
Local Development and Sustainable Tourism Models – Spa and Curative Tourism at Llixha of Elbasan, Albania

BEJTJA, ILIR¹

Abstract

Since Johannesburg 2002, the world now is becoming more and more conscious to development. Governments are focusing not simply on development, but they are planning for the future development too. Globalization and the involvement in the process of all the former “three worlds” have done it more difficult to distinguish exploitation vs. global exchange of goods and services. The weight of the foreign direct investments in the global economy is reaching and overpassing the export-imports’ value. “A world without borders” ... this does not mean any more just borders as a classic perception, but rather economic, political, cultural, legal, technology and moreover peoples movement mentality borders. Finally, the people worldwide are understanding that whole world is our future unique country, and we need to take care of our living resources. This and more was the meaning of the Johannesburg Declaration of 2002, sustainable development based on three main pillars, economic, socio-political and ecological development, getting use of our resources without compromising our future consumption. At the annual conference on social tourism on 23 April 2008, European Commission, DG Enterprise and Industry, Unit of Tourism the participants strongly called for sustainable tourism development, even considering the old models of massive tourism already ongoing in Europe and worldwide. The article analyses and argues why sustainable tourism development and what does it mean in terms of local development, suggesting and recommending ways and paths to foster this kind of tourism. It emphasizes the strong role of the professional and higher education in tourism sciences, in order to guarantee a long term development of tourism and its sustainable models.

Key words: Sustainable tourism, local development, education



Available online
www.bmdynamics.com
ISSN: 2047-7031

TOURISM IN THE WORLD

Statistics about economic development indicate a great and effective increase of tourism in the global and local economy. These developments and trends have stimulated entire regions worldwide to increase the number of tourist destinations and foster the investments for the development of tourism, both in financial assets and local, national and regional development policies and even wider cooperation.

Nowadays, this has made of modern tourism a key factor in economic and social progress in all space levels. Obviously, it is now the leader industry worldwide related the increase in incomes from exports, in creating new jobs, as well as in the development and perfection of infrastructure. Including in tourism the passenger transport product as well, the total income generated by inbound international tourism exceeds \$1.2 trillion on 2011 with a daily average of \$3.4 billion.

Exports from tourism already account for approximately 30% of world exports for commercial services sector and 6% of the general export of goods and services. Globally, as an export category, tourism ranks fourth after fuels, chemical industry and food industry. For many developing countries or countries that compete based on the efficiency enhancers or factors, tourism is one of the main sources of income in foreign currency and in most cases takes first place in the list of exports, creating both employment and development opportunities.

Based on the data related to the development of the world economy from reports and various sources, in particular on World Tourism Barometer, tourism's contribution to global GDP is estimated at 5%. The contribution of tourism to employment is about 6-7% of the number of available jobs in the world. For the group of countries in which Albania is part, tourism's contribution to GDP is estimated by 2-10%,

¹ University 'aleksander xhuvani', economic faculty elbasan, Albania
E-mail: i_bejtja@yahoo.com

considering the place given to tourism as an industry in their development strategies - the main columns where their development is based on. On 2011, despite the difficult international economic situation and the global financial crisis, the tourism industry revenue grew by 3.9% to 2010, while the number of international tourists' arrivals increased by 4.6%.

In the period January to August 2012 the number of international tourists arrived at 705 million worldwide, signing a new record nevertheless the presence of the huge difficulties due to the global economic crisis. Those signed a growth of 4% compared to the same period in 2011, or 28 million more tourists. While on 2011, international tourist arrivals reached 990 million, the forecast for 2012 planned for more than one billion tourists, with the expected growth of 3% to 4%. The prognosis of growth for 2013 is expected to continue with a more moderate rate in the range of 2% to 4%².

