

ARTISANSHIP AS AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF TOURISM OFFER

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This article will identify the role and importance of development of artisanship sector in Albania and especially in Shkodra region. Taking in consideration a lot of natural resources that Shkodra with the relation to tourism development this article gives an evidence of the enriching of tourism offer with artisanship products. In this article the research work has been focused on tourists that visit Shkodra region and artisanship businesses bringing an evidence the main problems hindering the development of their activities and facing elements of tourism offer including artisan products as part of touristic offer.

1. Handicraft and tourism

Every year Shkodra provides for 30 thousand masks to the traditional Venice Carnival. Since five years the product of this Albanian business are among the most sought after due to the artisan technique which has disappeared from the Venetian market of masks. Edmond Angoni, the owner, recalls returning to Albania to establish the business that with its charm and mastery of the hand works competes in the market of the city with the most ancient tradition of carnivals. This is a good example that how a component of the handicraft helps the tourism development, turning into a big attraction.

Tourism is the number one industry of the 21st century and handicraft is one of the businesses with the quickest growth rate. Together they form a powerful and logical combination. Handicraft is an integrated part of the total experience that a tourist gains from a certain country. A qualitative souvenir brought home by a tourist after a wonderful holiday experience acquires a continuous power generating good memories, and also arouses the interest of others to visit that special destination. But the link between tourism and handicraft is yet to be explored, understood, and developed. This has led to a potential loss of income and the loss of the possibilities of creating new employment positions. Traditional handicrafts, be them for utilitary or artistic purposes, represent a much valuable expression of culture, a "self-confident" capital which is important especially for the developing countries. Reinstating the hand work is important also for many developed countries where often the quality of life is under threat by excessive industrial standardization. Artisans not only preserve the cultural legacy, they also enrich and adjust this legacy to the contemporary needs of societies.

The tourism, which links individuals and human communities, and through them cultures and civilizations, plays an important role in facilitating dialogue between different cultures. It also has the ability to help world citizens to better go along with each-other, hence contributes in building peace of mind of men and women, if we were to quote the UNESCO Constitution.

The preservation of cultural and natural legacies and bringing it closer to everybody makes cultures and civilizations widely recognizable by improving the conditions of everyday living and by reducing poverty, it is what defines the sustainability of tourism development.

Social and cultural impacts of tourism in host countries were so analyzed from the international community in the

December 1976 World Bank – UNESCO workshop for policy-makers held in Washington. Since then, the tourism industry has developed at a fantastic pace while a greater stress is given to the cultural dimension of development. In line with abandoning "massive tourism" in favour of cultural or eco-tourism, we have noticed the increase of the drive to promote non-physical cultural legacy and the protection of cultural diversity as illustrated by two recent international conventions, the first on the protection of non-physical legacy by the UNESCO General Assembly on 2003 and the second is the "Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions" of 2005.

2. Establishing access in the tourism market

As mentioned earlier there is a clear need for physical markets where artisans can display and sell their projects. These artisan markets are not supposed to be very small, bazaar-type, such as the Kruja one. They might be small and nice huts such as those of Butrinti National park. It is important that the location of these centers to be near touristic destinations or near the roads leading to them. Tirana, the country capital, has no such a focal point for artisans. There are some shops in the Old Bazaar area but there is no touristic area for foreigners to find real hand-made products. This would be a great advantage for Tirana artisans but also for those of the adjacent cities to have at least a small area somewhere near the center of the capital; this would be an added value also for Tirana itself.

This idea requires great efforts to be implemented but can be achieved through some small actions. It is common practice for international museums to have their own gift shops. Though in Albania few museums are very much frequented, many tourists visit them. About 60,000 tourists visited Butrint Museum last year. If only 10% of visitors would have found a product related to the museum and would have bought it, this would have meant 6,000 sold products. While other museums would be required to buy artisan products to sell into their premises, in Butrint this is easier because it has an artisan shop supported by Butrinti Foundation. Currently Butrint is one of the cases where an artisan area has created and trained its own artisan group producing works based on Butrint models.

