

Tourism in Albania: A Local Authority Perspective - Shkodra's Case

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Abstract

Local authorities have many direct and indirect mechanisms at their disposal and responsibility to influence the development of tourism as they are providers of public goods and services, builders of public infrastructure, supervisory bodies of economic activities, responsible for economic development and accountable to the natural environment. Prior to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, mainly since the approval of Agenda 21, many local authorities have focused on the distinctive challenges of governance for sustainable development. This also applies to Albania.

In Shkodra (Albania), tourism is one of the many driving forces prompting the directions and opportunities for local development. The research question of this article is whether tourism can be sustainable, i.e. whether it can enhance the local sustainable development, in the context of the Local Agenda 21 process.

This article discusses the development of the tourism industry in Albania and Shkodra. It also calls for both local and national agencies, and respective stakeholders to support the Local Agenda 21 implementation by taking action in communities where tourism is an important sector in the process of economic development. The true proof of "sustainable tourism" will be the sustainable development of local communities which are tourist destinations as the time is right for more focus on this challenge.

Key words: *Agenda 21, local development, policy making, Shkodra (Albania), sustainable tourism*

INTRODUCTION

A principal challenge of local governance, both today and in decades ahead, is to manage external forces in order to develop the local economy so that the shared vision of the stakeholders, including local residents, can be achieved. In cities, towns and villages throughout the world, the key responsibility for this steering process rests with local governments and its diverse local authorities (Azoulay, 2002). Tourism is one of the many driving forces for the development of local economy.

Targeting Shkodra, one of the biggest cities in Northwest Albania as a case study, this article addresses issues associated with sustainable tourism, including policy making,

strategic planning, managing the private sector and other stakeholders (Shkodra's residents and interest groups). Other focuses of this article are (i) opportunities for tourism development, (ii) current and future challenges from a local perspective, and (iii) issues arising from the contribution of tourism to the economic development. This article provides, in general, a call for relevant stakeholders and the local tourism industry to join and support the Local Agenda 21 implementation in communities where tourism is a vital force for economic development.

The objectives of this article are to (i) provide a better understanding of the issues related to tourism development, (ii) identify approaches and mechanisms to explore how sustainable tourism and economic development in Albania can be balanced and how to make appropriate use of local resources, using Shkodra city as a case study, and (iii) draw conclusions and make recommendations for taking action in communities where tourism is a major development driver.

In this context, this study, based on the principles of sustainable development, draws attention to a range of very important issues regarding the development of tourism in Shkodra, for example, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluating the process of sustainable tourism development. The article examines the value of natural and human resources in Shkodra which contribute to create a unique ecosystem. This system provides great potential for sustainable tourism.

This article consists of six main sections. Sections One and Two include the introduction, research objectives and research methods. Section Three reviews the literature regarding sustainable tourism development from both academic and non-academic sources. This section also analyses (i) the current state of sustainable tourism development in Albania, (ii) challenges of and opportunities for sustainable tourism in Albania, and (iii) future directions. Section Four discusses the current state of sustainable tourism development in Shkodra, and challenges of and opportunities for sustainable tourism development in Shkodra as well as future directions. The article also draws a conclusion in Section Five that in the current social-cultural context, tourism in Shkodra is one of the important instruments for the local government to diffuse culture, discover natural resources and history. Tourism also helps with the creation of a network of positive relationships toward nature and humanity, which can be considered a peace instrument promoting the city and the Albanian North Region. The final section makes some recommendations on how local communities could achieve local sustainable tourism development.

RESEARCH METHOD

Firstly, this article analyses tourism in a broader context, in which tourism sustainability development is considered as a concept and as a theoretical framework. The focus is strategies for the development of the tourism industry in Albania, using Shkodra, one of the biggest cities in Albania and an important economic and cultural centre in the north of Albania (Berxholi and Nikolla, 2000).

