

STABLE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT – CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Mersida Bala, PhD candidate
mersidab@hotmail.com

Abstract

Over the decades, tourism has experienced continued growth and deepening diversification to become one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world. Modern tourism is closely linked to the development and encompasses a growing number of new destinations. These dynamics have turned tourism into a key driver for socio-economic progress (UNWTO). Shkodra city has much potential to develop different types of tourism. But as long as tourism is at its beginning we should take advantage of this and try not to develop mass tourism but start to plan sustainable tourism development. On this purpose I found appropriate to discuss about geotourism and the possibility to develop it in Shkodra city as a form of sustainable tourism development, and also to analyze what visitors expect from a touristic destination. I have analyzed and tested first tourists' attitudes to see if it reflects some principles of geotourism. This can help planners and decisionmakers in the case they may want to develop geotourism in Shkodra. Planning and orientation should start from a detailed market study.

Keywords: tourism, sustainable development, geotourism, visitors

1. INTRODUCTION

During the late decades, tourism flourished and has been turned into one of the most extensive industries of the world. Incomes average from the whole world over grew 30 times more since 1950. Following a year of global recovery in 2010, growth is expected to continue for the tourism sector in 2011 but at a slower pace. UNWTO forecasts international tourist arrivals to grow at between 4% to 5% in 2011, a rate slightly above the long-term average. (UNWTO, 2011)

By its nature itself, tourism expansion firstly and strongly affected the most beautiful countries on earth. It holds an economical strength which moves even political decisions. When performed as it should, tourism promises three advantages:

- Protection and good maintenance of the environment influenced by the profits.
- Public education.
- Decrease of poverty.

But, when it is not performed as it should which unfortunately often happens, tourism then destroys nature beauties and cultural ones, stimulates disparity in profits and does not give education. This continuous collapse of beautiful countries is a dangerous crisis of the protection.

Taking into account all these reasons I think it is important that our city develops a sustainable form of tourism, away from mass tourism which is geotourism.

2. ABOUT GEOTOURISM

Geotourism is an emerging niche market within sustainable tourism and is centered on sustaining and enhancing the geographical character of a place (Stokes et al., 2003). Different types of sustainable tourism are focused on a specific pattern or dimension of the travel experience, geotourism instead unites various travel experiences; all focusing on sustaining a destination's unique character (Stokes et al., 2003). Geotourism educates visitors and inhabitants too. It can give to the community incomes and pride. The geotourism term is used formally since the year 1997 by Tourtellot of National Geographic and was defined as: ***"The tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place—its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its resident"***. The Geotourism is a kind of tourism promotion but more energetic. It sustains but even

promotes using restoring instruments and tourism constructive forms that fit to the country nature. Tourism incomes would be used to restore the old quarters, and to promote the handicrafts activity. These would help the preservation and development of home-brew cooking. Also would help to preserve the traditions, arts and country celebrations that venture to be obliterated. It could help to decorate the disfigured places and to enrich the poor zones. All over mentioned would be done better when is concentrated on the country specialty avoiding the destructive abyss of a massive undifferentiated tourism.

Into the geotourism definition are included some other principles:

- the geotourism must provide to the visitors a gaily and diversified experience
- at the other part the visitors must obtain a high quality and esthetic country information – known diversely as "interpretation"
- The geotourism seeks the involvement of expectants people in different ways. It includes the discovery and submission of interpretative information. This would create the home-brew pride. It means some unique special aspects, as cultural history, folklore etc. Many of the countries have a lot of history but they depreciated it so one of the geotourism benefits consists on creating the home-brew population pride after obtaining the necessary profound knowledge over the home-brew natural and cultural heritage
- Another benefit for the community is certainly the financial advantage. It can be achieved by providing to the tourists home-brew goods and services. It can be achieved also by the employment including career progress opportunities. To support these benefits, the community should practice high standart services in the touristic destinations. This means, creation of politics which protect the environment and the national heritage, wich in a few words means to manage the tourism to achieve maximal benefits with minimal destroys. Geotourism accepts to have less tourists in some situations to avoid the "love to death" syndrome. In tourism, the quantity tends to exceed the quality. So, the success is not measured with the number of tourists in a country but by measuring the touristic benefits of the touristic countries – those economical, social and environmental.

