

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT AS A WAY FOR THE COMPETITIVE TOURIST DEVELOPMENT. CASE STUDY-SOUTH REGION OF ALBANIA

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Abstract

Destination management» represents the challenging task of serving the various needs of tourists and tourism-related businesses as well as the local communities, local businesses and industries in order to maximize customer value (WTO, 2007). It is very important in sustainable development of tourism in the region. The purpose of this paper is to identify the need of destination management in tourist region and to analyze the relationship between this concept and actual development of tourism in south region of Albania. This study is based on previous theoretical discussion regarding tourist destination and destination management and is based on previous researches on the tourism development. Results indicate that there is a great important that a tourist destination to manage with carefully in according to motivations and needs of tourists and community's needs.

Key words: current situation, destination management organizations, destination management, tourist region

JEL Classification: M30, M38

1. Introduction

In realizing this study, was used a methodology combining primary and secondary data. The questionnaire asked to tourists is made up to provide general information on tourist market profile, considering the object of visiting the destination, the information source used. Such information helps in determining new tourist developments in the destination which relies on nature activities aiming to preserve the tendency of tourist visits.

Gilbert. D (1990) suggests that destinations should differentiate their tourism products in order to achieve a unique« tourist product benefit».

The **goals** of destination management can be multifarious. The most common ones are summarized below: (J.Rehage,2010)

- ✓ Strengthening the tourism industry as economic sector
- ✓ Development of joint visions and strategies and securing their implementation

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- ✓ Decreasing competition thinking and strengthening the sense of belonging together“
- ✓ Using joint creative and innovative potentials
- ✓ Increasing readiness for private and public investments
- ✓ Qualification of (political) decision makers
- ✓ Exchange of information and networking
- ✓ Enhancing / ensuring quality of services and infrastructure
- ✓ Increasing visitors satisfaction
- ✓ Safeguarding natural resources and biodiversity

2. Literature review

Modern concepts of destination management build on three *principles*: (J.Kloiber,2008)

1) *Process orientation*: In the development of services, emphasis is given to the establishment of integrated supply chains for the various visitor segments rather than the traditional orientation along sub branches (hotels, restaurants, transportation services,).

2) *Demand orientation*: product development is not anymore driven by the question “What can

We offer?”, but by the question “What do our (potential) visitors demand?” This approach requires a higher level of dynamic and flexibility.

3) *Stakeholder orientation*: destination planning and development is not only oriented towards the interest of shareholders, but it is aiming at the participation and satisfaction of the interests of all groups related to tourism.

In the academic literature regarding destination management there is so far no unified understanding about the specific tasks of destination management. Following C.Kaspar (1995), the functions and tasks of destination management, respectively of tourism organizations are including the following points:

- ✦ Overall local and regional tasks of tourism development (elaboration of tourism policies and funding mechanisms)
- ✦ Administrative tasks (disposition of Tourism Information Centres, complaint services)
- ✦ Tasks related to the collective determination, maintenance and operation of (public) tourism infrastructure and facilities

Destination image is an important aspect in tourism management and destination marketing. which plays an important role for destination marketers. (Yilmaz et al.,2009)

Martina G.Gallarza and al.,(2002) suggest that the importance of the tourist destination’s image is acknowledged, since it affects the individual’s subjective perception in destination choice. The study of tourism destination image is the subject of some researches, but there were some difficulties. According Martina G. Gallarza and al.,(2002), the first difficulty is the tourism product’s characteristics such

as its complexity and multidimensionality. The second is that destination marketing involves the consumer physically moving to the behavior scenario.

Researches shows that tourist information is a valuable concept in understanding destination image and the destination choice process of tourists (Arturo Moline and al,2010) explains important factors for the analysis of tourist behavior. For instance, first, most of tourist behavior models incorporated the search of external information as an important component (Gursoy and Mc Cleary,2004). Second, some studies examine the influence of information sources on tourists' preferences and intentions. Third, other studies argue on the relationship between information sources, destination selection and travel decision.