This article started with an intensive desk review of scientific works from many individual researchers, such as Azoulay (2002), Gorzelak (2010), Haedrich (1993), Harris (2000), and Kurz (1998) from the German School of Tourism; and from Albanian researchers, such as Berxholi (2000), Doka (1996; 2005), Latifi (2009), and Uruci and Borici (2010). Non-academic sources were also reviewed. They are reports by the United Nations

Development Programme (UNDP), the International Council for Local Environment Initiatives (ICLE), the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the Albanian Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sport¹ (MoTCYS), the Institute of National Statistics of Albania (INSTAT), the Department for Strategy and Donor Coordination², the National Tourism Sector Strategy in Albania, and the local strategy council of Shkodra city. The field work was based in Shkodra. The desk review and field work were important as they help to establish the nature of the link between documents and processes. The materials collected were highly significant for the analysis of the relationship between global and local sustainable tourism development.

The data sources used to elaborate this study encompass the recently published materials and expert reports available in the tourism development in Albania, including national statistics for tourism via INSTAT statistical yearbook (2009-2010), and thematic statistical yearbook, data from Shkodra Regional Office of Statistics (2010), donor funded project reports (UNDP, European Union and Government of Albania, 2010), reports by EU and regional specialists (Bailey and de Propriis, 2006), publications from the Government of Albania (Department for Strategy and Donor Coordination, 2007), reports on National Tourism Strategy from the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports (MoTCYS), the World Bank and the United Nations' country reports (2010). Since information was from various sources, it was inevitable that certain discrepancies in data and reports would be identified. We avoided using data which could not be verified or drawing conclusions which may not be fully supported by reliable sources. Great care has been taken to understand why differences existed.

Three interviews were also carried out. The interviewees were a tourism manager in Shkodra city, a specialist from the MoTCYS and a specialist from the Department of Tourism at Shkodra Municipality. The interviewees were asked to bring with them any relevant information, reports, data, presentations, etc., to be discussed in an interactive manner during the interviews.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many countries consider tourism to be an important force for economic, cultural and social development. The tourism industry has the potential to generate foreign currency earnings, create employment, support development in various parts of the country, reduce the gaps in income and employment among regions, strengthen linkages among many sectors of the national economy and help to alleviate poverty (Basiuk, 2000). However, this standard view of the tourism industry does not give a complete picture of the potential contribution that tourism can provide to developing countries such as Albania.

Many less-developed countries have regarded tourism as an easy industry to develop, because it demands relatively low technology compared with many other industries, and

¹ The Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sport (MoTCYS) is the ministry responsible for tourism development in Albania. The Department of Tourism within the ministry is responsible for the implementation of the National Tourism Sector Strategy, the main strategic document for tourism development in Albania.

² The Department for Strategy and Donor Coordination (DSDC) is the most important department at the Council of Ministers in the Albania Government. DSDC acts as adviser to the Prime Minister to coordinate the implementation of sector strategies in Albania and the priorities of the Government with the donor's priorities. DSDC is responsible for the implementation of the National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI) and produce the NSDI annual reports.

skills which can be easily mastered. Unfortunately, as tourism worldwide has grown and become more sophisticated, high-value contributions to GDP by tourism have tended to become associated with higher technologies (Bull, 1995). When technical advances are applied to existing inputs or other resources, they enhance the productivity of the industry concerned and hence its contribution to GDP (Haedrich, 1993). Certainly, there will always be a place for applications of low-tech tourism, particularly whilst there are market segments which deliberately seek out the simple or natural life (Uruci and Borici, 2010).

In order to achieve sustainable tourism, it is important for countries to comprehensively and systematically address various issues relating to environmental protection (Azoulay, 2002). "Issues of policy-making, planning, management and the participation of the private sector and other stakeholders must be addressed in terms of opportunities" for action and possible constraints must be overcome by concerted efforts (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and The Pacific, 1999, Para. 2).

Agenda 21

Since the approval of Agenda 21 (1992), many local governments have focused on the unique challenges of governance for sustainable development. At the local level, sustainable development is achieved by directing local development activities to simultaneously achieve three objectives, namely (i) to increase local social welfare, (ii) to equitably distribute local economic wealth, and (iii) to enhance the integrity of local environment (World Summit on Sustainable Development, 2002).

Globalisation has created many challenges to governance which local authorities in different parts of the world have faced as it has gone beyond the national political and economic systems upon which different communities rely. These shared challenges of governance have prompted thousands of local authorities to "establish municipal international cooperation projects and to join international Local Government Organisations (LGOs) to advocate for local self-governance and control over the development process" (United Nation World Tourism Organisation, 2010, para. 3).