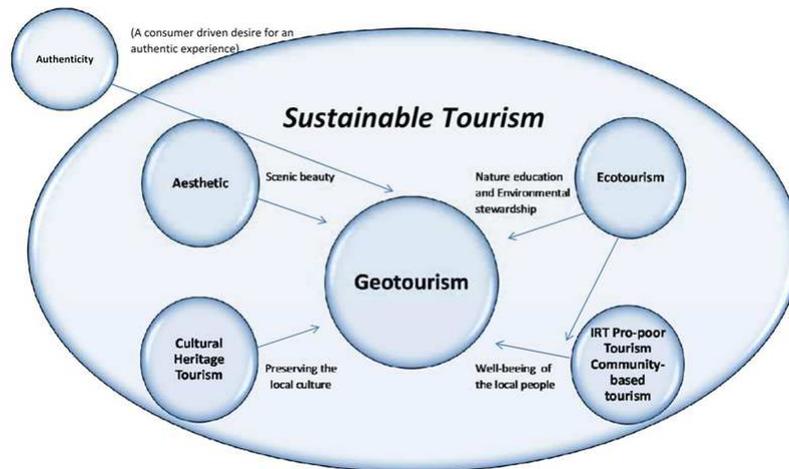


Figure 1: Geotourism's place within sustainable tourism (Boley, 2009)

As a summary:

- geotourism is environmentally responsible, dedicated to the protection of the resources and the well maintenance of the biodiversity.
- geotourism is culturally responsible, dedicated to respect the sensibility of the host and the building of the national heritage.
- as geotourism can't avoid the natural loss or the cultural diversity, it does not try to stop the time and keep a place untouched. It wants to save the geographical diversity and the unique of a place. The places which offer nothing but the international companies, tend to lose the unique and their interest. They end to apply the mass tourism which inquires only the lowest price.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

✓ Study aim

The aim of this paper is to find out if the tourists who visit Shkodra have attitudes which can help consider them as geotourists.

✓ Research question

"Can we consider the development of geotourism in Shkodra in terms of tourist's attitudes toward what is defined as geotourism?"

✓ Research design

For the realization of this paper I have used literature which was oriented toward the sustainable development of tourism and especially focused on geotourism. The National Geographic was a good source of definition and concepts but also I have googled to find other studies. Of special interest was the thesis accomplished by Boley (2009) where the topic was the geotourism. For the first time he realized an instrument called Geotourism Survey Instrument (GSI) which measured in terms of behaviour and attitudes the geotravelers. My primary research consists in adapting and using the GSI toward the tourists who visited Shkodra. I filled 60 questionnaires and in the same time interviewed them in the attempt to find out if these tourists have attitudes toward geotourism which could help me to understand if we can consider developing geotourism in Shkodra considering the potentials Shkodra city has.

4. CONSIDERING SHKODRA POTENTIALS TOWARD GEOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Shkodra city has a lot of potentials to develop different types of tourism. But as long as tourism is at its beginning we should take advantage of this and try not to develop mass tourism but try to implement sustainable types of tourism. On this purpose I found appropriate to discuss about geotourism and the possibility to develop it in Shkodra.

I have tried to analyze the opportunities Shkodra has and to give an overview of its resources in terms of environment, cultural heritage, aesthetics and consider the well-being of the local people. That is because all these categories are dimensions of geotourism included above in the definition given by the National Geographic. Shkodra city is of special interest because of its traditions, characteristics, people and ancient history. Lying by the side of the lake, at the foot of Rozafa Castle, and surrounded by the Buna, Drini and Kiri rivers, Shkodra exhibits a rare natural scenic beauty. Its mediterranean climate with sunny days is healthy, the beach waters are clean and agricultural production is abundant and what most important still bio. Shkodra bears traces of all historical periods, from which it has inherited its culture, bravery, emancipation, wisdom and hospitality. The beauty of the city portrait is attributed to the generosity of its nature and the great artistic skills of the architects. Below I have illustrated Shkodra touristic resources using what I like to call as Shkodra flowers.



