DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM
CASE STUDY OF SARANDA'S HINTERL AND FROM "100 VILLAGES" PROGRAM

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Abstract - On summer 2018, Albanian Government started "100 Villages" Project, a cooperation between National Agency of Territorial Planning and Universities of Tirana, students and teachers from Architecture, Economics and Agriculture.This project which started with the study of the rural fabric, the build environment and actual economic situation of every picked village, aimed to transform this rustic network, into the backbone of a future sustainable tourism in Albania, connected much more to the land, the produce and the people, arguing for a different type of tourist and for a more ecological development of these representative communities.The region I would like to tell you about is close to Saranda, by the Ionian Sea, just in front of Corfu Island, and is made of four villages: Mursi, Rusan, Çuke and Mesopotam. They are the hinterland of Saranda, one of the most important tourist spots of the country, with high development potential in coming years and a territory that with its history, ethnography, archeology, cuisine and nature will add a very interesting note to all toursits wanting to know more deeply the authentic Albania, beautiful, ancient, with its traditions and hospitality (Yi-Ping, 2016).The area is rich in history, the landscape is impressive, with evergreen citrus vegetation and majestic olive groves.The coast of this territory is a unique gem, but our whole concept of tourism development for the region is to support but also to offer an alternative to the sea-sun package, with the folklore, culinary, culture and antiquity of the area Yet the greatest wealth of this region are its people. These people who sanctuary the ancient and noble habit of preserving what was left from their forefathers. These gentle people, toughened by sunshine on their fields, hardworking and wise, with eyes towards the future full of hope and faith.

Keywords - Sustainable Tourism; Development; Tradition; Hospitality;

I. INTRODUCTION

At first glance, the situation of the villages making up the Region are so different; two are in demographic decline, one at the limit, while the fourth has not felt the change; one village has not even hypothecations for the houses and perhaps no desire to change, while the other is an example in the whole of Albania for the success and cooperation of the inhabitants; one is mainly inhabited by Greek minorities, one with a mixed population, one with Albanian Muslims and the other with Orthodox, Albanian and Greek residents, who speak both languages beautifully and are proud of this part of their culture.At the same time, they are part of an area that unites history, culture, language and geography. It is a territory with a historical weight of more than two thousand years, with the tradition of mixing languages, cultures and populations, without losing its identity over the centuries and above all, connected to the land of the ancestors, to the land they love and it holds them with a magnetic force.A very important and defining part of the region is its geography and climate, the proximity to the Ionian Sea, the mild climate, the beautiful nature, the landscape with almost dramatic contrasts, the relationship between the soft and fertile plains and the rugged and rugged mountains that surround them.The coast of this territory is an unrepeatable gem. From Cape Stillo and Tongo Island to Kroreza Bay, the beaches and the sea provide endless opportunities for the development of elite tourism with great potential in the future.The region has a significant diaspora, still closely connected to the country. This is seen in the restoration of houses, in the experience brought and the desire to always improve something. Good relationship and proximity to Greece,with proper marketing, will be an important part of the tourism potential that this project is trying to encourage in the Region and beyond. (Buonincontri P, Marasco A, Ramkissoon H, 2017)

II. SOME HISTORY

The territory is rich in historical and cultural values, including caves that have been places of pilgrimage since the Paleolithic, Epirote cities, villas from the Roman period, medieval castles, Paleo-Christian churches, etc. Even Butrint, currently perhaps the most important archeological site of the South, is a complementary part of a land with a rich history, since the beginning of civilization.(Kulturës, 2017)This area was among the first in the Balkans where Christianity spread, with the Apostles Paul and Andrew who are said to have stopped, preached and baptized the inhabitants in its cities. Yes, it was among the first to be affected by Ottoman pressure, but for the sake of truth, it remained one of the most conservative in preserving the earliest religion, thanks to the late presence of the Venetians.(SHABANI, 2001)A no less important historical episode was the period of Ali Pasha Tepelena, who throughout his career tried without much success to expand in this direction, with the dream of going to sea and being an independent political factor in the Mediterranean, an effort that brought calamity for many important feudal families in the area.(PANGO, 2002)Heritage of this kind is important, together with its preservation. For this region, the past can be considered primarily as a tool for generating income

through tourism; while in developed countries, saving heritage is mostly understood seen as resistance to modernization (Timothy D.J, Nyaupane G.P, 2009) Heritage is understood and described in many ways, all present in this region (UNESCO, 1983):

