

Sustainable Tourism in Albania a Tool for Sustainability in Albania (Thethi, Shengjergj and Voskopja Cases)

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Abstract. Several regions in Albania have interesting natural values and landscape beauties. Thethi, Shengjergji and Voskopja in Albania, are famous regions with big natural values, potentials in biodiversity and ecosystems. These regions are nature protected areas and very attractive for eco-tourism development too. Not only the nature, but also cultural and historical values are important. In these areas it is a big perspective the sustainable development. Taking into consideration green economy as the main factor for the economic growth this type of tourism it is considered with a big impact in these Regions. It is crucial the need to protect the ecological values and ecosystems in these regions but also to assess the ecosystem services with the impact on the economy. Several sustainable activities are applicable in the regions eco-farms, agrotourism, rural tourism and eco-tourism. For the community it is recommended to develop social and economic activities that at the same time respect the nature and the natural equilibrium. Law implementation, nature and biodiversity protection and also the creation of productive chains and services for tourists are the main activities suggested to be developed. The most important is the involvement of the communities for sustainable development in the area where they are living.

Keywords: nature protected areas, sustainable development, eco-tourism, green economy, agrotourism

Introduction

Several regions in Albania have interesting natural values and landscape beauties. Thethi, Shengjergji and Voskopja in Albania, are famous regions with big natural values, potentials in biodiversity and ecosystems. These regions are nature protected areas and very attractive for eco-tourism development too. Cultural and historical values are important for the tourism attractions. Several sustainable activities are applicable in the regions eco-farms, agrotourism, rural tourism and eco-tourism. Tourism at the international level is considered as a very important industry that with its potential has contributed and contributes to economic development. Two basic principles must be taken into consideration and applied, which connect sustainable development with ecotourism benefits for the local economy and support for environmental protection. Ecotourism, in turn, is a widely used concept that moves nature-based tourism toward sustainable tourism. Although there is no universally accepted definition, it is generally perceived that ecotourism relies on natural resources, environments, and nature-based attractions; employs best-practice environmental management; contributes to conservation; involves local communities and sustains their well-being; and offers effective interpretation and education. (Buckley, Citation2015; Fennell & Weaver, Citation2005; TIES, Citation2015; Weaver, Citation2005; Weaver & Lawton, Citation 2007). Notably, most nature-based tourism products contain both natural

and cultural features and attractions as well as adventurous elements and activities (Buckley, Citation 2009; Fennell, 1999).

The sustainable development of tourism is the shared responsibility of a significant number of actors, including state institutions, tourism enterprises, civil society organizations, educational institutions, media, and citizens. Taking into consideration green economy as the main factor for the economic growth the nature-based tourism it is considered with a big impact in these Regions in Albania. It is crucial the need to protect the ecological values and ecosystems in these regions but also to assess the ecosystem services with the impact on the economy. Sustainable tourism is related to and can benefit communities by adopting slow principles. (Heitmann, S., Robinson, P., & Povey, G. 2011).

The tourism sector is a sector, which relates to many other economic activities. The impact of this sector can not only be seen in a direct analysis of it in the economy, but also by analysing the progress of other economic activities related to it. The tourism sector on the one hand requires other developed economic activities such as construction, trade, transport, communication, and a number of other service activities and on the other hand it affects the development of these economic activities through the multiplier power it has in the economy. Ecotourism and rural tourism continue to attract the attention of many researchers in the world. Initially practiced in protected areas and then extended to urban areas, ecotourism is about an environmental, social-cultural, and economic "deal".

Rural tourism is driven by the search for unique and memorable experiences in particular settings, but knowledge on visitors' experiences in rural destinations is still scarce. (Kastenholz, E., Carneiro, M. J., Marques, C. P., & Loureiro, S. M. C. 2018).

