

## **COMMUNITY - BASED TOURISM: AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM IN ALBANIA**

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### **Abstract**

*Tourism is described as a 'smoke-free industry' where virtually all communities can be practically developed; a low-tech industry that does not require high capital investment or high skilled workers; and almost every community possesses some kind of tourist, natural, ethno-cultural and / or historical attractions. The development of tourism in rural areas is popular in search of ways to escape from the negative spiral of agricultural decline and depopulation, being considered one of the most promising sectors for job opportunities and regional economic development. In an era where nostalgia, search for authenticity and intact nature, as well as the need for action space, are important trends in tourist demand, rural areas are becoming increasingly popular tourist destinations. The purpose of the study is to explore community-based tourism as an instrument for the sustainable development of rural tourism. In many cases, the developments in the market led by recreation and tourism have generated negative impacts on host communities, and consequently on tourism income. Rural areas may be more vulnerable in this regard. To avoid these negative impacts are searching for new concepts of tourism development. These include, for example, soft tourism, green tourism and community development that tend to highlight small-scale and locally-based developments. The basic*

*argument is that this kind of approach will lead to a more sustainable tourism development by helping to preserve the local identity against the effects of external pressures. Similarly, Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is generally related to development in poor, especially rural communities. This alternative of tourism development is gaining momentum. In this context the article focuses on the role of rural tourism and especially community-based tourism and opportunities for its development.*

*Keywords: Sustainable Development, Rural Tourism, Community, CBT, Albania*

## INTRODUCTION

### Tourism in rural areas

Mainly what we possess, is a lot of potential and an emerging infrastructure. However, there is still a long way to turn Albania's rural areas into tourist destinations that will attract tourists who want to discover other peoples and cultures, and transform them into competitive destinations in the national and international tourist market. Rural Spaces as a 'new' leisure area is a symbol of modernity, even if it does not directly reinforce agricultural income. It has become a background for new leisure activities, mainly due to the stimulus that comes from the high and wealthy social classes that have concentrated their wealth mainly in the commercial sector. Their activities have already convinced rural residents to change their way of life and to associate them in their part with the new tourism industry.

Although the initial effect of tourism has been to stimulate agriculture, by offering the meat market, milk production and other farms, in the long term, tourism tends to damage it. The reason is that the desire to build holiday homes and apartments in a commune, which has only a small amount of beneficial land, causes drastically rising land prices. This curbs farmers in buying land for agriculture because it is difficult to cope with the high costs of purchasing from the benefits of agriculture. Furthermore, landlords do not want to sell agricultural land to tenants because they want to speculate on land values.

Another difficulty comes from the demand of the international food market for standardized products largely determined by the globalized food industry. In addition to the fruits and vegetables of any region, most of the food is produced for national and international markets

It is clear that rural tourism in Albania affects agriculture in at least two ways: it causes a shortage of work and it causes a huge increase in prices. The impact of tourism development on agriculture is generally perceived as the best problem in the worst catastrophe, as tourism and

agriculture compete with each other over space use. If this does not lead to the complete destruction of agriculture, it depends on subsidies. With the creation of metropolitan areas, many farmers saw their land as "urban", which, though it may be taxed and the highest contributions or can be sold for construction, raising the value.

If rural development is to be achieved through tourism, then marketing should be geared to attracting more returning tourists, and more national visitors, and convince them to spend more time in. Such a change does not contradict the current attitude that visitors who spend more money per day offer greater net public revenue than those who spend more money in total but less per day.

For the community in rural areas, the issue is not just how much they spend, but how much remains in the local circulation. The best type of tourists to attract the prospect of an inner community is not necessarily the best type of tourists to draw from a national perspective. Tourists are heterogeneous social groups with homogeneous consumer characteristics. When they discover new destinations, they tend to look for something unusual, about what is unknown. The tourism industry, therefore, must constantly seek to diversify tourism products, but given the risk of replacing models of mutually beneficial behavioral traditions with homogenized "investor" order patterns.

Strategies need to be developed to attract more independent internal tourists who will stay longer and spend more on local goods and services. However, decentralization and more rigorous marketing will not be enough, local residents should be encouraged to cooperate in decentralization of decision-making (Healey 1997). The promotion of Albania's inland travel will function in the long term only if tourists, expecting to enjoy the natural splendor, the cultural attractions and unique characteristics of the Albanian communities, actually find them to be attractive. The promotion of Albania should emphasize cultural differences from other holiday destinations rather than constantly emphasizing a single emblematic element, such as religious village constructions (churches, mosques).