But how does the destination make successful? There are some points, which must be in consideration : (Growing Destinations-www.tourismexcellence.com/Destination-Checklist)

- ✓ Identity (what makes the destination stand out from the rest?/what are its unique selling points?)
- ✓ Access (is the destination readily and cost-effectively accessible to the target market segments?)
- ✓ Quality product&infrastructure (are there sufficient attractions of significant interest and appeal to the target market segments and especially that align with the destination image?)
- ✓ Industry leadership and synergy (is there strong private-sector driven regional tourism organizations to work collaboratively with local tourism association?)
- ✓ Service (are operators willing to learn and improve?)
- ✓ Effective distribution (are there systems to deliver information about the destination to people before they leave home?)
- ✓ Industry synergy (this often includes neighboring regions)
- ✓ Strategic planning
- ✓ Co-operative marketing (which maximizes the effectiveness of industry, local government and state government contributions)
- ✓ Adequate resourcing (is the resourcing sufficient to enable the local industry to have an impact in a very competitive marketplace?)

3. Destination management organizations

Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) have the responsibility for destination product and through incentives and policies facilitate the development of products, which is desirable from the demand side. DMOs should therefore be the guardians of the image and resources of destinations (D. Buhalis, Tourism Management Special Issue: The Competitive Destination)

In order to realize the above mentioned activities there is an obvious need of (professional) human resources, and an organizational structure which is responsible

for destination management. However, the tasks as described above do not necessarily have to be fulfilled by: (J. Kloiber, 2008)

- ◆ governmental institutions of all involved levels and departments
- ◆ tourism sector (tourism businesses, tour operators, agencies and tourism associations)
- ◆ main tourist demand segments
- ◆ environmental care takers (NGOs, protected area administration)
- ◆ other NGOs and citizens' initiatives (social- cultural, sport associations)
- ◆ other economic sectors (agricultural, trade, building), chamber of commerce
- ◆ (potential) private investors and public donors and supporting development agencies single tourism organization. Some of the tasks can be outsourced or they do vary depending on the organizations geographic level (local, regional or national) and size of its area of intervention.

But DMOs participate in major annual tourism and travel fairs in Berlin, London, Milan, Paris and elsewhere. There they have the opportunity to meet intermediaries and members of the public to promote their offerings. They produce brochures, which they distribute to all their partners in the industry and to consumers who require information on the destination. (D.Buhalis, Tourism Management Special Issue: The Competitive Destination),

Korca's Destination Management Organization (DMO)

DMO is a nonprofit organization in Korca's Region that contributes to sustainable tourism, cultural heritage and regional development, by enabling good governance, developing civil society and empowering.

The key roles of the DMO are: to coordinate the implementation of strategic plans affecting tourism in the region; to enhance public-private partnership within the tourism sector and to be the local point for the coordination of tourism planning and development in Korca Region. This structure has these departments: Marketing Department; Visitor Services; Development Department.

4. Brief overview of tourism in Albania

Albania is a country with ancient cultural tradition and a brilliant history. Albania is an important connecting bridge of Mediterranean Countries and as a such country, it has favorable conditions for the development of tourism. 457 km of the total 1094 km national border line are a wonderful coastline. The nature has reserved a favorable climate to Albania, 120 sunny days, virgin and unexploited lands which inspire curiosity, a perfect nature and diversified relieve forms. International experts have uttered that Albania contains the necessary potentials to be a unique centre of European ecological tourism (www.albanian-guide.com). Due to its favorable geographic position, Albania has been called "the Balkan's Gate". It has some particular characteristics where are intertwined the geographical and geological features, the landscapes and relieve.

According to the 2011 Travel and Tourism Economic Impact for Albania prepared by World Travel and Tourism Council, the future of the Albanian tourism sector is positive. Key indicators of growth are as follow:

The total contribution of Travel&Tourism to GDP, including its wider economic impacts, is forecasted to rise by 5.4% from ALL 344.2 bn(26.3% of GDP) in 2011 to ALL 582.7bn (29%) by 2021.