- Tangible cultural heritage (buildings, historical sites, monuments and all kinds, etc.).
- Movable Cultural Heritage (sculptures, paintings, manuscripts, coins, artefacts, etc.)
- Immovable cultural heritage (archaeological monuments, sites, historic city tissues, etc.)
- Underwater Cultural Heritage (shipwrecks, underwater ruins and cities)
- Intangible Cultural Heritage (rituals, oral traditions, performing arts, etc.)
- Natural Heritage (natural sites, cultural landscapes, geological formations, etc.),

III. TOURISEM ORIENTED STRATEGY

The area has already developed a large amount of basic, sea and sun touristic package. What we want to diversify this into, is a list of activities and value promotions that increase the offering diapason and making it more sustainable for the future. Tourism could be a great tool, for its ability to merge conservation and development goals in similar areas (Ashworth & van der Aa, 2006; Figgis & Bushell, 2007).History will be one of the greatest assets in the attraction of tourists to the depth of the country. Other elements such as food and nature would be a complementary part of the package and help to enhance the effect. Natural monuments are the rest of the tourist collection that the area offers, in a summary of opportunities for nature travel, picnic positions, water sports, fishing, etc. Activities in the fresh air would be a very interesting element, with the possibility to take place throughout the year and a pleasant alternative especially in winter. Mountains and hills can be used for hiking, bird watching or camping according to elaborated itineraries(Ashworth G J, Graham B, 2005).A series of historical monuments are an important part of this heritage. The list includes objects from Paleolithic caves and settlements, to Paleo-Christian churches, and the most recent monuments of communist history. Architectural heritage is another layer connecting culture with history, that we consider valuable. There are many traditional dwellings, some still inhabited, some unfortunately almost in ruins, mostly with stone walls and gable roofs. Especially rich in such objects, is the municipality of Konispol with objects mainly from the 19th century. (Kulturës, 2017)Equally important part of the tourist offer is closely related to the inhabitants of the Region, as much as to the territory where they live. There are also some very interesting local fairs and festivals, where their customs, folk costumes, songs and dances are combined with delicious food and religious processions. A combination of these elements are the opportunities that open up for the establishment of Agrotourism, in olive groves, vineyards and citrus orchards.(Dostoğlu N, Başdemir A, Durmaçaliş B, Çalikuşu E, 2016)Tour packages will work with good organization, professional management and proper marketing. The investment for such packages would be minimal, based mainly on the necessary signage and appropriate furnishing of key points of interest. Very important are the lakes and rivers, with their banks and green valleys. Understanding the importance of cultural heritage, in many similar situations, has established cultural organizations whose goal involves protection, promotion, management and dissemination of the cultural heritage. (UNESCO, 1983)At the regional level, it is possible for tourism to give a higher output through a model of sustainable tourism development, based on the conservation of resources and their use, taking care of the environment and bringing economic and social benefits (Getz, 2008). The aim of tourism will be in general:

- increase and improve the offer for current tourists
- increase tourist flows in the area, especially in terms of extending the tourist season.
- create a part of a tourism product at national and international level
- Cultural tourism – spreads throughout the area was based on the use of importantcultural facilities
- Nature tourism and ecotourism – spread in those parts of the region that have more landscapes and resources of natural heritage as well as have special characteristics of biodiversity.
- Agritourism - high opportunity for spreading throughout the area, being the type of tourism based on the most important economic source, which is agriculture/livestock.
- Sports tourism – possibility to spread quickly in some areas, depending on infrastructures

There is a strong connection between tourism, heritage (of any kind) and its preservation. When local communities are aware of their cultural or natural heritage, they love and protect it better, making it a useful tool to generate funds, that can be used to protect and enhance this heritage, making it easier to attract more tourists and so on. It is necessary for professions like architects and planners to express and promote these values delivered by past times. (Interreg, 2017)