According to the United Nation World Tourism Organisation (2010), sustainable tourism is

tourism that leads to the management of all resources in such a way those economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural preservation, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems (p. 27).

Sustainable tourism is also defined as a process including activities taken to meet the needs of current tourists and host communities, while preserving resources to meet the future needs (International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, 1999a). Sustainable tourism means respecting the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserving their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance (Messina, 2009).

Sustainable Tourism Development

In the previous studies on tourism by Azoulay (2002), Becken and Hay (2007), Bull (1995), Gorzelak (2010), Haedrich (1993), Harris (2000), and Kurz (1998), and from Albanian researchers, such as Berxholi (2000), Doka (1996; 2005), Latifi (2009), Messina (2009), Troshani (2009), and Uruci and Borici (2010), the main obstacle is that each sector has its homogeneous products, and tourism is made up of heterogeneous products. Some issues are ecological protection from erosion, preservation of environment and landscape, and economic development activities related to the proximity of water, treatment and development of agro tourism activities, crafts and family tourism.

Tourism is vital for many local economies for the following reasons. The amount of money spent by tourists and the corporate taxes contributed by businesses in the tourism industry are significant. Tourism also provides opportunities for employment in support industries, for instance, transportation services, hotels, restaurants, bars, entertainment arcades, the hospitality industry and the resorts (Becken and Hay, 2007).

The development and success of tourism is closely linked with the quality of service provided. The quality of tourist services should be evaluated regularly to assess the level of customer satisfaction and reduce the gaps between customer expectations and perceptions of products consumed (Harris, 2000). Product and service quality in the tourism industry has become more and more important due to changing taste, preferences and behavior of tourists, and the increased competition in the current markets (Kurtz, 1998; Messina, 2009).

Sustainable tourism development requires strong cooperation among relevant stakeholders³ who are responsible for the local tourist destination. These parties must adopt both market and non-market instruments, such as voluntary agreements (actors voluntarily agree to take action, e.g. community based work), to implement a shared sustainable tourism development vision (Kandari and Chandra, 2009). They can initiate and implement rules and bylaws for private and public entities. They can establish the inventory of the main tourist sources of the local government agency, and the inventory of tourism business at the local level by capacitating the verification of sources according to the geographical location (Troshani, Oelfke and Keller, 2009). Local government is also responsible for coordinating the work of municipalities, commune and public entities, engaging in the development of tourism inside their territory for the protection, growth and utilisation of the tourism sources, and maximising the economic potential of tourism sources, in accordance to the principles of developing sustainable tourism. Without such a partnership, promotion of

sustainable development becomes a conflictive struggle between an industry which seeks to respond only to market forces and a public sector which, when accountable, acts to protect public goods and wealth for future generations (International Council on Local Environmental Initiatives, 1999b, p. 9).

³ Stakeholders are: local residents, local government officials working in the sector, managers, local businesses, tourist agencies, non-profit organizations working in tourism sector, etc.

Therefore, the key problem at this stage of the "sustainable tourism" debate is the creation of solid local partnerships. These local partnerships must be encouraged and reinforced by national governments and industry, and not challenged by "higher level" agreements (Gorzalak, 2010, p. 13). To succeed, local authorities and residents need to fully recognise the significant adverse impacts of tourism development and must be informed about opportunities for reduced-impact tourism development. Tourism businesses need to recognize and support the social conditions (e.g., security, public health) and the cultural and environmental wealth that make a community an attractive tourist destination (Xhindi and Heller, 2009).

Challenges of and Opportunities for Sustainable Tourism Development in Albania

The Current state of sustainable tourism development in Albania

Sustainable tourism is one of the main factors contributing to economic growth of Albania and one of the priorities of the Albanian government. To put this priority into action, Albania has chosen a complex pathway, which in the long term will enable the preservation of heritage, protection of archaeological and historical sites, natural resources, improving the lives of Albanian citizens and their livelihood in general (Civici, 2007). There is huge potential for tourist activities in many destinations in Albania. In order to establish a successful tourism industry, it requires a combination of activities and destinations that offers benefits to local residents (Doka, 2005).

