

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF URBAN TOURISM IN ALBANIA - THE POTENTIAL ROLE OF URBAN TOURISM IN COMPETITIVE DEVELOPMENT OF ALBANIA DESTINATION

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Abstract

In this paper, the main objective is to introduce the role of urban tourism as a potential form of tourism in the competitive development of the Albanian destination and the role of urban tourism to the community of the Albanian urban areas and the problems related to this development. For the purpose of the study, it's needed to define the criteria of the study and the organization of the Albanian cities that offers the greatest possibilities to develop the urban tourism as a competitive form of tourism development. These criteria are: the evidence of the heritage historical patrimony, the evidence of the culinary patrimony, the evidence of the technical patrimony, the evidence of the hospitality patrimony, the evidence of the transport's situation, the evidence of the cultural patrimony, the evidence of leisure structures, various services. The analyses used enable the author to come on interesting conclusions.

Key words: urban tourism, Albania, strategic management.

JEL classification: Q01, O18, L83.

1. INTRODUCTION

Now tourism in towns and cities has become widespread in the European territorial area. These urban places often offer a broad range of historic and cultural attractions, shopping, restaurants, and the appeal of urban vitality. Many urban attractions and amenities are primarily developed to serve residents, but their use by tourists can greatly help to support them.

Also, the changes that have been made during the last years on the economic and political organization of the European territorial area have had their influences on the tourism development and tourist consumer behavior.

So, the globalization process in action, favored by the growth and development of media technologies has put in competition between them the urban territorial contexts on multiple and intersected plans:

- From fighting for the acquisition of structural and economic development occasions;

- To the attractions of direct productive investments, better of high image profile and in line with postmodern trends of mass tourism;

- To the match for attracting important activities for the city;

- And finally to the research of local traditional resources and their valuation in terms of image and specificity.

In addition, it's in action now in the common perception a kind of diminution of the perceptive space, influenced by the combination of the globalization forces, of the intersectorial competition and Internet that make much more significant the traditional notion of "local" and "stranger."

The coin is playing the role and the function of the rivers and mountains, so it limits the territorial perception of an area. In other terms, the adoption of a unique coin inside a super national area will reinforce to the civic, the perception of a unique space.

The most important consequences of all these, that are essential for the study of tourism as a driver of the economic progress of a city, are two.

First of all, for the global tourist consumer, the economic area of indifference about the decision of spending an weekend out of the city includes today tangentially a number of cities spread on a geographic spectrum economically not thinkable years ago: Paris, London, Lisbon, Venice, Naples, Rome, etc, are much more perceived from a tourist consumer in the same homogeneous group of alternatives: for the cost, the coin, the access conditions, etc.

Therefore, the management information of the consumer it's very important. This information will help to choose the destination with much more possibilities of place, special cultural events in action, or much more shopping occasions.

The other point is that, for the civic, there are a lot of positive effects such as:

1. the opportunities of growing the activity volume;

2. the opportunities of employment;

3. the prospective of the valuation of real estate urban activities;

4. the occasions of having a pleasant time, owing to the growth of the cultural offer.

Naturally a correct economic analyze can't let out of consideration the negative effects of tourism to the city and the society, such as:

1. the growth of public structure's use with a consequent diminution of the service quality;
2. saturation of the civic urban network;
3. a higher price level of public services, specially in those areas with a greater tourist vocation;
4. various disturbs owing to temporary interruptions of the viability in certain areas;
5. a lower medium quality of commercial assortments in the shops of tourist areas.

Therefore, urban tourism must be carefully planned. Determination must be made of the location of hotels and other tourist facilities, location, and development of attraction features, the additional infrastructure required for them, and perhaps institutional improvements. It is common practice to develop or redevelop certain urban areas – such as historic districts and waterfront sites – which are oriented particularly to tourism and resident's leisure use.

All this discussion is available for the Albanian territory that is now developing different forms of tourism. One of the most important is the urban tourism considering the potentiality of the necessary resources for this development and the trends in the European tourism.

So, approximately 80% of Europe's population lives in towns and cities, making Europe the most built-up continent and the urban question one of the major issues for future years.

Urban conurbations mirror the problems that face the European society as a whole: traffic gridlock, pollution, lawlessness, and unemployment. They are not just the main places in which wealth and the focus of cultural and social development are created, however, but places where people work, shop and enjoy leisure pursuits.