International institutions that channel development assistance funds to Albania also play an essential role in achieving this objective. Tourism is a priority sector of sustainable economic and social development for the economy of Albania. It also generates higher income in several related economic activities, as well as guarantees employment and self-employment opportunities in the country. With special natural, historical assets and a wealth of cultural heritage, Albania has an extraordinary tourism potential, which will create a more recognizable identity for Albanian tourism, improve competitiveness and improve Albania's position in the national tourism market. regional, European and global. Most of the tourism in our country is coastal tourism, while this type of tourism is losing ground to ecotourism, cultural tourism and adventure tourism, which has a growth rate of no more than 2 to 4% per year, while cultural tourism, adventure tourism and "ecotourism" are considered to be the fastest growing tourism markets worldwide 15 - 20% per year and that represent more than 25% of the market. In the face of the present ecological crisis, a relational understanding of human-nature relationships is increasingly critical, especially in protected nature areas. This understanding encompasses not only the values assigned to nature but also the environmental values that individuals hold and their impact on sense-making. (Anke Peters and Matthias Fuchs, 2023). Findings reveal significant differences in how visitors with varying environmental values perceive these restrictions.

Methodology

The study presents the values and potential for eco-tourism and nature-based tourism development in Albania, based also on literature. It was applied the framework of the cases studies to design based science tourism products, which are examined in the empirical part of the study. It was done a data collection and analyze and was done a discussion addressing the limitations of the study and suggesting an agenda for future research, as well as conclusions, including managerial implications for the

sustainability in Albania linked with the ecotourism development. 150 questionnaires are developed with the community and business members of the three areas.

Discussions and results

Albania has an excellent potential for the development of ecological tourism. Many cultural and natural attraction resources are of very high quality and would attract large numbers of visitors if they were more widely publicized within target market segments.

The case studies zones offer a lot of possibilities for the development of nature-based tourism and ecotourism in Albania. They are protected areas, of the second category based on IUCN, National parks.

Thethi National Park is the central area of Albanian Alps, the most touristic area for the moment. The high valley of Theth is one of the most special areas of Albanian mountain tourism, among the most mentioned even by foreigners. In the heart of the northern alps, among historic rocks, dazzling greenery and crystalline springs. The landscape is beautiful and there is a lot of water sources coming from mountains. The only touristic activity is familiar tourism. Organic food, local clean and organic products and several cultural aspects of the zone are the touristic attraction. Hiking and white tourism are the most important activities. In the area there is not till now developed the public transport, but a lot of tourists access the area by their own cars, motorcycles, and bicycles during summer. The food is very good, local products milk and cheese are very famous. Rich biodiversity and interesting endangered and endemic species, beautiful landscapes and a lot of water resources are nature premises for ecotourist request. The data collected in the area and the analyses of the questionnaires done with the community members and business in the area shows that sustainable development is important for the community in the region. The results show that for more than 47 % the economic component is more important, for 32 % in ecological protection and 21% in the social values. The accommodation prices are very, there is a lot of people coming during summer and winter too. It is needed the development of a touristic produced to aim the sustainability, linked more with the nature and knowledge on species living in the area. There is not a touristic offer combined with the nature guide and biodiversity protection and knowledge.

Shengjergji National Park is located near Tirana and has good climat, freshwater resources, and more favourable condition for living. Natural beauty is used by the local population to develop touristic economies. Tourism is the only sector of the economy. The development of sustainable tourism is seen as a good opportunity to use the potential of areas where there are many problems that, as is known, are caused by the development of tourism. Since the area has great natural resources and potential that are characterized by a fragile natural balance, it is necessary to preserve and protect these. Precisely applying the principles of sustainable development, the harmonious development of the environmental, social and economic components, the development of such type of tourism should be seen as a priority in today's times for the Shëngjergji area.

In the territory of Shëngjergji, during the last years, there have been rapid socio-economic developments which have caused the decrease in the number of the population in the area, the increase in the average age of the population, the changes in the way of using the land and other natural resources. Traditional agriculture has been replaced by more tourism as well as services obtained from natural areas. There are in fact low rates of economic development, and this often leads people to illegal activities, either illegal hunting or out of season, as well as illegal tourist constructions through which people seek to profit but which on the other hand have an impact on the environment and in biodiversity. Accommodation

structures are very simple, camping covers 58%, bar and restaurants 21%, bar – in nature 7% and restaurants in nature 17%. The results of the questionnaires show that for the community living in Shengjergj in the quantity of 43% is more interested in economic development, 39% is interested in ecological aspects and 19% in the social aspects of the sustainability. Creation of a chain for local products marketing and sheepfold's restoration is considered necessary for the sustainability in the area.