The same thing could be accomplished for many museums and parks all around Albania, especially in places where artisans live nearby. The ethnographic museums of Kruja, Berat and Gjirokastra, Onufri and Shkodra Museum would require only a small budget and the cooperation with an artisans' association to meet this objective. The castles and

archaeological areas would follow suit later. 18,000 tourists visited the Gjirokastra Castle on 2009; 17,000 visited the Rozafa Castle in Shkodra. If they would have had an artisan shop of their own, the majority of the tourists would have spent their money in artisan products. We come to this conclusion because the questionnaires with tourists in Gjirokastra (from UNDP and GCDO on 2007) show that tourists would have spent at least 30 Euros more in one day.

The environment for selling artisan products is easy to set up: the selling points provide a reciprocal interest for both the touristic destination and the artisans. The center can serve as an inspiration for new products. Except the activity of Butrinti Foundation in the National Park of Butrinti exist also in Gjirokastra.

At this stage it might seem as a premature suggestion, but there are many examples in the neighbouring countries where local governments or the managing bodies of inheritance areas limit the right to sell to local artisans or establish regulations whereby art and handicraft is sold in the museum's own shops. Currently the National Park of Butrinti has set up the same restriction: only the Butrinti artisans group is allowed to sell in the vicinity of the Park. The municipalities of touristic destinations might establish an area where no imported souvenirs can be sold. Only the shops awarded with the Gold Medal can be authorized to sell in certain points. It would be of great help if these areas would be defined as "Tax-free artisan areas". This "protectionist" suggestion would help in strengthening and the fast establishment of the market in the inheritance area. The other step is the local products branding. This would mean for those products to be designed in a typical fashion for a specific area. Such activities can be carried out by local governments but it would be better if a branch of Artisans Association office coordinates the efforts. The public-private partnerships are a sustainable solution to operate artisan centres. Very soon artisan incubators will be established in Shkodra's Rozafat Castle (AAA) and Gjirokastra (GCDO) through the support of UN's Culture and Heritage for Social and Economic Development Programme. The way to support these incubators depends on how the partnership between businesses, the association and/or the park's administration would develop. Natural parks and recreative areas can also establish "their" artisan shops. Local population must be encouraged to prepare its own touristic package. Next to natural touristic destinations (for example, Valbona Valley, Llogara Saddle) small centres might be set up for tourists that offer information about tours, sports and recreative activities, gastronomy and healthy foods (home jam, honey, herbs, etc.) as well as on regional artisan products. These centres might be managed by private enterprises or by the municipality. The most important thing is to find people with a vision. For municipalities situated on the seaside, an interesting project would be the establishment of an artisan shop in the city centre or near the shore. The administration can find a place to put at least a small kiosk. Local governments must be encouraged to establish artisan

centres. Even in the gastronomic centres of touristic destinations, gastronomes and artisans must be invited to cooperate in order to provide for an authentic cultural experience for visitors. Usually artisans complain that gastronomes or hotel owners allow only the exposure of handicraft products but do not pay for this and do not care about sales. A project fund might sponsor the start of these joint ventures for cultural inheritance or another method might be found to finance this in order to establish access for artisans in the touristic market.

3. Strongest links between tourism and handicraft

-How can be maximalized the possibilities to increase income for local communities, how can the later enjoy valuable exchanges (experiences) from the relationship and the selling of artisan products to the visitors?

-How can we make possible that original handicraft products be preserved and developed in continuity by protecting them from the threat of low-quality imported industrial products?

-How can be improved the quality, design and marketing of the products?

-How can the tourism and handicraft sectors work together to promote cultural assets of the host destination and support artisans and their communities?

-How can be dealt with potential negative economic and cultural impacts of tourism sector over the delicate sector of handicraft and cultural inheritance of the host destination?