Renewed interest in urban tourism since the beginning of the 1980s has brought about a sharp upturn in this kind of tourism. Various interlinked factors have undoubtedly played a part in the need to breathe life back into and rehabilitate the historic centers of towns and cities, wide ranging and more diversified cultural pursuits, consumers' interest in the heritage and urban development and their search for things to do and for spending opportunities.

The fact that people are taking more, but shorter holidays, the advent of the single market and the general increase in mobility have also helped to build up urban tourism in Europe.

Naturally for developing this form of tourism in the Albanian territory there must be the necessary potentialities for this development.

So, it's necessary to define the criteria of the study and the organization of the Albanian cities that offer the greatest possibilities to develop the urban tourism as a competitive form of tourism development. These criteria are:

- The evidence of the heritage historical patrimony;
- The evidence of the culinary patrimony;

- The evidence of the technical patrimony;
- The evidence of the hospitality patrimony;
- The evidence of the transport's situation;
- The evidence of the cultural patrimony;
- The evidence of leisure structures;
- Various services.

Based on these criteria the Albanian cities that offer the greatest potentialities for developing urban tourism are: Tirana, Vlora, Berati, Kruja, Saranda, Durresi, Korca, Saranda and Gjirokastra.

They include small towns and large cities, towns with a tradition of tourism and towns where tourism is a more recent development, as well as towns active in various urban tourism markets (cultural cities, leisure centers, business centers).

2. PROBLEMS RELATED TO THE URBAN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN ALBANIA

Considering that any form of tourism can produce negative effects is very important to build up a quality urban tourism.

Quality tourism can contribute to the sustainable development of urban areas by improving business competitiveness, meeting social needs and preserving the cultural and the natural environment.

In addition, tourism must be seen as a cornerstone of a policy of urban development that combines competitive supply able to meet visitors' expectations with a positive contribution to the development of towns and cities and the well-being of their residents.

Integrated quality management offers an opportunity to act on both these fronts: the economic development, on the one hand, and urban development, on the other. It accomplishes this by offering visitors a unique and original experience and by trying as far as possible to satisfy residents' nightfall aspirations for harmonious economic and social development which shows concern for the environment.

Generally speaking, integrated quality management is a repetitive and participatory process.

In tourism, particularly in towns and cities, this process involves management policy, i.e. a policy that concerns everyone involved in the basic services and products supplied to tourists, which is the source of attraction for the visitor, as well as in the secondary services, which are an important part of the overall tourist experience.

Six criteria are helpful in creating, maintaining, and developing a dynamic partnership between all those involved.

They are as follows:

- establishing a strong, well structured, institutionally-based management that has resources (financial and human) for action, autonomy and

responsibility and the support of the public authorities, the private sector and local people;

- from the formulation of the plan right up to the monitoring of its implementation, forging a partnership approach based on close and cohesive cooperation between all those involved at local, regional, national, and even international level, thereby making the most of the resultant synergies, spin-offs from measures and economies of scale;

- working towards a common vision of tourism development by consulting the system for the circulation of information;

- looking for a balanced distribution of the positive impact of urban tourist development between visitors, industry professionals, their personnel and local people. The foundations need to be laid for a positive outcome that offers added value for everyone;

- drawing up a consistent policy and coordinating, in the field, the activities of services responsible for tourism and other services responsible for urban development which have a major part to play in the quality of the visitor experience (public transport, public cleanliness, police, etc.);

- introducing incentives to promote the emergence and encourage the development of private initiatives to improve tourism quality. These incentives may be constructive or repressive and can take a whole range of forms (tax concessions, aids and subsidies, information and promotion, prizes and awards, training, etc.).

This is all necessary for the development of a quality urban tourism, especially now that our country is at the infantile phase of this development. It's also necessary the existence of a strategic development plan with its objectives. The choice of objectives depends on factors connected with the context, positioning, and orientation of tourist development policy. Ideally, these objectives should be formulated so that they are in keeping with urban development policy. Implementing integrated quality management in urban tourist destinations requires in-depth work to:

- analyze the current situation;
- define the objectives and overall strategy of the approach;
- examine the environment and sustainable development;
- improve human resources and training schemes.

Analysis of the current situation

The partners working in an urban destination should carry out a detailed analysis of the SWOT type on the position of tourism with respect to the main market trends, its potential, and the limits on its sustainable development, its positive impact, and its constraints.

Defining the objectives and overall strategy of the approach

The reasons for introducing an integrated quality management approach need to be clearly set out in order to avoid any subsequent frustration of the

expectations of public and private partners and the local community. These reasons should preferably be positive and preventive rather than negative and corrective.

