

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

Alda GASPARI PhD student

alda\_gaspari@yahoo.com

Manjola TAVANXHIU PhD student

manjola-tavanxhiu@hotmail.com

**Abstract**

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

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

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

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

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

It generates higher incomes. The tourism sector is an important source for employment. In addition the development of tourism is accompanied by an improved structure with a lot of investments in roads, water and sewerage systems, telecommunications, etc. These investments improve the living standards for the local population. Tourism generates higher benefits as mentioned above but exists another side of the coin, not a positive one. Naturally, everyone can ask: what are the risks to this growing and developing industry? As we know, tourism development is associated with consumption of existing resources such as energy, water, oil which are limited. Transition towards market economy is accompanied by a total lack of environmental assessment and biodiversity. Tourism is putting pressure on ecosystems, so inappropriate constructions, massive cutting of forests, taking sand from the seas and rivers, uncontrolled hunting, different waste dumped at water is bringing irrevocable consequences to the environment. These consequences are erosion, deforestation, disappearance of habitats

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

#### PROFILE OF THE CITY

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

directions: Firstly rehabilitation and development of historical values of the city and secondly in their tourism promotion.

#### Characteristics of Sustainable Tourism

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

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

- **Authenticity**

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

- **Destination Assets**

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

- **Places with historical value**

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

The clock Town

The museum house of Kristoforidhi

Etnografic Museum

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

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

The monastery of Saint John Vladimir, Nazaresha Mosque

- **Places with natural values**

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

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

Llixha (thermal Bath area with curative values)

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

- **Sustainable Tourism is informatory**

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

#### SWOT ANALYSIS FOR ELBASAN CITY

##### STRENGTHS

- Favorable geographical position as an arterial center for road transport.
- Strong historical & cultural resources around the city with high potential for the development of historical, cultural tourism
- Considerable spaces in derelict economic areas that

could be recuperated for other functions.

- Abundant vacant areas .
- Large green areas are still existing.Existence of pine forests that support the city microclimate.

#### WEAKNESSES

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

Poor promotion of any competitive advantage at ational levels.

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

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

Neglect of historical heritage and inability to promote ctual resources.

Poor quality of offered services.

Deforested green areas.

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

#### OPPORTUNITIES

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

#### THREATS

- Extensive pollution ,dated from heavy industry.

- National tourism strategy still dysfunctional
- Poor coordination between central and local institutions in implementing different strategies.
- Lack of municipal competencies on environment issues.
- Non integrated regional tourism.
- Low levels of foreign investments.

#### Conclusions & Recommendations

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

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

#### References

- World Tourism Organization “*Guide for Local Authorities on Developing Sustainable Tourism*”. WTO, Madrid, 1998.
- Elbasan Municipality “City of Elbasan ,development strategy, 2006.
- Elbasan Municipality “Passages ,an administrative overlook of the city, 2008.
- United Nations”Managing sustainable tourism development”,ESCAP TOURISM Review No 22
- Ashley, C (1998) ‘Tourism, Communities and National Policy’ Development Policy Review, Vol. 16 (1998)
- Frederico Neto (2003) Economic and Social affairs” A new approach to Sustainable Tourism Development,Moving beyond Environment protection”,ST/ESA/2003/DP/29,DESA Disscusion paper No 29