### **The features of rural tourism**

When focusing on rural tourism, we conclude three types of links that are essential for an innovative development.

1. Marketing and product development - these are the links within the tourism sector
2. Integration - the links between the tourism sector and other regional actors.
3. Innovation and market knowledge - connections with the outside world (cf. Caalders 1997).

How can such connections be fostered? To answer this question, it is important to take into account the specific nature of tourism as an economic sector and its impact on the region as a whole. Among the most important features of rural tourism we can mention:

- The tourist product differs from most of the other products consumed by the region itself. In the case of rural tourism, this often means that the region as a whole is considered as a attraction by visitors.
- The tourism product is partly made up of dreams and fantasies of its customers (Seaton and Bennett 1996) This means that a region may have a very different image for different groups of tourists. These groups will have different perceptions of the tourist product and various holiday experiences.
- Rural tourism is often characterized by a large number of relatively small entrepreneurs who produce together the regional product.
- There is a tension between successful tourism development (which means increasing the number of visitors) and the attractiveness of rural areas (including tranquility). This tension should be handled by tourism planners who on the one hand should maintain the unique character of the region if they want to succeed in the long term and on the other hand should protect the landscape as an important part of the touristic product.
- Tourism is a fragile industry, vulnerable to outside forces beyond the control of its suppliers. (Seaton and Bennett 1996).

### **Development of rural tourism**

Community development and bottom-up planning have become popular in the strategies for rural tourism development. The exploitation of the endogenous potential of the regions is of central importance in these concepts.

Tourism development in rural areas is popular in search of ways to escape from the negative spiral of agricultural decline and depopulation being considered one of the most promising sectors for job opportunities and regional economic development. In an era where nostalgia, search for authenticity and intact nature, as well as the need for useful space, are important trends in tourist demand, rural areas are becoming increasingly popular tourist destinations. The tourist market is still growing, and competition between destinations is also on the rise. Many remote rural areas have to compete not only with one another, but with cities as well as the village with the city (Bryant and Johnston 1992) for the benefit of visitors.

In this process of increasing competition, regions are under constant pressure to adjust their product to the needs and desires of the market. In many cases, developments in the market led by recreation and tourism have generated negative impacts on host communities,

and consequently on tourism income, e.g. uncontrolled tourism development can completely transform the existing regional physical and social structures: landscapes can be dominated by large hotels, buildings, local culture changes, and traditional employment sectors may lose the "resource struggle".

(Increase in land prices, water, food etc, migration of new employees). What will remain will be simply a standardized tourist site, whose attractions can easily be copied elsewhere: a product that has lost its unique character and can compete almost exclusively in price (Dietvorst 1996). Rural areas may be most vulnerable in this regard. On the other hand, if all rural areas are to focus on tourism development, this "may create a situation in which many regions will have to continue investing in tourism infrastructure, and not so much tourist facilities gaining competitive advantage, but only to survive" (Jenkins et al. 1998).

Such negative impacts have led to research into other concepts for tourism development through which these negative impacts can be avoided. These include, for example, soft tourism, sustainable tourism, green tourism and community development. These approaches tend to emphasize small-scale and locally-based developments. The underlying argument is that this kind of approach will lead to a more sustainable tourism development by helping to preserve the local identity against the effects of external pressures (tourism).

This alternative to tourism development is gaining momentum. However, there is a risk from the stereotyping of two development paths: 'good', small endogenous scale and community involvement in the development versus 'bad', large-scale, exogenous, market-led development. Much of the mix of these two existing types, and besides, the potential flaws and the weak elements of alternative approaches should not be ignored.

A top-down development focus can lead to a tourism development based solely on nostalgia. This could lead to the 'museumization' of the villages and a loss of dynamism. Exogenous influences should not be considered as threats but as a means of innovation. A clear picture of the world outside the region is necessary to be able to harmonize the regional product on the market, an aspect that often lacks rural tourism (Jenkins et al., 1998). What is needed, therefore, is an orientation towards rural development that can merge both dynamics and development, as well as preserving identity and sustainable development.

Tourism has promoted agriculture, directly or indirectly. However, this does not mean that rural residents have no problems. Conversely, despite relative profitability and independence from tourism, the future of agriculture in Albania is doubtful for three specific reasons.

