,historical tourism.
- Potential for tourism as a leading sector of economy.
- Projects for infrastructure improvement .
- Projects and interest for maintenance of cultural heritage.
- Interest of central ,local governance for reducing pollution levels.

## **THREATS**

- Extensive pollution ,dated from heavy industry.
- National tourism strategy still dysfunctional
- Poor coordination between central and local institutions in implementing different strategies.

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- Lack of municipal competencies on environment issues.
- Non integrated regional tourism.
- Low levels of foreign investments.

## **Conclusions & Recommendations**

Based upon facts mentioned above , a shortlist of conclusion & recommendations for tourism development in Elbasan region is presented below. So

- Local communities should be aware for the potential that they have on influencing of tourism policies
- Careful and efficient usage of resources will ensure a sustainable ,natural environment. It should be adapted an innovative technology for the best use of (land ,water,energy).
- Government & local operators should be aware of negative impacts on environment that tourism can bring.
- Commitment and funding for tourism from central and local governance.
- Government should consider " The promotion of regional approaches for a sustainable tourism development.
- A national strategy on tourism should be coordinated to that in local level.
- Local communities & governance should take care ,protecting the cultural,archaeological heritages,museums and not destroying them.
- It should be more office information ,guides for tourists around the city.



## ARTISANSHIP AS AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF TOURISM OFFER

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### **Abstract**

This article will identify the role and importance of development of artisanship sector in Albania and especially in Shkodra region. Taking in consideration a lot of natural resources that Shkodra with the relation to tourism development this article gives an evidence of the enriching of tourism offer with artisanship products. In this article the research work has been focused on tourists that visit Shkodra region and artisanship businesses bringing an evidence the main problems hindering the development of their activities and facing elements of tourism offer including artisan products as part of touristic offer.

### **1. Handicraft and tourism**

Every year Shkodra provides for 30 thousand masks to the traditional Venice Carnival. Since five years the product of this Albanian business are among the most sought after due to the artisan technique which has disappeared from the Venetian market of masks. Edmond Angoni, the owner, recalls returning to Albania to establish the business that with its charm and mastery of the hand works competes in the market of the city with the most ancient tradition of carnivals. This is a good example that how a component of the handicraft helps the tourism development, turning into a big attraction.

Tourism is the number one industry of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and handicraft is one of the businesses with the quickest growth rate. Together they form a powerful and logical combination. Handicraft is an integrated part of the total experience that a tourist gains from a certain country. A qualitative souvenir brought home by a tourist after a wonderful holiday experience acquires a continuous power generating good memories, and also arouses the interest of others to visit that special destination. But the link between tourism and handicraft is yet to be explored, understood, and developed. This has led to a potential loss of income and the loss of the possibilities of creating new employment positions. Traditional handicrafts, be them for utilitary or artistic purposes, represent a much valuable expression of culture, a "self-confident" capital which is important especially for the developing countries. Reinstating the hand work is important also for many developed countries where often the quality of life is under threat by excessive industrial standardization. Artisans not only preserve the cultural legacy, they also enrich and adjust this legacy to the contemporary needs of societies.

The tourism, which links individuals and human communities, and through them cultures and civilizations, plays an important role in facilitating dialogue between different cultures. It also has the ability to help world citizens to better go along with each other, hence contributes in building peace of mind of men and women, if we were to quote the UNESCO Constitution.

The preservation of cultural and natural legacies and bringing it closer to everybody makes cultures and civilizations widely recognizable by improving the conditions of everyday living and by reducing poverty, it is what defines the sustainability of tourism development.

Social and cultural impacts of tourism in host countries were so analyzed from the international community in the December 1976 World Bank – UNESCO workshop for policy-makers held in Washington. Since then, the tourism industry has developed at a fantastic pace while a greater

stress is given to the cultural dimension of development. In line with abandoning "massive tourism" in favour of cultural or eco-tourism, we have noticed the increase of the drive to promote non-physical cultural legacy and the protection of cultural diversity as illustrated by two recent international conventions, the first on the protection of non-physical legacy by the UNESCO General Assembly on 2003 and the second is the "Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions" of 2005.

### **2. Establishing access in the tourism market**

As mentioned earlier there is a clear need for physical markets where artisans can display and sell their projects. These artisan markets is not supposed to be very small, bazaar-type, such as the Kruja one. They might be small and nice huts such as those of Butrinti National park. It is important that the location of these centers to be near touristic destinations or near the roads leading to them. Tirana, the country capital, has no such a focal point for artisans. There are some shops in the Old Bazaar area but there is no touristic area for foreigners to find real hand-made products. This would be a great advantage for Tirana artisans but also for those of the adjacent cities to have at least a small area somewhere near the center of the capital; this would be an added value also for Tirana itself.

This idea requires great efforts to be implemented but can be achieved through some small actions. It is common practice for international museums to have their own gift shops. Though in Albania few museums are very much frequented, many tourists visit them. About 60,000 tourists visited Butrint Museum last year. If only 10% of visitors would have found a product related to the museum and would have bought it, this would have meant 6,000 sold products. While other museums would be required to buy artisan products to sell into their premises, in Butrint this is easier because it has an artisan shop supported by Butrinti Foundation. Currently Butrint is one of the cases where an artisan area has created and trained its own artisan group producing works based on Butrint models.