Despite its large potential, the development of the tourism industry in Albania is conditioned by insufficient infrastructure and inefficient systems of solid waste treatment. Also, the protection and maintenance of places of environmental and cultural interest are not timely due to the delay and lack of funding. In addition, lack of training to upgrade skills of employees in both the public and the private sectors is another challenge for tourism development. Some other challenges are (i) lack of control over informal construction, (ii) ill-defined property rights, and (iii) weak enforcement of the legal framework, as a whole, and construction regulations, in particular. These create different sets of obstacles for tourism development. Specialised tourism products should be developed in a manner which can incorporate all types of tourism (World Bank, 2010).

Over the last seven years, according to the INSTAT, the tourism industry has contributed significantly to the export volume of the country, accounting for 77% of the total export volume (Institute of National Statistics of Albania, 2010). Revenue from tourism has been increasing substantially. Based on the sample surveys conducted quarterly at custom points in the country, the total number of visitors increased two times from 2000 to 2005 and increased further by 23% from 2005 to 2010 (Institute of National Statistics of Albania, 2010). The total revenues from tourism in 2006 increased by 18.2% compared to the figure in 2005, and increased to 35% in 2010 compared to the figure in 2009 (Ministry of Tourism Culture Youth and Sport, 2010). More than half of foreign visitors to Albania come from Kosovo and Macedonia (Ministry of Interior, 2010). The number of visitors from Western and Northern European countries, who are the main target groups in the long term, according to the tourism strategy, has remained stable. The number of people employed in the tourism industry was 138,000 in 2009 (Institute of National Statistics of Albania, 2010).

Opportunities for sustainable tourism development in Albania

The National Strategy for Development and Integration 2007-2013 (NSDI) emphasises the commitment of the Government of Albania to implement a comprehensive strategic planning framework for the tourism industry (Department for Strategy and Donor Coordination, 2007). The government strategy acknowledges that tourism is one of the important sectors which has the most potential to contribute to achieve sustainable economic growth (Department for Strategy and Donor Coordination, 2009a). The Albanian government has planned to promote different forms of special interest tourism, such as sun and sand tourism, cultural tourism, medical tourism, farm tourism, business tourism, etc. The government also emphasises the importance of an integrated approach to manage and preserve cultural and natural heritage (Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sport, 2010). The tourism strategic plan has set the target for the tourism industry of 1.25 million visitors and a contribution of 15% to the GDP by 2012 (Department for Strategy and Donor Coordination, 2007).

Within the above framework, tourism in Albania has been progressively developing, and has achieved the established targets. One of the recent accomplishments has been the approval of the new legal framework for tourism in May 2007⁴ which aims to develop a tourism industry meeting the international standards (Ministry of Justice, 2007). In 2006-2007, the government allocated a substantial budget to upgrade tourist signs and tourist information offices in some cities in order to facilitate the development of the tourism industry in Albania (Ministry of Tourism Culture Youth and Sport, 2010). Currently, given the strong focus on tourism, a whole network has been established to support the development of this industry and there is no longer a differentiated treatment between foreign and domestic tourist operators. These measures do not originate only from the policies of the Albanian national and local governments, but are also commitments undertaken by them in the framework of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union, where, apart from the legal instruments, economic instruments are considered as paramount to tourism development (European Commission, 2009). Tourism Development Fund (TDF) is one of the programs focusing on sustainable tourism which is administered by the National Agency of Tourism⁵ (NAT). It aims to promote and protect tourist destinations, cultural heritage values, and support other professional tourist activities. In addition to its share of the state budget, the TDF benefits from the revenue generated from the licenses issued by the Minister of Tourism, income from land leasing, and other possible donations (National Agency of Tourism, 2010). Financial assistance programs are designed to encourage entrepreneurs to engage in tourism activities. As the responsible agency, NAT has prepared such

⁴ In the framework of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement signed on 12 June 2006, as an important step towards the integration of Albania into the EU, one of the main objectives of this agreement is the approximation of the Albanian legislation with the "acquis communautaire" (The European bylaws) in all the subjects covered by the agreement, and tourism is one of them. One of the most important bylaws deriving from the law on tourism in the Decision of the Council of Ministers nr.601, date 12.9.2007, "On defining the standards, criteria, and rules of licensing, procedures for application, renewal, transfer and withdrawal of the license for the touristic agencies and operators". Its very first paragraph refers to the fulfillment of standards in tourism, according to the Global Code of Ethics in Tourism. One of the main principles of this Code is precisely the development of sustainable tourism, stipulated in Article 3 (Ministry of Justice, 2007).