In particular, the European continent exceeded half a million tourist achievement with 6% growth in international tourism arrivals, ranking as the fastest growing region along with Asia and the Pacific. Exciting results were deeply affected by the significant growth in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in Southern Europe and the Mediterranean, in both regions by 8%. The significant increase in international tourism arrivals in Southern Europe and the Mediterranean, which shares about 19% of world tourism, was based mainly on the largest tourist destinations in the region such as Greece with 10%, Turkey with 9%, Portugal with 9%, Croatia with 9%, Spain with 8%, Italy with 6%. Other smaller destinations registered double-digit growth, regions such as San Marino with 30%, Macedonia with 25%, Serbia with 12%, Montenegro and Cyprus with 10%. Data on Albania are available for the first quarter 2012 with a two figures Growth of 21.6% compared to the same period on 2011. Europe saw a 3% growth in international tourist arrivals in January-August 2012 compared to the same period last year³.

Meanwhile, the distribution of international tourist arrivals during 2011 still shows for a higher concentration of the arrivals on the summer months, but much smoother than on previous years. Months June-September estimates approximately 405 million inbound international visitors, approximately 43% of the total of about 938 million on 2011. What indicates for a fundamental change, is the tendency to decrease of this weight year by year for the last ten years, which tells also for much more wide distribution of the international inbound touristic movements during all the year round and toward non-mass tourism destinations such as, cities, cultural and historic sites, nature, sports, educational tourism, missionary etc.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The improvement in the quality of life and the continuous evolution of standards on the perception of quality by citizens; have importantly contributed to the tourism offer in each level and shape of it. This segment of tourism demand, recently classified as a segment of ecological, cultural and social tourism, or as sustainable tourism, has been continuously increasing. It is known in some classifications as ecotourism, nature tourism, sustainable tourism, environmentally friendly tourism, environmentally sensitive tourism, ecologically compatible tourism, ecologically sound tourism, or green tourism or eco-tour.

Sustainable tourism is the tourism model that meets the needs of the present tourists without compromising the ability and capacity of nature in general or of the environment to meet the demand of future tourists to fulfil their needs.

Tourist destinations are constantly under pressure due to the demand highly focused on cleanliness, preservation and virginity of environments where the destinations and touristic facilities within those are located. The building up of models based on the growing demand for unspoilt areas requires absolutely keeping of ecological environment in the spotlight and of the design of touristic destination, as well as the structures within them and products of tourist supply. This model, commonly called as eco-tourism is based on four fundamental elements:

1. Natural environment, as the main attraction to be offered, preserved in his virginity, and in quality implicated as intact, unspoilt and unpolluted, as well as the cultural environment that constitutes the second important base line in terms of sustainable environment in general.

² UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, Volume 10, pp. 3, November 2012

³ UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, Volume 10, pp. 3, November 2012

2. Sustainable use of ecological and cultural environment, as an integral part of sustainable tourism product.
3. Also focus on education and interpretation of sustainable tourism resources.
4. Predicted and granted benefits for the host community.

Under the context of these four elements guaranteeing the existence of the model of eco-tourism, tourism is based on people and places where different groups of other people classified as tourists move to, people who visit these destinations or pass through, furthermore including people who make travelling possible, as well as the people accompanying the tourist travel. Therefore, tourism comprise travellers, host communities and governments, both central and local government, central government considering the rules and laws guaranteeing the implementation of the eco-tourism model in its all details and requirements, and local government to guarantee the entire process at the local level in terms of hospitality and local direct security on the environment and travellers.

Based on the need for consumption and guaranteeing of local welfare, arises the conflict between the need of the local community for consumption and the need to recover or preserve disposal natural resources to provide for living. Under this trade-off, ecotourism model aims to make natural reserves economically self-sustaining and self-maintaining to provide alternative income for the people of that community, who would otherwise had to violate in an "illegal" way the assumed and established rule to preserve natural resources and to ensure the sustainability of their development, especially when it comes to resources defined as protected, and disseminating in the community the idea of "intact nature" as a fundamental moral value, as long as this value is the basic source of material welfare of the communities.

Tourism development under the ecological model would give to it a strong ethical shape and transform it into the required model from WTO and the European Commission, "ethical ecotourism". Under this definition, two are the main base lines of this model, protection and preservation of the environment in tourist destinations, and the economic and social benefits for local communities by meeting their economic objectives, as well as objectives related to the development of the travel and tourism industry, the satisfaction and meeting of the modern tourist demand for tourist product quality and unpolluted preserved areas⁴.