While figures on tourist arrivals are growing year after year in Albania, the country has remained highly dependant on Balkan region tourist

The Ministry's Tourism Development National Strategy 2007-2013 replaces the 2002 Tourism Strategy. It presents the following vision statement (Vision 2013):

“Albania is a safe, high-value tourism destination featuring an unparalleled variety of world-class natural and cultural attractions in a small geographic area, managed in an environmentally and socially responsible manner, easily accessible to European tourism markets.”

Tourism in the Korça's region

The city of Korca is situated in southeastern part of Albania. The area occupied by the city today is a former Illyrian settlement. The potential for tourism development in Korca and the surrounding area is high thanks to its historical, cultural and natural wealth. Korca is mentioned as a castle in 1280 and in 1431, as an inhabited castle. After 1484, the city started to expand and development gaining the feature of an urban and regional centre. The city has participated historically in intensive exchange of culture and trade with Byzantium and Greece. Korca's region illustrates and encompassed three of these areas: historical tourism; archaeological tourism, religious tourism. *Historical tourism* encompasses the design, planning and application of historic elements used by tourism as a source of cultural attraction, such as monuments, tangible and intangible recourses and architecture. *Archaeological tourism* is very important for many tourists. So, Korca's region is well-known for the artefacts housed in the Archaeology museum, some of which date back to the early Iron Age, with others from the Hellenic, Roman and Byzantine periods. *Religious tourism* may be considered as the oldest manifestation of tourism. Korca's region is well-known for old churches and monasteries, such as Orthodox Cathedral, which is the biggest in the Albania.

Korca's destination as a city should not seen as separate from the tourist villages surrounding it, due to tourists are coming to the city to visit the city and tourist villages around, to take part in activities or to use the accommodations and traditional dishes. Municipal programs have transformed Korca to "The City of Holidays", so Korca is a famous city in Albania and the neighboring countries. The cultural activities help to increase the number of foreign and domestic tourists in rural areas, especially in summer time due to their favorable climate and fresh air.

Korca-the city of events!- The «Events Calendar 2010», is the first calendar in Albania. It has listed a number of important national and international cultural activities, fests and fairs held from April through December 2010.

4.1 The analysis of tourists in Korca's Region

The Visitor Survey was introduced in the Korca region in 2011, when it was distributed to guests at selected accommodation establishments.

General information as demographic characteristics and other information to tourists are important for understanding the psychological, educational and other needs of tourists. The respondents were studied concerning the following:

~“*How many times have you visited this destination?*” The responses were: 43%- 1-2 times; 24%- visited it for the first time; 33%- more than twice.

So, we are able to notice that there is a continuous interest to visit these areas, enjoy the fresh air and the landscape, and also traditional cuisine that is often the main reason of visiting these rural areas.

~ Tourists that visit the destination, as far as *the nationality of tourists is concerned*, it results that most of them are native: 45% of them are Albanians from Albania; 19% Albanians from Greece; 10% are Albanians from Macedonia and 26% are foreign tourists, mainly Greeks about 10% followed from Macedonians, French, Germans, English and Asian people; about 1% are American people.

These data show that the interest of domestic tourists is still continuous and according the information gathered from the hotels of the area, there is a tendency of tourists to come during winter time to enjoy the snow and be able to skiing.

~ An important question to understand the tourists' profile is: “*What is the goal of visiting this destination?*”

To understand better tourists' preferences, they were asked as following: “*What was the reason you chose this place?*» defining the most attractive characteristics.

These data show that the tendency of being attracted by nature still persists. There is a need to look for a more vivid environment and adding services in the destination; attraction by culture inherited from generation to generation shows that these areas are attractive in this aspect, which makes tourists go and visit these areas even though most of them are accommodated in town. They spend an overnight or half a day with outdoor activities or enjoy the traditional cooking. Thus, the special thing about these areas is that there is a mingling of nature with culture, as the reason for sustainable tourist continuity.