⁵ The National Agency of Tourism has started its activity since the year 2005 with the name National Tourist Organisation. The present title is in operation from the year 2007. The institution is part of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports. The main objective of NAT is the implementation of the governmental policies in the branch of tourism (National Agency of Tourism, 2010).

programs, which can provide start-up businesses with grants, loans, tax concession, or a combination of these measures. In order to ensure successful implementation of these programs, supervisory mechanisms are put in place and administered by respective government bodies. These mechanisms include both legal and economic instruments (National Agency of Tourism, 2010).

Challenges and future directions for sustainable tourism development in Albania

Sustainable tourism development plan in Albania can be achieved only through coordination, co-operation and collaboration with all stakeholders who should focus on prosperity for the whole country. While there is a set of principles, guidelines and practices to support the tourism industry in Albania, relevant stakeholders still face several challenges. Engagement of the public sector at all levels in the process of preserving and developing cultural heritage sites is not the only challenge, but searching for financial sources required to develop tourism products is a real test. The private-public partnership (PPP), which encourages local businesses and the public sector to be joint venture partners where appropriate, will be one of the measures to ensure that tourism strategies and plans are comprehensive and linked to broader development plans, especially at the community level. Tourism operators and other stakeholders need to co-operate with one another to address such financial and operational challenges, and be innovative in developing and sustaining local tourism (Xhindi and Heller, 2009). Of importance is the co-operation between local tourism operators with those of neighbouring states and beyond. The national plan of tourism development focuses mainly on the importance of collaboration and learning from tourist experiences of neighbouring countries, especially those with the developed tourism industries such as Italy, Greece and Turkey. These countries are those with large tourism potential in the Mediterranean market, and present a great chance for sustainable development and modern tourism in Albania (Isaku, 2010).

SHKODRA'S CASE IN TOURISM FROM A LOCAL PROSPECTIVE

Apart from these central government institutions, a great deal of tourism development depends on the local government authorities. The local governments have the information and keep the inventory of tourist destinations within their jurisdiction and may offer their support to tourist enterprises operating in their area. At the same time, tourism should be seen as a local activity that contributes to a better understanding of places, people and their cultures (World Bank, 2010). National and regional policies are important, but local communities are the most aware and best able to respond to the best use of local resources.

Current State of Sustainable Tourism Development in Shkodra

Shkodra (or Shkodër), the largest city in the north of Albania (with estimated 87,500 inhabitants in 2008), is located on the east side of Shkodra Lake. Shkodra is one of the oldest cities in Albania, and it is also an important cultural and economic centre of the Shkodra Region (Regional Council of Shkodra, 2010). Its geographical position and abundant natural and human resources are promising for sustainable tourism development (Troshani, Oelfke and Keller, 2009).

It is evidenced that Shkodra Region has a very favourable geographical position, compared to all other regions in Albania with regard to the development of four major types of tourism (Xhindi, 2008):

- City tourism, based on the attractions offered by Shkodra itself, with its religious artefacts (from three different main religions practised in the city), cultural monuments, Rozafa Castle and 40 characteristic traditional houses;
- Mountain tourism, based on the attractions offered by Malesia e Madhe, in the villages of the Razem, Boge and Theth area, all of which are within 45 km of the city;
- Seaside tourism, based on the attractions offered by Velipoja Beach, only 30 km from the city;
- Lake tourism, based on the attractions of the villages of Shiroka and Zogaj, and the lake itself (Foundation for Local Autonomy and Governance, 2008).

The combination of Shkodra's geographical location, cultural and historical heritage, has attracted investment from many international agencies in several small projects in the Shkodra Region, apart from tourism development (Department for Strategy and Donor Coordination, 2009). Their presence and the pressure of the tourism market have recently made the private operators more active, and have increased their investment in interesting places, such as Thethi, Kelmendi, Razma, Velipoja, Shiroka, Zogej, etc. As a result of these interventions, a significant figure of 7,500 tourists visiting Theth was recorded in 2008 (German Technical Cooperation, 2009). There were 2,000-2,200 vehicles per day passing the custom point of Muriqan⁶ in 2010 (Ministry of Interior, 2010).