In this research, we are trying to find answers for the following issues:

- Which are the hindering factors for the increase of sales of artisan products?
- Which are the factors influencing the increase of purchases of artisan products?
- Is the artisan offer liked?
- What does the artisan offer lack?
- Which are the strong points of handicraft in Shkodra?
- Which are the weaknesses of handicraft in Shkodra?

Then, we will make a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the results, from which we will have a general idea.

Main subjects of the primary research were:

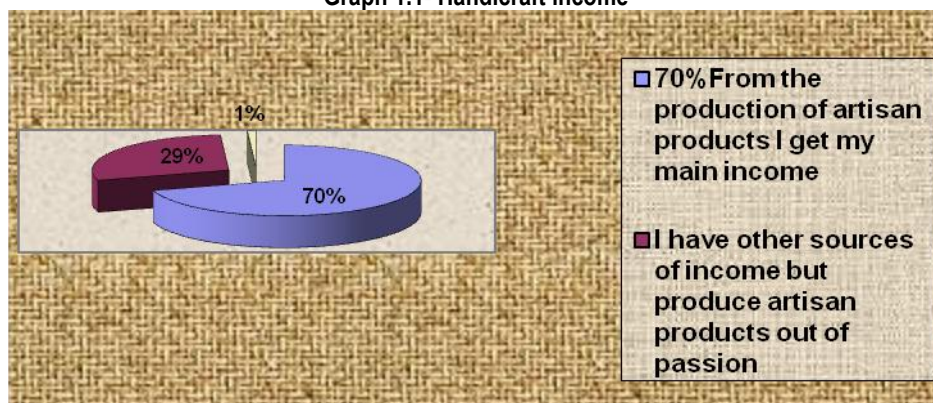
- touristic agencies (there were interviewed those agencies that bring tourists in Shkodra, which amounted to 3)
- artisans (those that carry out their activity in the artisans' market, amounting to 10 subjects)
- tourists (different groups of tourists, 60 tourists were interviewed)
- experts (from different fields of life but related to handicraft, 12 in total, information outside the scope of the questionnaire were also gathered)

A special attention and energy was paid to the preparation of the questionnaires, through which we aimed to gather useful data that later would serve to the main objective of the paper, namely to help the development of tourism through handicraft and of handicraft through tourism.

4. Research findings

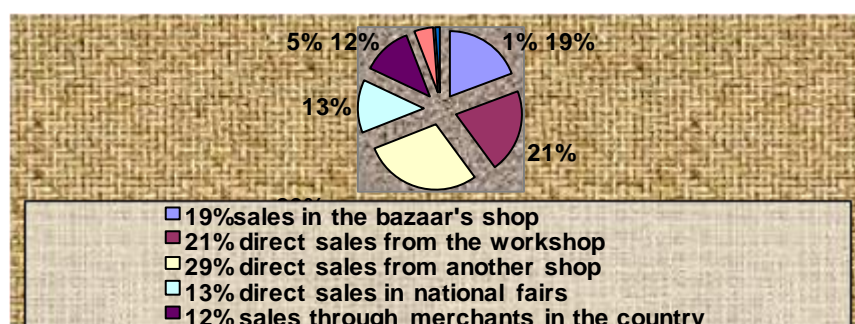
Our research has been focused on sample of 100 artisans from Shkodra region. The following are the illustrated results.

Graph 1.1- Handicraft income



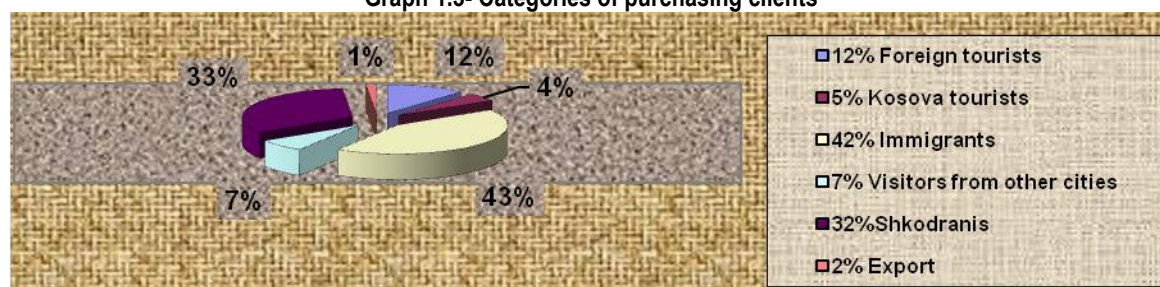
As seen in the Graph 1.1, a great part of artisans situated in the artisan market take their main income from the selling of artisan products. This is an indicator of their attachment to this activity. Handicraft is the primary activity for 70% of the interviewed.