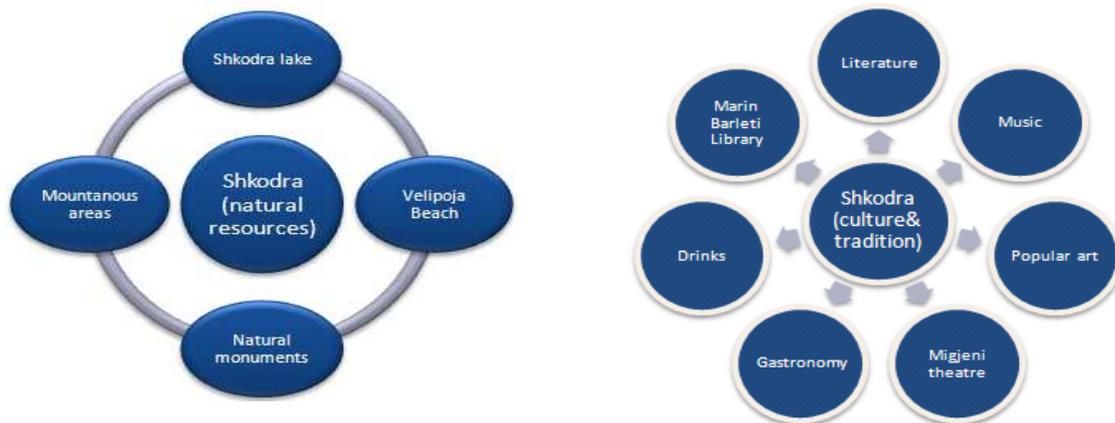


Figure 2. Shkodra categorisation of touristic resources

5. SURVEY RESULTS

The results given and calculated in the tables below are the answers that 60 tourists gave to the questions which valued their attitudes towards the cultural heritage, environment, aesthetics and well-being of local people.

When I travel I feel it is important to"	Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Somewhat disagree 3	Somewhat agree 4	Agree 5	Strongly agree 6
eat local cuisine	0.00%	1.67%	3.33%	16.67%	20.00%	58.33%
have info on the history of the local people	0.00%	3.33%	8.33%	13.33%	25.00%	50.00%
learn about the local culture	0.00%	0.00%	3.33%	16.67%	26.67%	53.33%
see a culture different than my own	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	16.67%	16.67%	66.67%
meet local residents	3.33%	3.33%	6.67%	10.00%	30.00%	46.67%
have contact with native people	0.00%	1.67%	6.67%	13.33%	45.00%	33.33%
purchase locally made products/handicrafts	0.00%	1.67%	1.67%	21.67%	28.33%	46.67%
attend cultural events	3.33%	5.00%	6.67%	18.33%	36.67%	30.00%
visit museums	1.67%	3.33%	10.00%	16.67%	41.67%	26.67%
visit art galleries	3.33%	10.00%	13.33%	16.67%	33.33%	23.33%

Table 1. Tourists attitudes toward cultural heritage

As we can see the major part of tourists strongly agree and agree that it is important to see a different culture, eat local cuisine and learn about the local culture.

Do you agree with the following statements?	Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Somewhat disagree 3	Somewhat agree 4	Agree 5	Strongly agree 6
The balance of nature is very delicate and easily upset	3.33%	6.67%	6.67%	10.00%	13.33%	60.00%
Plants and animals have as much rights as human to exist	3.33%	3.33%	6.67%	10.00%	20.00%	56.67%
When humans interfere with nature it often produces disastrous consequences.	0.00%	5.00%	5.00%	13.33%	26.67%	50.00%
Humans are severely abusing the environment.	3.33%	6.67%	10.00%	10.00%	23.33%	46.67%
If things continue on their present course, we will soon experience a major ecological catastrophe.	5.00%	6.67%	13.33%	25.00%	16.67%	33.33%
Humans were meant to rule over the rest of nature.	51.67%	23.33%	8.33%	8.33%	5.00%	3.33%
The current discussion on the ecological crisis facing humankind has been greatly exaggerated.	30.00%	30.00%	20.00%	10.00%	5.00%	5.00%
Humans have the right to modify the natural environment to suit their needs.	46.67%	21.67%	18.33%	6.67%	3.33%	3.33%

Table 2. Tourist's attitudes towards the environment

The questions given in the table above were used to see how important the environment to the actual tourists visiting Shkodra. The results can be commented as positive and these tourists can be seen as potential geotourists.