Challenges of and Opportunities for Sustainable Tourism Development in Shkodra

In Shkodra, the local authorities responsible for the region, cities, towns, villages, rural areas and attractions sites are becoming, to a greater extent, more involved in developing and managing many aspects of tourism. This is in line with trends towards decentralisation reform in Albania, i.e. giving more responsibility to local authorities. It also reflects the importance of community involvement in tourism through participation in tourism planning and related development processes (Xhindi and Heller, 2009).

Among local government authorities in Shkodra, the Regional Council⁷ is responsible for designing and implementing regional policies. The Regional Council of Shkodra has recently designed a regional development strategy. In its first draft, local tourism is defined as a key element that will contribute to increase in local income⁸. The strategy is not finalised, but there are concrete plans for tourism and the Regional Council is thinking seriously about it (Regional Council of Shkodra, 2010).

The Shkodra's draft tourism regional strategy is characterised by continuing geographic spread and diversification of destinations. The strategy integrates a wide range of qualitative developments: development of new forms of tourism related to nature, wildlife, rural areas and culture, and the introduction of new programmes in traditional package tours.

⁶ The custom point of Muriqan is one of the customs at Albania-Montenegro border.

⁷ The region of Shkodra comprised the Municipality of Shkodra and the surrounding communes.

⁸ This originated from the interview with the specialist from Department of Tourism at Shkodra Municipality.

The region of Shkodra, given its culture and natural attractions, forms a good basis for tourism planning at various local community levels including cities, towns, villages, resorts, rural areas and some specific tourist attractions. Planning at the local level includes comprehensive tourism area plans: urban tourism plans, and land use planning for tourist facilities and areas of attraction. Tourism also has the potential to bring economic benefits to host communities and help alleviate poverty and conserve natural and cultural assets. Special tourism programmes such as ecotourism and village and rural tourism are already carried out in the region of Shkodra (especially in the mountainous areas) (Hoti, 1999).

Although Shkodra has inherited an artisanship (in handicrafts) tradition⁹, “the lack of financial resources and a sound market infrastructure has limited its boost. Local stakeholders [private and financial sectors and civil society] and central authorities should, therefore, invest more in this sector which may simultaneously assist in the development of tourism” (Vurmo, 2006, p. 18). Such a situation should concern not only the structures of local government that make up the Regional Council, but requires serious involvement of experts and academia of Luigj Gurakuqi University¹⁰ in Shkodra¹¹. The actual challenge for tourism development in the region is research and development, education and training for tourism that normally take place at the local level. Other challenges are tourism marketing, provision of information services and other management functions. The development of tourism in Shkodra also requires a participatory approach which refers to the involvement of all sectors in the decision-making, planning and management processes. Local stakeholders comprise diverse groups with a broad range of interests to be taken into account. There is usually a variety of views about the forms of tourism in a particular area. Differences may need to be resolved, making it important to consider all values and opinions, relations among groups and what role they can play in tourism development.

Public-private sector cooperation is growing quite rapidly in Shkodra Region. Maintaining close cooperation, shared objectives and coordination among institutions and groups that are public, private, non-governmental organisations and other community representatives is essential for tourism development in Shkodra.

Future Directions for Sustainable Tourism Development in Shkodra

To ensure sustainable development of tourism in the region of Shkodra, the actual draft tourism strategy should be approved by the Council and the implementation process should start as early as possible.

A meaningful experience for tourists and a high level of tourist satisfaction should be the driving force for the local community and local government. This requires attention and participation of all stakeholders (Xhindi, 2008). However, it is a continuous process to achieve sustainable tourism which requires constant monitoring of the impact on the environment, economy, history and culture of the region. Sustainable tourism requires

⁹ In Shkodra, there are 341 women that produce artisanship and traditional handmade products (Shkodra Regional Office of Statistics, 2010).

¹⁰ The University “Luigj Gurakuqi” in Shkodra, is a regional university in Albania, and one of its well-known academic branches is “Tourism Marketing”.