IV. SUSTAINABLEY DEVELOPED ECONOMY

Economic analyze takes into account important factors such as demography and human resources, the main cultural and natural resources, assets related to the local economy sectors such as agriculture and livestock, as well as the basic orientations that come

from important strategic and planning documents at the national and regional level(Hopkins, 2011). In this context of regional development, this analysis aims to:

- Identify factors building competitive advantage that will support future strategies and projects;
- Facilitatedecision-making for economic development by examining the environment;
- Guarantee lasting results in an sustainable progress;
- Extend from focal to regional development;
- Facilitate a systematic form of preparation;
- Projet change for the future of a village/villages/region;
- Take into account the socio-economic and environmental context;

4.1. Strategies for economic growth

We envisioned a model based on tangible experience and not only visits or tasting food and products, founded on the agricultural/livestock sector and the variety of cultural and natural heritage resources, as well as from the proximity to the city of Saranda, as one of the main ports and tourist sites in Albania. The region will advance economically with tourism as a priority sector, which will promote development and interaction with the agricultural sector and light processing in the form of handicraft products and workshops. Farm activities will aim to increase the demand of visitors and tourists in the area, leading to amplified income from agritourism, to diversify agricultural activities. This will reduce the risk, especially by reducing the possibility of a decrease in income in case of a drop in demand for agricultural products. The human resource element will be an essential component in total service delivery. Training and encouraging all employees to treat customers well is the essence of service quality. While interaction with customers will create the possibility of building a competitive advantage compared to other tours and competing agencies(Indevelop AB, 2011).

4.2. Growth strategy

Our strategy will be based on several points important for a sustainable growth of local economy (Idilfitri, 2015):

- Diversity of agritourism sites
- High level of interest from locals and institutions
- Participation of existing partners, includinglocal farms
- Adequate infrastructure
- High level of public awareness about the importance and issues
- agriculture in the region
- International tourism trends show that today's travelers want a richer experience than that offered by conventional "sun and sea" vacations.

4.3. Chain model for sustainable development

The chain model in the Region will be based on the current production, which is relatively high and of sound quality, both in terms of process and final product.

To increase offering products to the consumer and tourist markets, it is suggested to use small packages for processed products as well as their branding with a local brand. Economic empowerment through local actors and interest groups by better cooperation between the agriculture and tourism sectors is possible, as there are bases for the cooperation of actors, which can be used in the development and diversification of agritourism. Agreements with tourist operators would be an additional and beneficial opportunity for the area. Some digital marketing tools, blogs on social media as well as through e-commerce can also be used in this direction(Shimray, 2019).

Production and trade - have a complementary role in realizing an increased income per capita of the population. Currently, the economic impact that production and trade have in the area can be improved, through the proposal of workshops for the processing of agricultural products, in products of the area such as jams as well as handicraft products, where we mention reed products.The trade will aim to increase the opportunities for export of the agricultural products of the area, increase the opportunities in different channels of distribution and marketing of the products, including collection points and agreements with traders outside the current market area, as well as marketing to tourists in "E dua" (I want it) stores, or more widely in the market in other chain stores in Albania.

V. COOPERATION MODEL

Rural development today in Albania is very important, since the village constitutes an important part of the territory, as well as contains a significant part of our economic resources, but it is abandoned by a large part of the population, due to the internal movements and external migration. The promotion of a new approach to rural development based on bottom-up initiatives, differentiating interventions according to local needs and encouraging the exchange of experience and knowledge can be found in initiatives such as Local Action Groups (LAG). They are associations that represent cooperation between different sectors within the framework of common agricultural policies.LAG initiatives in this context can be an approach that comes as an example of success from the EU countries, whose basic objective has been to build the structures of local actors to support them in building long-term potentials in their region. In this context, these initiatives have aimed to develop capacities in local government, implement strategies for increasing the quality of services and encourage the use of resources

for sustainable rural development of the regions. LAG can be legally based as: a joint legal structure (like an NGO with a Board)(UNESCO, 2002). The principles should be:

- Partnership
- Cooperative agreement in the field of environment
- New approaches for regional and local development based on interaction
- Appropriate solutions to agricultural problems and the environment
- More effective use of internal resources
- Involvement of different sectors – agriculture, tourism, local government, etc.