Voskopja National Park is located in south Albania, and it is very known for the natural beauties, landscapes, cultural values and high number of religion structures. Voskopja is quite rich in natural water resources, biodiversity and endemic species. These sources are spread throughout the territory of the municipality and best meet the needs of the community. The village is surrounded by high hills and forests with ferns. The climate in this village is with cool summers and cold winters and snowfall during most of this season. There are also some natural ski slopes. This village is known for its clean air and the healing power of respiratory diseases. This village can be called a pearl of the Albanian landscape. Explore nature paths and camping in Voskopja is one of the most important tourist activities aiming the sustainability in the area. Voskopja is surrounded by high hills and forests with ferns. Favourable for performing various sports activities, especially in winter. There are also some natural ski slopes. It was called a pearl of the Albanian landscape. Voskopja is also one of the perfect villages to practice skiing. The village is full of hills and consequently natural slopes.

Voskopja carries with it layers of origins of many cultures. There are different civilizations and ethnicities, as a cultural centre, all over the Balkans. Heritage and tradition in characteristic clothing, embroidery, carpets, etc., which are liked by the market. Voskopja is distinguished for the preparation of handcrafts based on local craftsmanship and natural resources, mainly woodworking, weaving of woolen garments and many other valuable skills. Production of quality meat, milk, cheese, as well as tradition in livestock breeding. Potatoes, beans and fruits are also popular in the market. A Voskopja is famous for the traditional cuisine of the area. The tourist are coming there also for one reason, 100% of the food is organic there. Livestock farming has so far been treated mainly for personal production and very little of its products are used for trade. Voskopja is known for the mounting tourism and there are lot of accommodation structures also resorts. The number of tourists in Voskopja is more than 500 every weekend and the accommodation structures are full. Sometimes the increased number of tourists is a problem for the inhabitants. They are also disappointed by the destruction of some cultural and historical values, damage of the biodiversity and species. The geographical position of the municipality of Voskopje creates very favourable conditions for a sustainable development of agricultural and livestock products, in terms of their quantity and quality. There are traditions in the development of agriculture and livestock products.

Voskopja region is considered the most important challenge for the tourism development in Albania.

Conclusions

Ecotourism and rural tourism is considered the future tourism industry in Albania. Albania has big potentials to work in the sustainable development of protected areas and promote the sustainable use of natural resources.

In Albania from the community and business economic development is considered more important than ecological and social component of the sustainability.

Law implementation, nature, and biodiversity protection and also the creation of productive chains and services for tourists are the main activities aiming the sustainability in Albania.

The big potential in nature, biodiversity, biodiversity protection, bio food, are the most important key indicators for the research studies on biodiversity in protected areas, monitoring law implementation and development of food chain products.

The sustainable land use, the sustainable use of genetic resources for food and in agriculture, are considered directly linked with the sustainability. The attention of all actors should be focused on the production and increase in the quantity and quality of the traditional agricultural and livestock products of the area.

Recommendations

The research on nature-based science tourism, founded on science, scientific knowledge, and/or engagement in scientific research, is still missing in Albania. Drawing on tourist motivation, nature-based tourism, special interest tourism, and science tourism, a novel theoretical conceptualization of nature-based science tourism should be developed.

For the capacity building component is good to have more knowledge and skills for stakeholders during planning period, to build capacities on biodiversity conservation methods and create manuals for farmers, land users and hunters, business, etc for ecosystem services and their management. Integrate the politics for biodiversity protection in all relevant sectors in order that the national strategy for biodiversity protection is taken into consideration during the decision-making process.

But the local authorities and the community should revise the Local Green Agenda Document. They should adopt it to enforce the economic, social and environmental principles. Enforce the sustainable tourism and practical management in the tourism field.

For the community it is recommended to develop social and economic activities that at the same time respect nature and natural equilibrium. Law implementation, nature, and biodiversity protection and also the creation of productive chains and services for tourists are the main activities suggested to be developed. The most important is the involvement of the communities for sustainable development in the area where they are living.

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Acknowledgement

Author is thanking University of Shkodra for the financial support and the Municipalities of Shkodra, Voskopja and Tirana for data collection.