Graph 1.2- % of sales by artisans



Graph 1.2 shows us that the greatest percentage of sales is represented by sales outside the artisans bazaar . This data reminds us that the artisan bazaar still has not as yet consolidated its position in the market, and that it's the artisans themselves in individual way that with their work and contacts explore and find new markets.

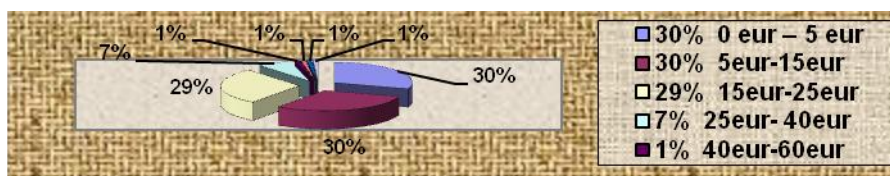
Graph 1.3- Categories of purchasing clients



From graph 1.3 we get a hold of the current situation about what the categories of most important clients for artisan products are, namely the immigrants represent the most important category with the greatest percentage of purchases, 42%, followed by the locals with 32%.

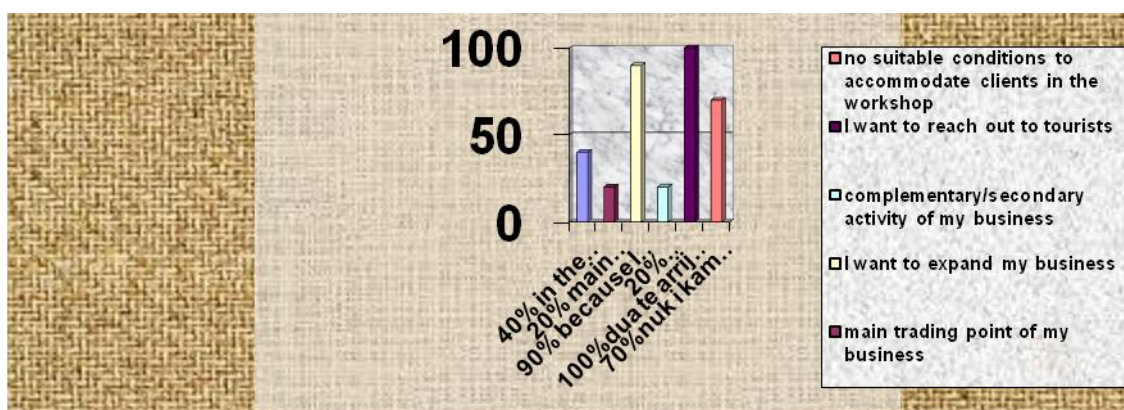
It is noticed a relatively smaller weight of category "tourists" in the evaluation that bazaar's artisans have made to these clients. This makes us think that this market is not as yet explored as it should be and that the link between artisan sector and tourism currently must be improved.

