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TOURISM DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY OF RURAL AREAS

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Abstract: Sustainable tourism may be regarded most basically as the application of the sustainable development idea to the tourism sector. Essentially, sustainable tourism involves the minimization of negative impacts and the maximization of positive impacts. The development of sustainable rural tourism has become a priority of national tourism policies and / or strategies in many countries. Ecotourism is the ideal model of sustainable tourism. It involves an emphasis on nature- based attractions, educational interactions with these attractions and management practices that make every reasonable effort to achieve environmentally and socio-culturally sustainable outcomes. Ecotourism is advanced as a strategy to help address economic and social problems in local communities and as an appropriate and effective tool of environmental conservation. Each approach has its strengths and weaknesses, depending on circumstances typical for the particular case and type of tourism that is being developed. Impact analysis, increased community awareness and involvement in the decision – making process are the key future issues that must be addressed. For the credibility of ecotourism as the conscience of sustainable tourism to be established and maintained, it is necessary to implement a modified comprehensive ecotourism model that embraces both hard and soft ecotourism. In according to Tourism Development Strategy of Albania, the tourism must be developed in a way that is sustainable: culturally, socially, environmentally and economically. Referring to the analysis of the present situation and development toward the future for Korca's rural areas, ecotourism and familiar tourism are most appropriate types.

Key words: sustainable tourism, ecotourism, nature preservation, rural tourism.

INTRODUCTION

Destinations are complex places in which the pursuit of sustainable is critically influenced by factors such as cultural landscape, scale, boundaries, absolute and relative location and the fact that all destinations are positioned within and influenced by the other destinations. The broad context model of destination development scenarios provides a framework for identifying the current status of a destination as well as possible future scenarios with regard to sustainability. Destination managers can employ visitor management strategies to affect positive sustainability outcomes. Visitation facilitates strategies based on fixed or flexible carrying capacities, depending on whether they apply to absolute numbers or rates of growth. Establishment of links between the community, tourism businesses and local authorities, as well as between representatives of the host community and national organizations is one of the key

issues in developing the future sustainable rural tourism. But, a clear understanding of the concept of sustainability and ability to learn from the experience of others, must be involve in formulation and implementation of national strategy for rural development.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND ECOTOURISM- THE CONSCIENCE OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The idea of sustainable tourism has emerged as a priority objective of the global tourism sector since the mid – 1990s. The need for the economic revival of rural areas, combined with the growing emphasis on sustainability, has created e new challenge for tourism as a potential means of achieving these two political goals. The development of tourism rural is a priority of national tourism strategies in many countries. National governments adopt different approach to ensuring that tourism is being developed in a sustainable manner. In states with a lower lever of intervention

the development of sustainable of rural tourism has become a priority of national tourism policies. In democracies with a higher level of government intervention, national governments undertake a more active role in ensuring that tourism is developed in a sustainable manner. But there is a question, whether the national strategies for rural tourism development actually lead to sustainability within these areas.. Sustainable tourism must be regarded as an “adaptive paradigm” that accommodates both weak and strong interpretations of the sustainable development idea.

Weak sustainable tourism strategies, on one side of planning/ management spectrum, apply to extensively modified environments such as the inner city where the absence of undisturbed natural habitat makes the protection of the latter irrelevant and extremely high densities of tourism activity are not necessarily associated with environmental or social stress. Large resort hotels and theme parks are modes of tourism that could be appropriate in weak sustainable tourism strategies. On the other side of the spectrum with strong sustainable tourism strategies which regarded as relevant in relatively undisturbed natural or cultural settings where even a small increase in tourism – related activity could result in unacceptable environment or socio-cultural costs. Discussions of sustainable tourism generally ignore or downplay the issue of financial sustainability (as opposed to economic sustainability), even though a tourism product that is not financially viable will not survive, no matter how sustainable it is from an environmental or socio-cultural standpoint. All sustainable tourism strategies must be formulated within the financial capabilities of managing body, which can substantially constrain the scope of these strategies.

Today, ecotourism is the conscience of sustainable tourism.” Ecotourism is a form of tourism that fosters learning experiences and appreciation of natural environment, or some component within its associated

cultural context. It has the appearance of being environmentally and socio – culturally sustainable, preferably in a way that enhances the cultural recourse base of the destination and promotes the viability of the operation (Weaver)”.

Ecotourism is advanced as a strategy to help address economic and social problems in local communities and as an appropriate and effective tool of environmental conservation. Inskeep's model Action Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development provides the framework for the evaluation of the strategy. According this model, two groups of characteristics of strategy for rural tourism development can be identified: positive features that may lead to sustainability and negative feature that may create obstacles to sustainability.