Do you agree with the following statements?	Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Somewhat disagree 3	Somewhat agree 4	Agree 5	Strongly agree 6
Scenic beauty at tourism destinations must be preserved.	0.00%	0.00%	3.33%	6.67%	20.00%	70.00%
Scenic beauty creates a sense of awe within me.	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	10.00%	20.00%	70.00%
Beauty has intrinsic value.	0.00%	0.00%	3.33%	6.67%	23.33%	66.67%
When I see a beautiful landscape, my full attention is to absorbed by it.	0.00%	3.33%	5.00%	5.00%	23.33%	63.33%
A area's scenic beauty is an essential component of an enjoyable travel experience.	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1.67%	30.00%	68.33%
The opportunity to enjoy the beauty of nature is essential to all my travel experiences.	0.00%	1.67%	1.67%	10.00%	26.67%	60.00%

Table 3. Tourists attitudes towards aesthetics and scenic beauty

Tourists are attracted by the beauty and uniqueness that a country offers. Nature attracts the attention and for most tourists is essential for the accomplishment of the travel experience.

Do you agree with the following statements about travel and tourism?	Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Somewhat disagree 3	Somewhat agree 4	Agree 5	Strongly agree 6
The local people's opinions must be considered in the tourism planning process.	0.00%	0.00%	3.33%	6.67%	26.67%	63.33%
Tourism must contribute to the integrity of the local community.	0.00%	1.67%	3.33%	16.67%	20.00%	58.33%
Tourism must build cultural pride within the local community.	0.00%	1.67%	10.00%	15.00%	23.33%	50.00%
Hiring local people must be a priority of tourism-related business.	0.00%	0.00%	3.33%	11.67%	23.33%	61.67%
The local people must have the opportunity to manage tourism in their region.	0.00%	0.00%	3.33%	20.00%	30.00%	46.67%
I desire the revenue from tourism to go into the hands of the local people.	0.00%	1.67%	3.33%	10.00%	30.00%	55.00%
I am concerned with wether or not my visit impacts the local community.	1.67%	3.33%	5.00%	13.33%	36.67%	40.00%

Table 4. Tourists attitudes towards the well-being of local people

The major part of tourist's strongly agrees or agrees that local people must be taken into consideration when planning a process and they should be the first to benefit financially and in terms of opportunities.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Tourism development is strongly supported by the actual decision makers in Shkodra city but also in Albania it is considered as a priority industry. In terms of local development I think it is time to start planning before than to start building and than directing forces toward the market. Considering the advantages that a sustainable development bring I strongly support the idea of including geotourism in the process of strategic planning for the

sustainable tourism development which is going on in Shkodra. From the literature review and next considering potentials that Shkodra has toward meeting the criteria of geotourism and supported by the results of the questionnaires there exists the opportunity to start thinking about geotourism as a niche segment of potentials tourists. Considering that most tourists had positive attitudes toward the dimensions of geotourism and taking into consideration that 80% of these tourists would like to come back and visit Shkodra, it supports and gives a positive feedback to the research question of my study. Further studies are needed to create a more complex idea of the possibility of adapting and attracting geotourists.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Boley, Bertram (2009). *Geotourism in the crown of the continent: Developing and testing the geotourism survey instrument*. University of montan. Missoula, MT.
2. Dibra, Mithat (2000); *Shkodra guide-album*; Idromeno National Geographic Center for Sustainable Destinations; *Geotourism principles*; retrieved January 12, 2011, from www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable/index.html
3. National Geographic Center for Sustainable Destinations; *About Geotourism*; retrieved January 13, 2011, from www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable/
4. Parruca, Bilal (2002); *Shkodra bastion i qyteterimit shqiptar*; Rozafat
5. www.unwto.org accessed February 15, 2011
6. www.wttc.org accessed February 10, 2011