Sport activities let us know about their early tradition, but those tourists who spend more time in destination should have the opportunity for organized activities such as riding horses as well as ski and mountain-climbing during winter time, going on thus with the sports tradition of these areas.

From previous research, (SNV- Netherlands Development Organisation, 2010)) there are some findings:

- 1) The annual average bed occupancy rate is estimated as 20%
- 2) The bed capacity in the region is 1500 bed spaces
- 3) The average length of stay in hotels/guest houses was 3.5 nights
- 4) The percentage of bed nights in private accommodation(home stay) is 10.1% and the average length of stay is 6.3 nights

- 5) 79% of all visitors stayed overnight
- 6) Average spend per day is 8576 lek

It is possible to calculate approximately: the value of tourism in the Korca Region

- the annual bed night capacity is $15008 \times 365 \text{ days/year} = 547\,500$
- the number of bed nights occupied in the year is $547\,500 \times 20\% = 109\,500$
- total visitor arrivals at hotels/guest houses is $109\,500 / 3.5 = 31285$
- total bed nights in private accommodation are: $[109\,500 / (100 - 10.1) \times 10.1] = 12302$
- total visitors arrivals at home stay accommodation is $12302 / 6.3 = 3905$
- total visitors in the region who stay overnight is: $31285 + 3905 = 35190$
- number of day visitors is : $(35190 / 79.2) \times (100 - 79.2) = 9241$.

So total visitor arrivals in the region are: $35190 + 9241 = 44431$; number of total days spent in the region: $109500 + 12302 + 9241 = 131043$ days.

In according to dates of Korca's DMO, average spend per day is 8576, so total expenditure from visitors in the region is $8576 \times 131043 = 112\,382\,4768$ min lek or 1,1 bn lek.

In these conditions, we can think that tourism branch in this region will be very important about the economic development of the community. But it is very important to improve tourist services and to promote them.

4.2. General information for tourist units in rural areas

In this section provided an overview of tourist accommodation in the study area which represents with hotels of various capacities, but also provided with rental houses for tourists, a characteristic of rural areas in Korca. From the survey in rural areas showed that hotels were 24% of all rural accommodation and tourist rental homes were 76%. Accommodation units had different years in terms of activity in the tourism sector and to this question from the survey showed that 40% of them were about «4-6 years»; 36% had 1-3 years .40% owned by the themselves and 60% is leased. These dates showed that the community consider the tourism as an opportunity to improve the life.

The analysis of these dates showed clearly the largest number of tourist units were rental houses. This is characteristic for developing rural tourism destinations. The small number of hotels explains that tourist requires and «house village», while for a clientele group hotels meets their requirements.

Using wood as a heat source is connected with the fact that Korca is a mountain destination and tourists like very much the fire for warming. In these conditions should be implemented environmental protection policies as well as taking actions in relation to new forests. Setting up an environmental balance in the destination would be necessary to have tourist in a sustainable manner.

Based on theory arguments of tourism scholars and the characteristics of the area intended for study, let us propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: *The higher the interest for the rich nature, the higher the frequency of visits in destination.*

For the **Hypothesis 1:** the following results were found: χ^2 llog=12.31, df= 8, $p=0.04$, χ^2 tab= 15. 5, F= 4.88 for $p < 0.05$.

So, χ^2 llog < χ^2 tab, that is why the **Hypothesis 1: was proved.** This showed that the *rich nature* of destination makes tourists come back again resulting in a factor which would increase the frequency of tourists' visits, making thus possible tourist sustainability from this viewpoint and specifically ecotourist one.

For hypothesis 2 -"If the community has the positive attitude towards tourism development, community increases the possibility that require a higher number of tourists", were found the following results: χ^2 calc = 26.57, for $p = 0,00$ and F = 37.6, $p = 0.000$ and b = 0, 94; Cronbach's index = 0.7. **So Hypothesis 2 was proved.**

This shows that the community has the tendency of a higher number of tourists, given the improving economy through tourism, without causing economic and social problems.