**Firstly**, labor force has decreased and salaries are high - both are interrelated and both are influenced by tourism. Salaries in agriculture are much lower than in other sectors. It is no wonder, therefore, that it is difficult to find manpower. Mechanization has become a necessity as a result of this absence.

**Secondly**, like everywhere, it is impossible for a farmer to have an idea of supply and demand when he has to decide what to increase and to what extent. State intervention in agriculture is low - either in the form of guaranteed prices, either in the form of loans or other assistance. Mixed agriculture can be a way of reducing the price risk, but it does not solve the problem. Uncertainty is inherent in agriculture; Tourism is not the cause.

**Thirdly**, the younger generation does not want to work in agriculture. This fact is not particularly due to tourism. This is part of a much more general phenomenon - the decline in the prestige of agricultural labor, a decline that seems to be very visible in all South European countries. The inheritance system that gives equal rights to all boys and girls seems to play a role in the successful continuation of agriculture. However, inheritance conflicts seem to have little effect on the readiness to work the land. The land, however, is broken up into multiple divisions and subdivisions, which seriously complicates efficient spatial organization.

The consequences of tourism for agriculture are clearly not uniform. The argument is that we need to know much more about land characteristics and territorial organization, scale and time of agriculture, and salaries in all sectors before anyone can make any generalization.

### **National Strategies for the Development and Sustainability of Rural Tourism**

Structural changes in the global economy brought a small place of agriculture and forestry in rural areas. But economic benefits from tourism, combined with increased tourist demand and strong tourism promotion by the international tourism organizations, encouraged many rural areas to invest in tourism.

On one hand, this trend created an opportunity for those living in rural areas to produce and sell quality products to attract visitors and to develop rural tourism. On the other hand, it was clear that the uncontrolled development of rural tourism would bring about environmental and social impacts that would be a serious threat to the village. More and more the emphasis was on the need for development policies and management strategies that would guide the sustainability of rural tourism.

In countries where government intervention is at low levels, the development of sustainable rural tourism becomes a priority of national tourism policies. In countries where the

government's intervention is high, national governments play an active role in ensuring that tourism develops steadily.

*But the question raises whether national strategies for rural tourism development are currently conducive to sustainability in these areas?*

Researchers show that tourism is a factor of economic development and helps to improve living standards within rural areas. In order to return these destinations to tourist destinations, they need government support so that they can turn to sustainable tourism. Environmental problems related to tourism development need horizontal coordination (between different governmental departments at the national level) and vertical coordination (between national, regional and local levels), thus ensuring a sustainable development.

In different destinations, sustainable tourism is adopted in different ways. Depending on the purpose and interest these adoptions depend on whether focus is on a particular sustainability, e.g. environmental, social and economic sustainability: or on a combination of sustainability types such as ecological and social sustainability: or above all types of sustainability, it requires careful management of the entire process.

But what is the best practice of sustainability for economists may not be so in terms of social and environmental sustainability. However, a comparative model should be used, of sustainable tourism development, a model that analyzes all aspects of sustainable tourism development (environmental, economic, social, cultural and political sustainability). Inskeep's model is considered a suitable model for rural areas. According to him, the development of sustainable tourism is aimed at protecting the environment, improving the basic needs of people, promoting and improving the quality of life. Sustainable tourism focuses on the management of all resources in order to meet the economic and social needs while preserving cultural integrity, key ecological processes, biological diversity and lifestyle.

Based on this model, two sets of features of the rural tourism strategy are identified: the positive features that guide the sustainability and the negative features that bring obstacles to sustainability. Whether a bureaucracy will be driven only by economic development, then this strategy is not considered successful. If we do not aim at sustainability, we will have a fall in the number of tourist destinations. For our country this analysis is added to the fact that a low percentage are visited by rural areas.

An analysis of European experiences in the development of sustainable tourism shows that there is no universal rule for achieving success, as it depends on national, local and regional authorities. Each strategy implementation in rural destinations has its own strengths and weaknesses, depending on the typical conditions of particular cases and the type of tourism to be developed. Impact analysis, establishment of monitoring schemes, increased community



awareness and involvement of decision-making processes. These will also be the future goals of rural development. Creating close ties between the community, tourism business and local authorities is the key to the development of sustainable rural tourism in the future.

### **Community-Based Tourism CBT**

Scott (2015) notes, as Novelli (2016) did, in relation to tourism in general that promoting alternative types of tourism is a consequence of overlapping tourism and developing remote and remote areas with topics such as rural tourism, poor tourism, ecotourism, ethnic tourism and community-based tourism.