From this derives the obligation for "responsible travel", "conservation of nature" and "benefits for locals", but everything within a determined natural landscape or natural environment. An appropriate form of defining this model of tourism is "Active Tourism" - active tourism which shares similar goals and objectives to ecotourism, which is not determined by the destination or location, but rather from "the way of visiting"⁵ - tourist attitude and activities carried out during the visit. This approach is more comprehensive and modern in terms of its compatibility with international documents and guidelines fostering the development of sustainable tourism, and stimulates the demand for sustainable tourist product. Active tourism requires active physical and intellectual participation in the process of touristic production and consumption regardless of tourist destination. So, if ecotourism is possible as a concept and process only in the "undisturbed" areas of the virgin nature (natural jungles, Sahara, Amazonas, Tibet, Alaska, European Alps, Himalayas or Andes, etc.⁶), active tourism is equally possible both, in "undisturbed" natural areas, as well as among urban jungles such as cities. Active tourism is not limited by the presence of trees, houses, roads or presence of much population in the area. But, it is not limited neither by the presence in the particular destination of people who come from other countries, representing many interesting cultures and speaking other languages. These are very important parts of what tourists consume in the destination and share with locals during their touristic activities. Local architecture, archaeological ruins sites, urban characteristics and products of local civilization are all subject of tourist visits for the model of Active Tourism. Active tourism is a new travelling philosophy that combines adventure, ecotourism and cultural aspects in a discovering tourist trip⁷, simultaneously, as mystery and attractions discovering, as well entertaining. Active tourism aims to combine in one

⁴ TIES (*The International Ecotourism Society*) definition, 1991

⁵ *Active Tourism, Annual Report, 2002*

⁶ *Active Tourism, Annual Report, 2002*

⁷ *Active Tourism, Annual Report 2002*

experience or tourist package the re-creativity, education and benefit the tourist area or visit destination. It has a low ecological impact, socially compatible and total high quality. It also means “responsive” fun of today's modern tourist, so rules or tourist legislation to regulate so compelling tourist relations with the environment.

If we define it more complex, “active tourism is responsive travel in foreign countries and destinations that requires active physical and mental involvement by tourists and the host community, while respecting the maximum demand for sustainability, protection of biodiversity and conservation of storage of culture”. It is realized through involvement of some important elements as: re-creativity and education on the people element of the marketing mix for tourism and services, respect and consciousness, action, exercise and active inclusion in the companies and structures of the tourism industry of local experts and competent persons from academic world as tourist guides at the destinations and landscapes where tourist activities take place. This makes possible to answer better and more precisely to the modern tourist demand for unspoiled areas and spaces not only in the ecotourism models, but in every destination where tourism is developed as well.

CURATIVE TOURISM

Talking about health tourism, we consider that category of visitor movements out of home residence which aims both vacations and health care or medical treatment. It has seen an important growth worldwide recently, and as a rising trend in the industry of tourism, curative or health tourism is considered an important type of alternative tourism or sustainable tourism. It can be shortly and strictly defined as that kind of travel out of the place or the country of residence to another destination or country for medical or health treatment purpose. And, the person travelling for health treatment purposes is called “health tourist”⁸. Health tourism implies travel for treatment in hospitals, as well as other forms of medical and health treatment as spa and thermal water tourism, or other kinds of treatment under the control of medical system services. We can this way reassume this kind of tourism share between the following links:

1. Medical Tourism, including hospital services on health
2. Thermal Tourism, getting use of thermal waters, mud and other thermal treatment for physical rehabilitation and other disabilities.
3. Tourism for elderly and disabled people, physiotherapeutic treatment centers, long term accommodation for elderly etc.