~ *The first group* of characteristics relates to those elements of strategy that comply with the requirements of Inskeep's model and may thus lead to sustainability. These include:

- The involvement of, and collaboration with national institutions responsible for environmental protection in the process of formulating the strategy.
- The identification of tourism activities within rural areas that preserve their environmental and cultural heritage.
- Support for lower levels of government to develop their development strategies consistent with the national strategy
- The inclusion of tourism in land use planning
- The development of public consultation techniques in order to involve various stakeholders in making decisions related to rural tourism development.

~ *The second group* of characteristics relates to other elements of the model, are creating possible obstacles to sustainable. These include:

- Lack of research into the environment, cultural and economic effects of rural tourism development prior to the choice of areas where rural tourism is to be developed,

- Lack of development of models for appropriate levels of tourism development in rural areas (e.g. carrying capacities) and sustainable economic indicators

- Lack of standards and regulations for environmental and cultural impact assessment, monitoring and auditing of existing and proposed tourism development projects

- Lack of involvement of local communities and all providers of tourism services in making decisions related to rural tourism development

- Lack of educational and awareness programs which would sensitize people to the issues of sustainable rural development (the emphasis is placed on the economic effects of rural tourism development)

Local communities require linking the economic benefits of ecotourism to the conservation of the natural environment. Linking the economic benefits of ecotourism to conservation helps to ensure that this interdependency is taken account in the planning and management of ecotourism. There are a number of ways in which this linkage can be strengthened. Firstly, one of the problems that has been in ecotourism initiatives in the past is that the economic benefits of ecotourism do not stay in the local area but are appropriated by outside interest, including tourism operators and governments. Ensuring that ecotourism providers purchase their inputs from local suppliers and employ local people can ease this situation. Secondly, ensuring that the economic benefits are spread widely within the local community can also enhance the linkage between the economic benefits of ecotourism and its conservation objectives. There is some evidence that local communities are more likely to adopt positive attitudes towards the conservation of local environments if they receive a significant share of the ecotourism – related benefits derived from them. The direct employment of local people as tour guides, park rangers and conservation project workers might be a particularly appropriate way of achieving this outcome.

TOURISM POTENTIALS OF KORCA'S RURAL AREAS ARE INPUTS OF EFFECTIVE TOURISM STRATEGY

There is a national strategy of Albania, which carried out by the Ministry of Territory Adjustment and Tourism with technical and financial support of Federal Republic of Germany, represented by the Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development. Consulting body is the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ).

The directions put forward in strategy aim at assuring that Albania highly maximizes the sectors potential and grows tourism in a way that is sustainable: culturally, socially, environmentally and economically.

The tourism strategy will therefore: assist the sector to manage growth in a way that ensures long – term sustainability; provide ways manage conflicts between increasing tourism growth and environmental, social and cultural values that are important to Albania and its visitors; reduce overlaps and gaps within the sector; make it easier for operators and investors to do business in the sector; secure commitment and funding to tourism from central and local government; provide cohesion to strategic directions and strategies.

In according to Tourism Development Strategy, vision of Albania is” *Albania is recognized as a tourism destination at the Mediterranean coast and has a competitive position in the international tourism market; the contribution of the tourism sector to the GDP is significant; sustainability and awareness for environment issues are major part of the tourism development strategy*”

The success of this strategy lies on the partnership of the main actors of tourism sector. The mission of the tourism partners is:

~ *Welcome the guest* and therefore understand hospitality and high quality of service as the most important elements within the tourism product.

~ *Protect* and even develop actively the environment.

~ *Support the culture*

Partners should be assured, that through co-ordination of their individual business strategies towards the mission, the vision would be realized.

Based on the survey and analyzing of the country's tourist potential as well as other factors that influence tourism in Albania, the following types of tourism can be considered the main tourism products of Albania: Sun and Beach Tourism; Special Interest Tourism; Urban Tourism/ Business and Conference Tourism.

National Strategy of Development Tourism is adopted for development of tourism sector in Korca's region. Analysis of the present situation focused on tourism potentials (city, mountains, village nature, culture etc); tourism supply (hotel, private rooms, sports, tourism agencies etc.); demand tourism (number of guests, overnights, origins etc); competitive neighboring regions and SWOT analysis.

Korca region is divided in three areas: lakes areas; mountains areas and National Parks. Mountains areas are in the center of management of tourist potentials. Development Potentials are: rich biodiversity at the mountain areas with unique flora and fauna; unspoiled nature and beautiful scenery in some areas; cultural and historical sites of the city and to some villages; still active traditional life-styles are factors contributing to the rural atmosphere.

A growing demand for rural tourism is perceived as an *opportunity* for further development of this sector. International aid, in terms of providing funds for training, consultancy and the formulation of a comprehensive national strategy for rural tourism development is also considered to be opportunities. The others opportunities are: attractive nature and landscape with mountains, forests and the two big lakes, National Parks and protected areas, good air, mild climate in summer, several places of interest like caves, historic places, potential for sport activities (skiing in Dardha and Voskopoja), fishing in lakes, mountain biking; local cultural and religious

events; close to the source market of Macedonia.