It can be assumed that any form of tourism may have its own types of influence on the shape and course of development and CBT is generally seen to have mostly positive results. In this context, the way in which CBT principles are developed, managed and expanded across the tourism sector is an indication of the level of impact that CBT may have on the tourism industry as a whole.

CBT can be a good start as Tamir (2015) argues that it can be practiced at minimal cost with maximum benefits and bring economic prosperity, environmental and cultural awareness as well as peace.

CBT has been associated with different definitions and meanings and the development of CBT can take a variety of development trajectories (Mtapuri & Giampiccoli 2014). However, the CBT is defined as a kind of tourism that is "managed and owned by the community, for the community, in order to enable visitors to increase their awareness and learn about the community and local ways of life" (George Nedelea & Antony 2007, Mtapuri & Giampiccoli 2013, Leksakundilok & Hirsch 2008:).

Cited in other words (George, Nedelea & Antony, 2007), CBT offers communities opportunities for participation and opportunities to make community-based conservation and development decisions.

These principles of ownership and management, and benefits to and from the community should be considered as the first and fundamental feature in CBT. In addition, CBT development does not necessarily require major investments, even if specific policies and legislation can affect its success or failure (Tresilian 2006)

In terms of deeper and comprehensive understanding of CBT, it has been argued that the CBT should reflect a kind of tourism that promotes a number of objectives related to conservation and development in its broader terms to include socio-economic and economic issues interrelated, including culture and environmental protection (Tamir 2015).



Tamir (2015) states that CBT participation and development empower local communities by increasing their knowledge, skills and confidence to manage their resources and take control of them; "If it is effective and successful, CBT can lead to sound economic development, cultural and environmental awareness, cross-cultural understanding and peace and sustainable development of the destination."

For Yoopetch (2015), CBT includes collaborative activities, social capital creation, and the redistribution of power, including four dimensions related to sustainable development, namely "economic sustainability, ecological sustainability, equal distribution of costs and benefits and good governance (Yoopetch 2015).

George, Nedelea & Antony (2007: 3) proposed CBT characteristics as follows: A community-based tourism project is a lucrative and sustainable activity that enhances the environment by adding value to the experience of locals and visitors.

- It directly involves the community - offering social and economic benefits.
- Its ultimate goal is to meet customer expectations without harming the interests of the community.
- It is driven by the market and must meet high standards in order to be sustainable.
- May be owned by private entrepreneurs, community groups and / or organizations. It should aim to educate, train, develop, encourage and utilize any human capacity and potential within the community to provide professional service.
- Must be operated within a business structure that adheres to governmental, financial, obligations, good working relationships, and sound management systems.
- All Business Plans should be reviewed to ensure that owners / organizations understand the opportunities, pitfalls and risks and show the long-term sustainability of the project.
- Environmental awareness and sustainability should be key priorities. It is the community's responsibility to maintain a clean and healthy environment.
- Community members are expected to show friendliness, honesty and professionalism among them as well as in their relationship with the visitor to ensure the integrity of the project.

### **Rural tourism in Albania: Is there a sustainable community-based tourism strategy?**

As a place of great diversity within not a wide area, Albania has a wealth of natural and cultural heritage. In addition to the sandy beach stretching mountain ranges, lakes, forests, and various wildlife, classical archeology, Byzantine and Ottoman architecture, folklore, customs and crafts. They all suggest the possibility of developing small tourist businesses in the country. But tourism infrastructure was limited (e.g. Albania 1998); Knowing the sensitivity to the heritage of

the country's natural and cultural resources has been expressed at the beginning of the post-communist government's commitment to sustainable forms of tourism development (Atkinson and Fisher 1992).

It should be acknowledged that "community based projects" are vital for rural areas not to be considered as poor areas. Sponsoring a large number of small projects for sustainable tourism in the Albanian village has been attempted by the UK, and other organizations, in some devastated villages in southern Albania such as Qeparo, and in the north of Albania near Shkodra. Tourism in such projects included plans to renovate abandoned homes using indigenous materials to stimulate and / or keep local handicraft skills. Local ownership is undoubtedly encouraged as a means of preserving values that have an impact on tourists.