Main reasons, other than travelling to tourist and attractive destinations, regarding the development of health tourism are impossibility of health system services as well as capable medical professional resources to cure or heal several disabilities and diseases in their country or place of residence, wish to take a vacation while in treatment, costs and quality of health care in their place of residence, often the wish to avoid giving information to others on their health state, limited massive tourism resources near or in their country of residence undertaking in the same time holidays, vacations and medical treatment in areas rich in landscape, natural resources, sports, cultural heritage etc, necessity for chronic physiotherapeutic treatment altered in different places and destinations, educational reasons in form of professional and education expeditions by university or other education and academic people, or people having the necessity to live and be treated in an ongoing bases etc. Considering this vast set of reasons to travel for medical or health treatment, it has seen a very rapid growth and development recently as a type of tourism.

Talking about thermal tourism, it is one of the largest forms and models of curative and health tourism. There are a large number of people preferring the health treatment getting use of the curative characteristics of thermal waters, mud stones or sands, being oriented and believing more on the success with homeopathic forms of treatment. This is related to costs of treatment, entertainment during medical treatment, leisure, tourist quality accommodation and close relations to natural resources. In this framework, a very important element is the close relation between curative health thermal tourism and cultural and natural tourism. This explains also the strong development of this kind of tourism near

⁸ Ministry of Health of Turkey, Health Services general Directorate, Health Tourism Handbook, pp. 65, 2012

lakesides, or cultural heritage sites, or natural parks and reserves⁹. We can this way consider or classify it more as wellness tourism, rather than simply health and curative tourism. Not confusing necessarily wellness with health¹⁰, we strongly talk about tourism and tourists while considering thermal visitor arrivals at thermal destinations. As Smith and Puczko (2009) stated, since so far, health and wellness practices have been strongly embedded in regional and local traditions and cultures¹¹, with available natural resources also determining the forms of wellness that were developed. It is strongly arguable that there are a lot of motivations by tourists to visit health/spa facilities at particular holiday destinations consuming in the same time other natural and cultural tourist resources in the area. In Albania we find some very important thermal water resources which can be found in the fountains of Dobrova near the city of Peshkopia, in Bilaj near Fushe-Kruja, in Elbasan, Bënjë in the district of Përmet and in Vronomero near Leskoviku in the district of Kolonja. Llixha of Elbasan is the most structured and equipped destination of thermal waters and mud. The thermal tourism is diversely called "thermalism" and its visitors are called "thermalists"¹² or thermal and spa tourists according to the ten paradigms on thermal tourism (Ramos, A. 2005).

LLIXHA OF ELBASAN STATE OF NATURE

Llixha of Elbasan is located 12 km in the south of the city of Elbasan in a green landscape with plenty of oak forest, green valleys, smooth green hills used for agricultural purposes, with plenty of rills and founts of water, both thermal and natural. The thermal water founts of the Llixha of Elbasan being closed to the ancient Via Egnatia are well-known and used since ancient times for health and wellness treatment. We can still find archaeological ruins of the roman stone baths used since that time, Roman Empire times, when this region is mentioned for its thermal waters used for medical treatment. Referring to historical archives we find several names and toponyms related to this thermal founts as "Fount of Scabies", "Fount of Bones", "Walnut tree of whooping cough", "Stone of Destiny" etc. In the modern times the first scientific research on these thermal waters were undertaken by the Czech engineer Dr. Breno Winter on 1922, analyzing and measuring the chemical composition of the thermal founts finding that there are a lot of curative characteristics embedded in this waters, by which a lot of diseases and disabilities can be treated and healed, mainly rheumatic, blood, renal, arthritis, respiratory, skin problems etc.

The first hotel/hospital built there was on 1932 by the Family Nosi from Elbasan, with a strong tradition in health care and use of natural resources on this purpose. The hotel, unique in the thermal water territory had 63 rooms and 133 beds with common WC placed at the end of the corridors of each floor. Later on there were built two other hotels increasing the accommodation capacity of the area in 500 beds, improving also the health/spa treatment infrastructure within the hotel structures. It has been strictly seen for a long time as pure health service, hospitals, used by medical recommendation, since when the last 20 years of the last century other wellness activities were involved in the health treatment package.