Graph 1.4- Tourists expenses in artisan products (Euro)



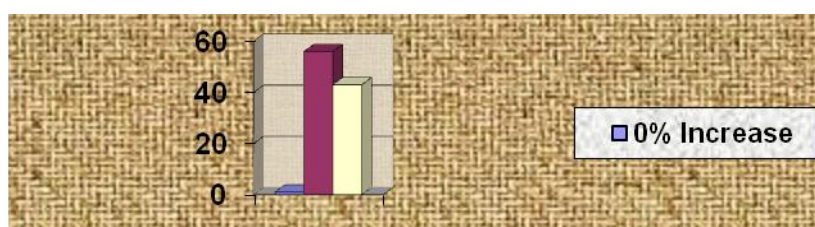
As seen by graph 1.4, roughly 90% of the artisans say that the greatest part of tourists are willing to spend up to 25 Euro each during a daily tour in the city. 7% believe they are willing to spend more, 25 to 40 Euro. A very small percentage say that tourists might be willing to spend more than 40 Euro.

Graph 1.5 The reason to set up shop in the artisans bazaar



From graph 1.5 it is clear that the main reason why all artesanans have set up shop in the bazaar is that they want to enter with their products in the touristic market, this fact proves a part of our hypothesis that handicraft is closely related with tourism. 90% wanted to expand their business with the participation in this bazaar. 70% of artisans have no suitable conditions to welcome clients on their workshops.

Graph 1.6 Tendency of sales in artisans bazaar



It can be seen from graph 1.6 that 56% of artisans mention a certain kind of stability during the period of their activity in this bazaar. A considerable number say that there is a tendency of reduced sales, which documents the not so good situation in this bazaar. Less than 1% of artisans say that purchases have increased.

This possibly is related with the effect of global economic crisis because as we saw above, the immigrants represented an important purchasing category in the handicraft sector.

The main comments were: there is no advertisements, the bazaar is far from the city, not so good management, no support from the municipality.

Graph 1.7 The impact of extra activities on artisan sales' increase



Artisans need more activities that later would lead to the increase of sales, because as seen above there was no increase of sales in this bazaar. The graph shows a great difference between percentages of sales according to the impact brought by the listed activities. The activity with the greatest impact in the increase of sales results to be the completion of other shops of the artisans bazaar. In the second place regarding importance is the relationship with touristic agencies, with 27% of impact in the increase of their sales. The main results gathered which are related with the most immediate issue/s as perceived by artisans:

- the artisans' bazaar not working with full capacity
- greater advertisements
- more serious support for handicraft
- establishment of an information office in the artisans bazaar
- attracting the clientele
- making the bazaar known to local/foreign consumers (its location and more informations)
- there are no sales

The main results gathered which are related to the weak points of artisan products:

- there are no people to produce new models
- design
- high production cost
- marketing, packaging

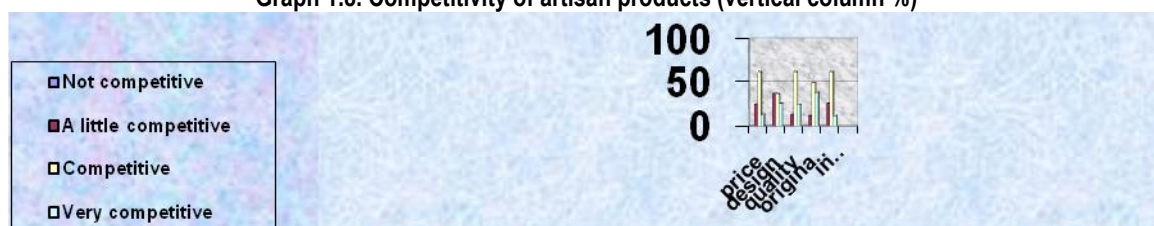
The main results gathered in regard of strong points of the handicraft production:

- quality
- originality
- new models
- design
- express and protect tradition
- dedication toward challenges of work yields excellent products
- mixture of tradition with modernity
- qualitative raw material (cotton)
- guarantee for the product in the preservation of colors
- guarantee in general for the goods

Results of the experts questionnaire

Our research has taken in consideration even the opinion of experts and the following are the illustrated results.

Graph 1.8. Competitivity of artisan products (vertical column %)



Graph 1.8 presents a mixture of competing elements in the sense that how much competitive are they perceived. Generally from the graph we understand that products are competitive almost in all the listed categories. 37% of the experts said that the design is not very competitive, a percentage equal to the "competitive" one, maybe because the design in some products is competitive and in some others not so competitive. However, their answers were given after they made evaluations on each of the topics.