Conclusions

Position of the destination is primary, so we have to stress one more the fact about the way how visitors perceive the destination and not what is it from the community's point of view. In this definition we should be led by the fact that destination **"is not what you say it is, but what all the others say"**.

The greatest market visiting the area was the *domestic market*; therefore the development policies will focus on it, aiming to expand the market of foreign tourists. Tourists who visited repeatedly the destination were considerable in number, which shows that the environmental and cultural sustainability were the main source of this flow. Thus, its retention would require high service quality to tourists.

As tourists frequented the area because of its natural features, the community would be encouraged not only to preserve the natural landscape, but look for opportunities of developing such activities as: riding, mountain-climbing, etc, required from tourists as the area possesses such environmental features.

From the study, it resulted that there is a tendency to be engaged in tourist businesses, fact which is obvious from their considerable number. These businesses though should add more services especially those dealing with activities mostly required from tourists like ski, mountain-climbing, hiking, etc. Houses intended for tourists should be encouraged to promote their business in order that tourists see what the rural destination offers to them, mainly the characteristic cuisine of the area. In these conditions, it is necessary to:

~ encourage the local businesses to develop activities like riding and cycling, rent equipments and improving passages with appropriate signals and compiling tourist guides.

~ encourage the improvements of hotels, guest houses to comply with tourists' standards (were needed).

~ Encourage the restaurants to offer and promote traditional cooking making use of the regional specifications and distinctions between villages.

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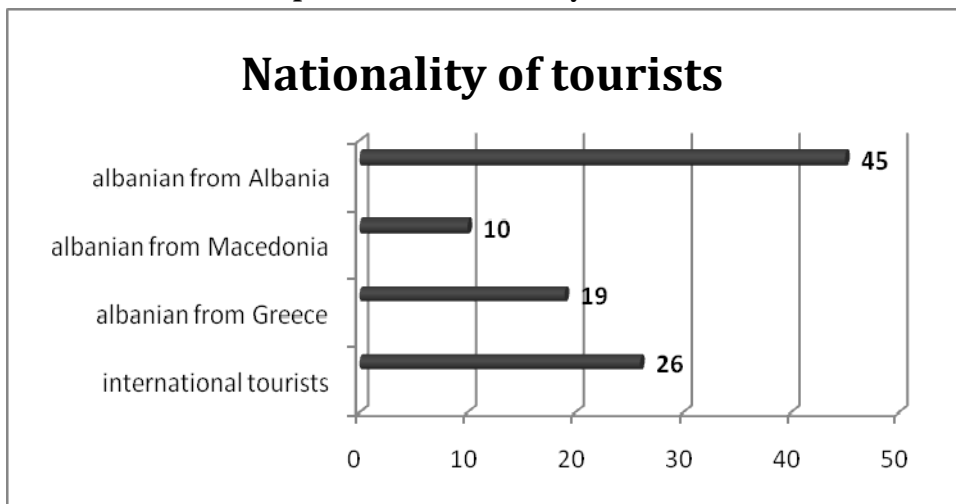
Tab1. Purpose of Visit (activities)

Purpose of Visit	%
Wonderful nature	33%
Heritage culture	23%
Hiking	21 %
Sports(ski)	15%
Leisure activities	8%

Tab.2: Purpose of visit (type)

Purpose of visit	%
Leisure	52.8 %
Visiting friends and relatives	20%
Business	13.2 %
Transit	10%
Other	4 %

Graphic no 1. Nationality of tourists



For hypotheses 1: Tabela a). Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.314	8	.138
Likelihood Ratio	15.351	8	.053
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.626	1	.031
N of Valid Cases	70		

Table (b): ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2.647	1	2.647	4.887	.030
	Residual	36.838	68	.542		
	Total	39.486	69			

For hypotheses 4:

Table. Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	26.574	2	.000
Likelihood Ratio	30.416	2	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	24.596	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	70		

Table: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.703	2