Nowadays, the number of beds is doubled and other small hotels and guest houses are used for accommodation, while the health treatment is still centralized at the three or four main hotels of the area. The number and quality of the services offered is poor, as well as the tourist and local infrastructure. Except for the sector of accommodation and transport, the other sectors of travel organization, destination organization and attraction are almost absent or weakly organized. There are few amenities on board, lacking considerably their quality. The visitors are almost all domestic, price oriented, and more than 80% elderly. The prices are of an average 140-150 Euro/person per two weeks full board. The health control on board is included in the price, while the visitors sitting in the guest houses and small hotels pay tuition

⁹ Gabor Michalko and Tamara Ratz, *Hungarian spa destinations in tourism oriented property market*, *Hungarian Geographical Bulletin*, 59(2), pp 134, 2010

¹⁰ Niko Koncul, *Wellness a New Mode of Tourism in the World of Turmoil*, 5th *International Scientific Conference "Entrepreneurship and Macroeconomic Management: Reflections on the World in Turmoil"*, Pula Croatia, pp 5, 2011

¹¹ Smith, M and Puczko, L, 2009, *Health and Wellness Tourism*, Oxford, Elsevier

¹² Ramos, A. 2005 at *Termalismo em Portugal. Dos factores de obstrução à revitalização pela dimensão turística*, cited for Adilia Ramos and Rossana Santos, *The Quality and Innovation in Thermal Tourism Destinations*, XVI *International Tourism and Leisure Symposium*, ESADE, Baecelona on 23 of May 2007

of 50-70 Euro/ person per two weeks for their spa and medical treatment. The area and environment lacks accessible attractions and organization on entertainment and leisure. Meanwhile, public organization at local self-government in order to host tourists is weakly organized undertaking spontaneous actions to “improve” local infrastructure and hygiene care and monitoring system, as well as installing weak signalling system for tourism, and guaranteeing security and order. The local public administration is weakly prepared for tourism development of the area. The number of tourists during the year is on average 8-10 thousand per year, mostly travelling on the periods April-May and August-November.

METHODOLOGY

In order to gather and analyze the answers regarding increasing performance of the “thermalism” in the area we interviewed four groups of people using the Delphi Technique, being represented by a sample of 5 persons per each group. This serves to congruate the answers considering the different approach the groups have related to “thermalism”. The first group represented local and regional tourist tour operators and agencies, the second represented Local Self-government PA, the third represented medical staff, both regional and local, and the fourth represented the accommodation sector. Once analysing the first answers, we chosen a sample of restructured interviews in order to judge on their perceptions and attitudes related to tourist development based in more relevant point of view on tourism, representing this way the offer side of the market for “thermalism”. We used SPSS to process the data collected and to find the tendency of the local tourism offer approach towards a better performance. We also interviewed a sample of 50 tourists, shared between Hotel Accommodation 30 and Guest Houses 20. They all answered more than 20 questions representing different factors related to thermal tourism performance in the area. The total of interviewed people between demand and offer representatives, as well as auxiliary system of the tourism industry was 70. We settled down and run a multiple linear regression considering a set of factors related to the total quality management of “thermalism” at Llixha of Elbasan. Once testing their significance, using AIC backward induction method, we eliminated the insignificant factors concluding at the final multiple linear regression as follow:

1. Quality of hotel services
2. Medical care and control, both centralized and on board
3. Local infrastructure
4. Organization at the destination, public and non-public
5. Marketing organization for travel and tourism
6. Attractions at the destination and Infrastructure for entertainment and leisure
7. Total cost of “thermalism” service
8. Hotel capacity
9. Seasonality

The determination coefficient was 0.58 (R^2) ($r^2 = 0.587$) evidently strong considering the number of the explanatory variables involved ($k=9$, $df 60$). All explanatory variables were tested (F -test = 15.83 within the norm) for autocorrelation with the disturbance term and for multicollinearity, which resulted negative (no autocorrelation and no multicollinearity), for a level of confidence interval of 95%. The most determinant factors to the increased quality of the “thermalism” product were No. 1, 2, 4 and 6, and less correlated No. 9, 3, 8. The multiple linear regression increases significance of coefficients under a confidence interval of 90%, obviously increasing and making significant the disturbance term.