With regard to competitiveness the following are the recommendations:

A more qualitative advertising in the mass media.

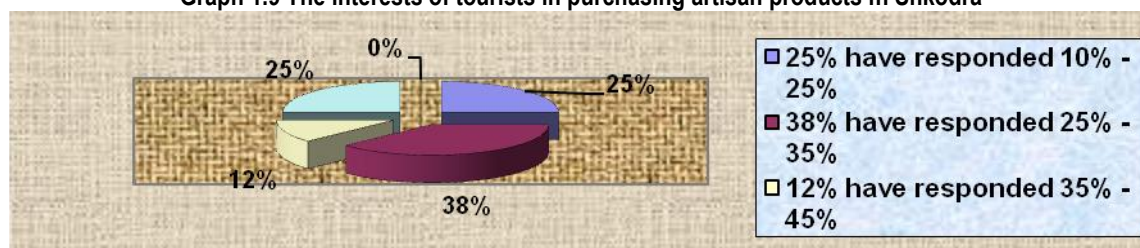
Managing the young manpower in a more professional way.

Having more institutional support, more tourists would be attracted.

There has to be more orientation toward tradition not only in forms and colors, but also in materials used for production (raw material), which have to be original, for example bags have to be made from indigenous wool and not acrylic, etc.

The production of typical unique Shkodra products must be aimed.

Graph 1.9 The interests of tourists in purchasing artisan products in Shkodra



As seen in the graph 1.9, the major part of the experts, 38% of them, said that 25-35% of foreign tourists that spend at least one day in Shkodra are interested on purchasing artisan products. 25 % of experts said that 45-65% of tourists are interested to buy. However, these are relatively

high figures if we bear in mind the declarations of artisans that in their activity the most important purchasing group is represented by the immigrants. So we clearly see that if we establish even a small link of cooperation between the two sectors, it would be decisive and very powerful. The results

up to now of this paper certify this and also our hypothesis that handicraft is an important part of the touristic package. There are these very elements of the cultural legacy that tourists feel as a difference between experiences offered for different touristic destinations.

5. Conclusions

1. For the crafts to achieve their full potential as regards tourism, an organized, coherent and complementary approach is needed. Institutions, organizations and different public and private agencies can and must play individual roles in the development process. It is important that their activities to be linked in a comprehensive program adjusted to the evolving needs.

2. In tourism we can understand the importance of culture as a resource that with a careful and thorough management can be used in the strategy of alleviating poverty and eliminating prejudices, as well as forming the basis of the important inter-cultural dialogue. Tourists are very much interested in handicraft as a cultural element.

3. Low capabilities in product development

Many small businesses in the sector are started by former employees of the state enterprises that continue their previous activity. The majority work in small workshops situated in their homes. At the state enterprises, the product development was carried out by designers in a special department called the technical office. The average employee didn't have to think about product development.

Today artisans are busy with production, marketing and distribution issues, so they are not very capable of investing in product development. Local market in Shkodra in a certain sense has no pretenses about design. Due to the low purchasing power, price is the main criteria of the market. Some artisans are stuck with the previous design of state enterprise products. Another groups of artisans are women of rural areas. They continue the traditional production of home textiles. The design of their products is simplified to lower costs, but in general their products preserve their cultural authenticity. Rural handicraft is left behind as regards its economic potential. New products are rarely developed. Rural population is inclined to remain faithful to traditional products because this group lacks information about markets and trends. Especially in the most remote areas, the long period of isolation is not overcome yet.

4. The aging of artisans and the lack of training programs for the new generation

There is no much time left to protect and revive handicraft in Shkodra. Many artisans are aging and only a few of them are handing over their craft to the new generation.