5.1. "22" Organisation

We propose to establish an "Umbrella" structure or organization with a mixed character as an agreement of existing public and private structures, to directly manage some of our proposals and to offer experience and assistance to interested entities in the region in applications for projects and grants offered by the government or various donors. Its main structures to manage are:

- Village Inn (Han), Mursi
- Village Inn (Han), Rusan
- Restaurant and Culinary Academy, Mursi
- Luxury Hotel, Chuke
- Sculpture Park, Mesopotamia

There is a symbiotic relationship between the proposed projects in the region, which facilitates the existence of this management structure. The Culinary Academy serves as an avant-garde restaurant that produces recipes, places itself in the world guides by winning Michelin stars, distributes experience among the residents for the production and storage of products, produces recipes for the Inns and the Hotel, does Catering for the exhibitions and activities of the Sculpture Park.

Separately, these subjects would have difficulty surviving and would remain theoretical proposals, but together, with a core that directs and finances them from Tirana, they have all the possibilities to function and succeed as an activity, giving them gave life to the whole community.

(Albania, 2018)This organization will apply profitable methods to its units, becoming an example of success, but also sharing income with specific villages, investing in infrastructure and training residents. In close connection with the latter, not only will transparency of activities be made, but they will also be given the opportunity to participate through representatives chosen by themselves, in decision-making for all proposals.

VI. CONCLUSION

Our concept for the tourist development of this region is supporting and making possible alternatives to the sea-sun package, with the tradition, culture and history of the area. It is the duty of this project, tourist guides and local government bodies in the first place, but also all other actors of the initiated platform, to present to the foreign or local visitor even the most prosaic reality of the country, the real life of the inhabitants of it, the thousand-year history of the territory and the authentic creations of the simple hands of its inhabitants and owners, from jams and pies, to characteristic houses and architectural ensembles, but also olive groves, vineyards, meadows and dairies where real life springs, and where the air, the honey, the water, and the brandy taste like the pagan deities born in these lands once tasted.

As designers our main role in this type of interventions is to facilitate the coordination between different actors, with a wide range of fields important for the region. Of the same importance is the illustration of main strategies and projects in order to be understood and developed further from the authorities and the locals. And last but not least, there is the possibility to offer better ways of terry tory planning in order to accommodate the expressed strategies and objectives.

The recommendations of the economic development model are to invest and encourage:

- Installation of product selection and refining lines to increase its value;
- Planting in blocks for different cultures.
- Increasing production while maintaining product quality and respecting the environment (soil and surface water and underground).
- Promotion of citrus and olive by-products as a local merchandise;

Another important component for the future is investing in local infrastructure in order to have:

- Increasing accessibility between the villages of the region;
- Improvement of connecting infrastructure and diversification of mobility
- Quality public services and strengthening of rural polycentrism
- Guaranteeing public services; Digital technology as a potential to reach the goal.

The architectural heritage of the Region is to be appreciated, even though many buildings have serious structural problems. An accurate guide is required, but modestly this material can recommend:

- Respecting old facades, starting from photographs, memory or residual marks.
- Respecting the construction method, especially stone walls, with hewn stone corners.

- Covering with a roof, with tiles or stone slabs, according to tradition, with natural colors.
- Avoiding prominent volumes, deep consoles, roofs with flat terraces, etc.
- Restoration of details such as doors, windows, stairs, sofas, etc., using traditional materials.
- Obstruction of buildings higher than two floors in the old borders of the villages.
- All-out efforts for the use of original materials, avoiding apparent concrete.
- Wherever possible, copy the style of half-ruined and abandoned houses, as the best examples of Vernacular Architecture of the area.
- Preserving the tradition of paving with characteristic cobblestones.

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