The methodology used allowed us to judge on quantitative and qualitative level, for determination of the factors selected to measure the performance of “thermalism” in Llixha of Elbasan and for the better understanding of the stakeholder approach and perception on the total quality management of “thermalism” product, as well as on communicating them a congruent point of view on the design and production of the future tourist service they have to offer to the modern tourist demand, departing by the domestic one..

CONCLUSIONS

Considering the information gathered from the interviewees and the data processed we can come to some conclusions:

- a) The quality of the services is strongly out of standard and weakly appreciated by the tourists. The same perception exists in the staff and auxiliary sector people group of stakeholders, confirming low asymmetry or adversity.
- b) Public organization and community in the area are weakly oriented to thermal tourism even considering their long experience in hospitality (health treatment accommodation).
- c) There is lack of entertainment and leisure infrastructure in the area, except for some bars and small restaurants.
- d) Attractions, both natural and cultural are near the thermal tourism location, but the marketing organization is mostly absent or weakly organized (lack of tourist guide and tourist signaling system).
- e) Seasonality still remains an important factor related to tourist arrivals.
- f) There must be rules to set order on the use of the natural environment in the area, in order to preserve the natural resources and guarantee their sustainable development under models of active thermal tourism.

REFERENCES

- Dr. Ayed Al Muala and Dr. Majed Al Qurneh, *Assessing the Relationship between Marketing Mix and Loyalty through Tourists Satisfaction in Jordan Curative Tourism*, American Academic & Scholarly Research Journal Vol. 4, No. 2, November 2012
- Albanian Local Capacity Development Facility, Tregan Commune Case Study*, SNV, 2012
- Ministry of Health of Turkey, Health Services general Directorate, *Health Tourism Handbook*, pp. 65, 2012
- UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, Volume 10, pp. 3, November 2012
- George Erdeli, Ana Irina Dincă, Aurel Gheorghilaş, Camelia Surugiu, *Romanian Spa Tourism: A Communist Paradigm in a Post Communist Era*, Human Geographies, Journal of Studies and Research in Human Geography, V. 5.2, pp. 41-56, 2011
- Niko Koncul, *Wellness a New Mode of Tourism in the World of Turmoil*, 5th International Scientific Conference "Entrepreneurship and Macroeconomic Management: Reflections on the World in Turmoil", Pula Croatia, pp 5, 2011
- Wellness Tourism and Medical Tourism: Where do Spas fit?*, Research Report Global Spa Summit 2011 Drita Kruja and Marinella Sichi, *Climate Change and Tourist Activity*, TMC Academic Journal, 5(2), pp. 10-23, 2011
- Gabor Michalko and Tamara Ratz, *Hungarian Spa Destinations in the Tourism-oriented Property Market*, Hungarian Geographical Bulletin, V59.2, pp. 131-146, 2010
- Smith, M and Puczko, L, 2009, *Health and Wellness Tourism*, Oxford, Elsevier
- Adilia Ramos and Rossana Santos, *The Quality and Innovation in Thermal Tourism Destinations*, XVI International Tourism and Leisure Symposium, ESADE, Baecelona on 23 of May 2007
- John Connell, *Medical tourism: Sea, sun, sand and ... surgery*, Tourism Management, V 27, Elsevier, pp. 1093-1100, 2006
- Garcia-Altes, M., *The development of health tourism services*, Annals of Tourism Research, V 32(1), pp. 262-266, 2005
- Smyth, F., *Medical geography: Therapeutic places, spaces and networks*, Progress in Human Geography, V 29, pp. 488-495, 2005
- Derek Hall, Irene Kirkpatrick and Morag Mitchell, *Rural Tourism and Sustainable Business*, Channel View Publications, 2004
- Ritchie, J. and Crouch, G., *The Competitive Destination- A sustainable Tourism Perspective*, Cabi Publishing, UK., 2003
- Active Tourism, *Annual report*, 2012