¹¹ This was mentioned from the interview with the specialist from the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports.

careful planning and assessment of the impact on the local community and the outcomes. The local government in Shkodra should take responsibility for addressing the issues associated with sustainable development. They have to explore new opportunities for the tourism industry to develop its full potential in the long term. Local community in Shkodra will also have to participate in planning and assessment of parts of the city where culture and heritage are important aspects of ecotourism (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2001).

Spontaneous and unsustainable development should give space to local and regional master plans for tourism in Shkodra, which ought to achieve the orientation and maximisation of spending the public funds for the above mentioned aims. This would make tourism a strong instrument of local economic development in Shkodra (Uruci and Borici, 2010).

CONCLUSION

This article has discussed how the local tourism industry can be developed, and how different groups of stakeholders support the implementation of Local Agenda 21 in communities where tourism is an important development driver. The focus was the tourism industry in Shkodra in Albania. There are many opportunities for tourist activities in many places in Albania. In order for the tourism industry to fully develop, it is noted that activities and destinations that offer good prospects to local authorities should be incorporated in establishing a successful tourism sector. Sustainable tourism is one of the main forces for economic development in Albania and one of the priorities of the Albanian government.

Shkodra is already recognised as one of the largest regions of Albania and is the most important economic and cultural centre in the North of Albania. The Region of Shkodra is very rich in natural, historical and cultural resources, but local public policy-makers, planners and investors should be more active in the development of the tourism industry. They should also find ways to collaborate with all stakeholders to achieve the objectives. Once a good plan is in place, there are many opportunities for Shkodra to be a local and an international tourist destination.

Overall, this article has contributed to the development of theoretical and empirical aspects of tourism. It has provided information sources for future directions of research in tourism sustainable development in Albania and other countries in Eastern Europe. The forms of implementations vary according to their locations, the interests of the tourists and the tourism resources that are available in the target location. Regardless of form, however, there is certain positive impact of tourism which is expected to contribute to the development of tourism, for example, additional contribution to the economic growth of a community, generation of employment, maintenance of community stability, upgrading amenities in the area, and enabling local residents to have a sense of pride and local identity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Some recommendations are made based on the findings in the previous sections.

Firstly, tourism is one of the many sectors influencing the directions and options for local development. The local government plays the main role in the steering process of

tourism development. However, sustainable development is not a task of any single individual or institute. Thus, cooperation among relevant stakeholders would certainly contribute to achieving sustainable tourism in accordance with Agenda 21.

Secondly, local authorities in Albania should take greater leadership role to work with other stakeholders to minimise or eliminate the negative impact on tourism and to increase the positive contribution of tourism activities in increasing the livelihood of local residents.

In order to achieve sustainable tourism, it is necessary for Albania to address various issues arising from the operations of the tourism sector in a comprehensive and systematic manner. These issues, such as decision making, strategic planning, engaging and managing the private sector, should be included in the country's development agenda.

Thirdly, the private-public partnership (PPP) should be one of the mechanisms to ensure that tourism strategies and plans are amalgamated and linked to broader development plans of the country, especially at the community level (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2001).

Finally, the strategic plans for sustainable tourism development should include the following policy instruments which are proposed by the Department for Strategy and Donor Coordination (2007):

- Implementation of the completed legal framework in tourism;
- Effective and efficient engagement of both the public and private sectors in order to materialise the vision and strategic objectives for development;
- Infrastructure development, i.e. development of land, water and air transport;
- Effective and efficient management of solid waste systems and wastewater treatment systems;
- Upgrading telecommunications systems and the Internet;
- Review and establishment of standards for land use plans, especially design for areas with potential for tourism development;
- Setting a clear legal framework for ownership, i.e. one of the preconditions for developing tourism and creating sustainability in tourism development investments is to clarify as soon as possible legal resolution of ownership of land and facilities;
- Increasing in public and private funding in order to preserve and maintain natural and cultural assets;
- Provision of heritage preservation requirements;
- Developing and supporting financially private stewardship programs to protect cultural heritage and green space;
- Provision of tax incentive to property owners who exercise sustainable development practices;
- Effective and efficient management of tax revenue from tourism activities and development fees to support construction and maintenance of the necessary infrastructure;
- Provision of training in order to develop a pool of skilled labour force for the tourism industry.

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