Local social and economic sustainability has thus been a major priority of such schemes. The Southern project, for example, supported by the EU in order to help fill the vacuum of the initiative the Communists had left, empowering local people through community participants in developing and transferring the main economic skills in agriculture, tourism, finance and marketing. By helping to create new jobs for the resident population, the project also hopes to attract migrant workers back to the region. In this way, it was required to provide local leaders and NGOs with skills in public participation, thus communities had a focus on information, advice and resources that would ensure a solid basis for establishing mechanisms to assist the development of long-term partnerships within the region, country and Europe.

Encouraging community engagement and property development schemes that are now largely based on Albania's planning (Nientied 1998) has been limited by the legacy of almost half a centuries-old centralization from the leadership of the civil administration in the up-bottom direction, which gave local people little real opportunity to experience bottom-up development or little opportunity to actually participate in local decision-making. Past experience has given the wrong concepts of co-operation: any collective action is likely to be seen with skepticism as a return to communism and, in a failed economy, where interest itself dominates thinking. Resistance to co-operation was particularly characteristic of a village where mistrust towards foreigners and peasants was a major obstacle.

This was stated when collective economic activities, such as discussing the establishment of accommodation standards and tourism prices, which was seen by the villagers in terms of benefits that would be part of the community and in terms of spending (cost ) that would have the rest. It is not easy to understand that unified standards and prices will bring village benefits in terms of long-term tourism development through collective credibility and quality. The desire for short-term benefit is constrained by the desire for long-term benefit and the collective point of view (Holland 1998).

In such circumstances, "strong" institutional and organizational frameworks such as law and administration, and intangible and unforeseeable "soft" frameworks such as interpersonal bonds, loyalty, values, and networks are important in the accumulation of trust and economic development. Where faith is weak, as in Albania, people do not understand the productivity and other benefits that can be achieved through effective co-operation. Significant social integration is vital, and a condition for the sustainability of rural tourism initiatives.

Lack of trust between neighbors and any authority has created a vacuum in which the mafia has intervened, adding an institutional layer of "authority" between the state and society. The strength of its social structure, emphasizing the involvement of small groups, the avoidance of co-operation outside the group, and the intolerance of competition has characterized the post-communist, subconscious nature of Albanian society. For community development in an effort to empower local actors when organized crime has vetoed a part of country, raises issues of identity, participation, consensus and power by taking in a local context what 'Western' models cannot easily accommodate.

- Firstly, as a mean of reducing the negative effects of mass tourism, and as a more appropriate model for Albania's nature, the sustainability of the development of non-domestic tourism within the country, the "community-based tourism" as more appropriate in its development.
- Secondly, rural attractions will have to act as a fundamental resource for organized and sustainable tourism through small local enterprises, and to act as a tool for integrated rural development.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the increase in tourism marketing and efforts to "improve" the many aspects of the tourism industry, the massive coastal tourism continues to grow in absolute terms, and Albania still has an important role in the development of Mediterranean sun and sand tourism. Hypothesis about human capital surpluses suggests that tourism is a 'natural' employment sector for Albania.

Albania offers a potentially valuable supplement in global tourism. Ironically, the reputation and representation of the country (Hall 1999), as one of the poorest in Europe can actually act in its favor, offering a fun, entertaining tourist experience. Further, the Albanian diasporas, especially its North American components, represents a potentially lucrative market for those Albanian wishing to return to their origins.

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- Secondly, rural attractions will have to act as a fundamental resource for organized and sustainable tourism through small local enterprises, and to act as a tool for integrated rural development.
- Thirdly, while commercial incentives insist on the lack of local infrastructure in Albanian villages, the uncompressed environment has been a strong attraction for rural tourists, local residents involved in small scale rural development schemes will support them in the sense that tourism will be the tool that will bring about their local change and improvement, and in particular their infrastructure.

Our community models, as processes based on sustainable tourism development, appear very weak not to say negligible, within the context of the instability that Albania faced. There appears to be contradictions in Albania, among the highly structured frameworks that may drive unjust participation in the tourism development processes - a subdued workforce, a gloomy economy, family-based entrepreneurial activities, within a context volatility that has faded the effort to start a tourism industry, on a small scale in rural areas.

Community Based Tourism (CBT) is generally related to development in poor, especially rural communities, as meaningful social integration is vital and a condition for the sustainability of rural tourism initiatives.

The fact that the tourist product is made up of the products of many entrepreneurs and the fact that the rural tourism sector consists mainly of small enterprises makes the cooperation more and more important, therefore CBT is increasingly seen as the most appropriate alternative to tourism development rural.

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