Low access for artisans in the tourism market

The low-level income makes the sector non-attractive for the youth. Handicraft is not so attractive as a business. Private trainers or state vocational educational centres offer only courses on sewing and embroidery. The small artisan workshops that require manpower have it difficult. Usually they try to use family links to find young men and women to employ. Trainings for this sector in the official work programs are very rare. Without this support many old artisans will not transmit their knowledge to the new generation. An example of a dying craft is straw. The former

enterprise in Shkodra had around 3,000 employees that produced baskets and furniture for exporting. Today only four of them continue their old profession. The main product is willow sitting furniture for the national market of gastronomy. Due to the increase of cheap plastic chair, this craft is attracting very few offers.

5. Links with outside are needed to create new products and to open new markets

The developing tourism market is an interesting market as regards artisans. While new touristic destinations are being developed and the number of visitors is increasing, the destinations' administrations and municipalities must be interested in having extra accessories to attract visitors. If handicraft products meet a certain quality standard and represent the regional cultural inheritance, it is very true that an artisan point attract tourists.

The lack of handicraft products that attract tourists. Especially rural artisans need to be in touch with tourists in order to understand their needs. The reaching of this understanding then requires that they invest in production. Sometimes they have to adjust only the size or the color of their production. Some other times they must create new products for tourists that require simply something to remind them of this trip. That's why artisans need support in product development, and maybe for somebody in an intermediary role. There is no protection for design and intellectual property. The Albanian Copyright Office, in charge of observing and monitoring the implementation of copyright or other related rights, is very busy with the challenge of observing the international movies and music copyrights, and still has had no time to protect the artisan products. The majority of artisans even don't know that there are legal ways to protect their innovative products. They who do know this, don't know where to go and how to do it. There is the need of a handicraft awareness campaign as well as the coordination with the Copyright Office.

6. Artisan concerns

- Low level of requests in the local market or low purchasing power of local clients
- Handicraft products have lost their previous value
- Competition with industrial products
- Lack of physical access in touristic destinations
- Unfair competition due to "fake" artisan products
- Imports from Asia
- Lack of copyright protection
- Difficulties in product development, design, etc.

Loss of tradition because youth is not interested to operate in the handicraft sector Lack of honest trading partners Outdated equipments, lack of financial means to invest in equipments or increasing manpower. Generally it can be said that artisans lack a supporting environment to facilitate the development of handicraft in Albania.

6. Recommendations

1. The discussion on handicraft and tourism must not be confined on those objects that tourists buy. There might be also instances of utility production for local people as well as for hotels, restaurants, and recreative environments visited by tourists.

2. Taking for granted that touristic comfort is preserved, these crafts represent unusual decorative furniture for

touristic rooms. Together with the craft-based production that suits local styles and traditions, they can help create an atmosphere that educates tourists and appreciates local culture. After all, handicraft products are always meant for use: pots for cooking, tables for eating, carpets to walk over, or blankets to cover.

3. The touristic development requires innovative "products", developed in such a way that they do not compromise the cultural integrity of local communities and that maximize the social, economic, and environmental benefits. The unification of the cultural creativity of communities is an important strategy to promote an as great participation as possible in the process of developing tourism and it can help in the distribution of benefits generated by tourism.

4. Because today in the market there are all kinds of handicraft as a result of globalization, tourists are requiring authentic and original items. That's why there is the need for a greater distinction in touristic purchase between gifts with

no authenticity (blouses, coffee cups, key holders) and souvenirs that help you remember a trip from time to time. They are looking to see, to taste, to experience and to take something home. The want "souvenirs" that represent the core of the place they visited. Artisans are in a unique way very suitable to give just that if they are supported by a national policy of handicraft development.

5. Handicrafts still lack the support they so deservedly need, be it for improving their capabilities or for the adjustment and protection of their works. This is, in great part, due to the lack of data regarding the direct and indirect impact of handicraft sector on local economy, that is through direct sales to tourists. Secondly, there is a lack of coordination and cooperation between ministries/departments in charge of handicraft and tourism.

6. There is an urgent need to develop and illustrate the indirect links between these two sectors (handicraft and tourism) in qualitative and quantitative terms.

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