The objectives should be operational, possible to evaluate and staggered over time. If they are few in number, they can be readily communicated which should help to unite the partners, step up the internal mobilization of the destination and provide visitor information that is increasingly sensitive to consumer notions.

The environment and sustainable development

These objectives should be part and parcel of an overall strategy of urban development whose aim is to make the most of local socioeconomic impact and to optimize the quality of life of current and future generations.

Human resources and training schemes

The human factor is one of the keys to the success of an urban tourist destination. It is the quality of the contacts that visitors make that they will most often remember and speak about to their friends and family. The objectives chosen should therefore always include personnel satisfaction underpinned by a wider range of opportunities for personal enhancement through a policy of continuing training and improvement of working conditions.

3. URBAN TOURISM CONTRIBUTION TO THE RESIDENT COMMUNITY OF THE ALBANIAN URBAN DESTINATIONS

This contribution is seen in terms of:

1. greatest development possibilities of relevant economic indicators: level of occupation, GDP, productive investments, family consumptions, public investments, etc;

2. much more investments in instrumental infrastructure;

3. improvement of the quality of life, thanks to the attention paid to the environment (in ecological sense), to the sustainable development, to the urban equipment, so to the compressive esthetics of the urban experience, etc;

4. much more investments in production and cultural infrastructure;

5. increasing of the external consideration of the city through the improvement of the image.

The good development of tourist activities go and increase the real value of the city, acting on the variable factors of value and implementing the generative capacity of structural factors.

Structural factors are qualitative/quantitative components, protemporal constants and however difficultly modifiable, that identify and note the city, defining the personality and the characteristic functioning modalities. They include:

1. The geographic position, in absolute and the relative sense, in comparison with the great economic, social and financial attractive centers;

2. The position on the urban hierarchy;

3. The equilibrium between the city personality and the state of transition of productive and social infrastructure;

4. The environmental physical conditions to intend as compressive quality of the environment and climate and the connected influences on the quality of life;

5. The story and the local culture, that let impressed mark on the mental habits of the local society, indicating an extraordinary capacity of adaptability to the demographic contaminations.

Variable factors are qualitative/quantitative components, modifiable on the short and long-run with direct and programmed interventions, with the aim to keep the dynamics of the structure with the external environment. They include:

1. The instrumental infrastructure from the traditional ones (streets, railroads, etc) to the civic such as: telematic networks, connected services, etc.;

2. The infrastructures of cultural production and use such as: Universities, research centers, museums, editorial houses and so on;

3. The rules that regulate the daily life, written or not/have a direct impact on the quality level of life in the city;

4. The institutional regulation of the public power;

5. The image capital of the city, made of a structural component (related to the local story and culture) and a variable, more influenced by the capacity of being in harmony with the themes of contemporaneity;

6. The international opening seen from the relational aspects (exchanges on scientific research, the capacity of being a trendsetter, etc) and those infrastructural, too.

7. The resident population, in terms of its attitudes, inclination, typical expressions, culture, etc.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The lead authority should:

- lead the integrated quality management approach for the urban tourist destination;

- unite the various partners by establishing facilities for concerted action and consultation;

- initiate specific measures likely to improve the quality of the services and products offered to visitors;

- integrate this approach into the broader framework of the general development of the destination and its neighboring region;

- put forward a policy of sustainable development of tourism based on the optimum use of the destination's resources.

Public and private tourism service providers should:

- work with the public authority to design, implement and monitor the integrated quality management approach;

- comply with standards and quality labels (as well as environmental labels) and constantly endeavor to improve the services and products offered to tourists;

- listen to visitors and to their staff in order to provide food for thought and feedback for integrated quality management approach;

- help, through individual and collective initiatives, to improve the destination's appeal;

- ensure that visitors have a positive image of the urban destination and are aware of its specific nature.

Local people should:

- take part in consultation meetings and surveys organized by the public authority as part of the design, implementation and monitoring of the integrated quality management approach;

- play an active part in improving visitor care through their attitudes, friendliness and helpfulness to visitors;

- abide by and help to implement the measures and regulations drawn up by the public authority in areas such as cleanliness, the rehabilitation of buildings, respect for the environment, public transport and security.

For this purpose, tourists should be encouraged to behave in a responsible way and:

- be made aware of the well-being of the local population;

- respect the traditions and cultural features of the destination's residents;

- abide by measures to minimize the negative impact of tourist flows on the environment.

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