But there are many *weaknesses* related mainly to the lack of investment capital for rural facilities in order to meet customer's needs. It is also stressed that some villages lacked the appropriate technical infrastructure (e.g. roads, telecommunications) and farmers lacked knowledge on how to manage or market their farms to attract tourism, problem with the service – very few knowledge about the needs and wishes of guests and of foreign languages, not enough activities like courses, guided tours, sport activities; bad road signage (to find the villages and attractions) and no professional marketing. Limited entrepreneurial experience, lack of community involvement, cooperation and coordination of actions at rural tourism development, are identified as weakness.

Most serious problems are threats of these areas: destruction of the forests and landscape by uncontrolled tree cutting; uncontrolled hunting endangers the fauna; fishing with dynamite of the endemic fish species in the lakes; competitions of neighboring regions and countries with better standards; relatively high prices compared to competitive regions and countries – no marketable products.

- **In Albania**, in according to the data, number of foreign tourists was 900 000. So, had an increase nearly 35% compared the last year.

- In according to World Travel & Tourism Council, the contribution of tourism to Albanian GDP was 3.8 % (2006) and for 2007 -2013 will be a increase nearly 7.5 %

- The buxhet of Tourism Ministry for the investments to the cultural heritage was nearly 4.2 million euro, for 2005 – 2007. Projects for the development of the religious tourism will be with 1.23 million euro.

There are some villages in Korca, which have got tourism potentials, but they have need for the rural strategy of tourism development.

Vithkuq - is the mountain village with its virgin beauty nature and very interesting history and legends. Vithkuq is surrounded

by the mountains and hills totally covered with trees and bushes and forests of beech, oak and pine. The mountain tea leaves and different medical herbals can be found too. The fauna in these surroundings is rich with wild beasts like bear, wolf, fox, deer, hare, wild cat and birds. The climate is mountainous, but it is a very curative and relaxing climate in every season. Vithkuq is an historical treasure. There are a lot of historical monuments, events and well known people which goes beyond the measures of a village. Even not explored enough, it dated as an inhabited center form the first period of Iron till the II Century B.C.

The most important monuments of the village are the churches. The first church in Vithkuq was built on 1162, which is Saint Atanas. Important as an historical and religious monument, is the church of Saint Peter, built on 18th century, around 1764-1773, that has magnificent frescos with about 2000 paintings. It is important to be mentioned that on this Monastery had been a famous library with books that were printed on the printing shop in Voskopoja. On the side of Saint Peter there is another church of a special nature, Kozma Damianoj, where people preserve the skeletons of dead people. Vithkuq is mentioned for the monuments of nature such as Linden of Saint Peter and Oak of Saint Mihal.

Hospitality, generosity and affections is the atmosphere that inhabitants offer to the guests. The characteristic costumes for man and women are very beautiful. Vithkuqi's women knit very good and with finesse the wool for clothes rugs and blankets.

Voskopoja – "It is safe that there is no town on earth, indeed no single location, that is as bound up with the history, identity, and development of the Balkan, as Voskopoja"- Author unknown. The old city strategy.

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of Voskopoja (Moskopoli, as it was formerly called) is founded around the XVI Century. In 1744, was established Academy of Voskopoja transformed in a very important center for the development of the culture and didactic thoughts. The first churches were constructed in the 17 century as the medieval Cathedral of Saint Maria, Church of Saint John, and Church of Saint Athanas etc. The number arrives on 24; nowadays only 8 could be visited.

Liqenas – It has got unique beauty and is rich in historical values and treasures. The Saint Mary Church of the 14-th century on the Malingrad Island is well known for its murals of high artistic value. There are old churches, dating from the 13 – 14 century. Every year the local population organized the activity "Culture of Lakes" to promote the culture of the villages bordering the lake. The region is rich in folk values, traditions, and customs. Liqenas has got natural treasures as Prespa's National Park with an area of 27750 ha. It is the largest park in the country and the only one to manage several ecosystems, such as water, agricultural forest. There are about 1500 types of plants in Prespa's National Park, including aromatic, coloring, oil-producing, curative and honey- bee ones. Maligradi's island is a unique natural and cultural beauty. A church was built on the island, within a cave, in 14 century (Saint Mary Church). The fauna of this zone is rich, including rare birds like the white and curly Pelicanus Crispus.

These villages have possibilities to accommodate tourists. The local restaurant offer local food to the visitors. They are small and plain but the food is delicious.

There are natural and historical treasures in the other villages of region's Korca too, but is important that these areas to develop the tourism in according to tourism's