The same thing could be accomplished for many museums and parks all around Albania, especially in places where artisans live nearby. The ethnographic museums of Kruja, Berat and Gjirokastra, Onufri and Shkodra Museum would require only a small budget and the cooperation with an artisans' association to meet this objective. The castles and archaeological areas would follow suit later. 18,000 tourists visited the Gjirokastra Castle on 2009; 17,000 visited the Rozafa Castle in Shkodra. If they would have had an artisan shop of their own, the majority of the tourists would have spent their money in artisan products. We come to this conclusion because the questionnaires with tourists in

Gjirokastra (from UNDP and GCDO on 2007) show that tourists would have spent at least 30 Euros more in one day.

The environment for selling artisan products is easy to set up: the selling points provide a reciprocal interest for both the touristic destination and the artisans. The center can serve as an inspiration for new products. Except the activity of Butrinti Foundation in the National Park of Butrinti exist also in Gjirokastra.

At this stage it might seem as a premature suggestion, but there are many examples in the neighbouring countries where local governments or the managing bodies of inheritance areas limit the right to sell to local artisans or establish regulations whereby art and handicraft is sold in the museum's own shops. Currently the National Park of Butrinti has set up the same restriction: only the Butrinti artisans group is allowed to sell in the vicinity of the Park. The municipalities of touristic destinations might establish an area where no imported souvenirs can be sold. Only the shops awarded with the Gold Medal can be authorized to sell in certain points. It would be of great help if these areas would be defined as "Tax-free artisan areas". This "protectionist" suggestion would help in strengthening and the fast establishment of the market in the inheritance area. The other step is the local products branding. This would mean for those products to be designed in a typical fashion for a specific area. Such activities can be carried out by local governments but it would be better if a branch of Artisans Association office coordinates the efforts. The public-private partnerships are a sustainable solution to operate artisan centres. Very soon artisan incubators will be established in Shkodra's Rozafat Castle (AAA) and Gjirokastra (GCDO) through the support of UN's Culture and Heritage for Social and Economic Development Programme. The way to support these incubators depends on how the partnership between businesses, the association and/or the park's administration would develop. Natural parks and recreative areas can also establish "their" artisan shops. Local population must be encouraged to prepare its own touristic package. Next to natural touristic destinations (for example, Valbona Valley, Llogara Saddle) small centres might be set up for tourists that offer information about tours, sports and recreative activities, gastronomy and healthy foods (home jam, honey, herbs, etc.) as well as on regional artisan products. These centres might be managed by private enterprises or by the municipality. The most important thing is to find people with a vision. For municipalities situated on the seaside, an interesting project would be the establishment of an artisan shop in the city centre or near the shore. The administration can find a place to put at least a small kiosk. Local governments must be encouraged to establish artisan centres. Even in the gastronomic centres of touristic destinations, gastronomes and artisans must be invited to

cooperate in order to provide for an authentic cultural experience for visitors. Usually artisans complain that gastronomes or hotel owners allow only the exposure of handicraft products but do not pay for this and do not care about sales. A project fund might sponsor the start of these joint ventures for cultural inheritance or another method might be found to finance this in order to establish access for artisans in the touristic market.

### **3. Strongest links between tourism and handicraft**

-How can be maximalized the possibilities to increase income for local communities, how can the later enjoy valuable exchanges (experiences) from the relationship and the selling of artisan products to the visitors?

-How can we make possible that original handicraft products be preserved and developed in continuity by protecting them from the threat of low-quality imported industrial products?

-How can be improved the quality, design and marketing of the products?

-How can the tourism and handicraft sectors work together to promote cultural assets of the host destination and support artisans and their communities?

-How can be dealt with potential negative economic and cultural impacts of tourism sector over the delicate sector of handicraft and cultural inheritance of the host destination?

**In this research, we are trying to find answers for the following issues:**

- Which are the hindering factors for the increase of sales of artisan products?
- Which are the factors influencing the increase of purchases of artisan products?
- Is the artisan offer liked?
- What does the artisan offer lack?
- Which are the strong points of handicraft in Shkodra?
- Which are the weaknesses of handicraft in Shkodra?

Then, we will make a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the results, from which we will have a general idea.

#### **Main subjects of the primary research were:**

- touristic agencies (there were interviewed those agencies that bring tourists in Shkodra, which amounted to 3)
- artisans (those that carry out their activity in the artisans' market, amounting to 10 subjects)
- tourists (different groups of tourists, 60 tourists were interviewed)
- experts (from different fields of life but related to handicraft, 12 in total, information outside the scope of the questionnaire were also gathered)

A special attention and energy was paid to the preparation of the questionnaires, through which we aimed to gather useful data that later would serve to the main objective of the paper, namely to help the development of tourism through handicraft and of handicraft through tourism.