

## **Cultural/Heritage Tourism Strategic Planning in Albania. Analysing Berat, as a World Heritage Patrimony, Protected by UNESCO**

**Frosina Londo<sup>1</sup>, Fioralba Vela<sup>2</sup>**

**Abstract:** Cultural/Heritage tourism market has always been seen as very important in tourism development in Albania, even before 90's. It's important in nowadays to be focused in a very well planned development of this form of tourism, as cultural tourism is trying to be one of the key determinants of Albanian tourism development. In Albania it has been developed since before 90's, time when tourism itself did not have the proper attention by the government. It must be emphasized that cultural tourism development implies at the same time the lack of use of some cultural sites and fast degradation of certain others. This problem points out a significant two sided imbalance in the cultural tourism market. So, there are needed a lot of efforts in terms of strategic plans of cultural tourism development to enhance positive impacts of it. In this paper we aim to point out some of the problems related to the focus of strategic plans in developing sustainable cultural tourism in Albania. The following issues will be addressed: 1. Tourism strategies developed in Albania regarding tourism and cultural/heritage. 2. Defining key success factors of cultural/heritage tourism in Albania, focused especially on sustainable development. Our goal is to demonstrate how the overall analysis of these issues may improve the integration between development and conservation of heritage, not only to meet the challenges of emerging trends in cultural tourism, but mainly to keep heritage alive, diversify its uses and enhance its ability to improve the quality of life of the contemporary society.

**Keywords:** cultural tourism; Strategic development; conservation; heritage

**JEL Classification:** Q26; Q01

### **Introduction**

In the last years cultural/heritage tourism development in Albania has been seen as another integral form of pushing this form in another level, so at the highest levels of decision making it has been given special attention to it. While cultural tourism is not a brand new concept in Albania, since it has been the unique reason international tourists came in Albania before 90s and, also after, in Albanian scientific and professional community there is a lack of studies related to cultural/heritage tourism development. Cultural/ heritage tourism development in Albania

---

<sup>1</sup>Professor, PhD, Department of Education, University of Vlora, Albania, Address: Vlorë, Albania, Corresponding author: fiorivela@yahoo.it.

<sup>2</sup> Professor, PhD, Department of Business Administration. University of Vlora, Albania, Address: Vlorë, Albania, E-mail: fioralba.vela@univlora.edu.al.

is researched scientifically only in case of projects financed by UNESCO or Ministry of Tourism, but rarely. There is a lack of information related to its development and the impact of it in general tourism flows and economic development. The reasons for this are inadequate and not systematic inter - sectoral cooperation of tourism, culture and heritage, not a proper idea on the measures used to give an insight of this form of tourism development in Albania and in general lack of responsibility on the importance of deep analysis of the causes and effects of its development in the future of economic development. Also, government institutions do not offer the necessary information based on official data.

In order to present a actual situation on the state of cultural tourism development in Albania, in this paper the authors tend to introduce Albanian cultural/ heritage tourism development problems, with a focus specially on the city of Berat known as “the city of a thousand and one windows”, by UNESCO and declared as World Cultural Heritage Patrimony with a special status and protected by it.

But, as we will see further on, in this paper, there are a lot of problems related to qualitative development of cultural/heritage tourism development in Berat and in general in Albania.

### **Methodology of Study**

Methodology used in this paper is focused on using case study method to describe and consequently analyze cultural / heritage tourism development through a strategic planning which leads to sustainable tourism development in Albania and specifically in Berat city, known by UNESCO as world heritage patrimony with the name “city of a thousand and one windows”.

### **Cultural Tourism in Albania**

Cultural and heritage sites are a very great potential for tourism development for each country which dispose certain patrimony. But, at the other hand it must be planned carefully since tourism development is controversial and expose sites to danger in their sustainability. On the other hand, governments must be careful to not permit the uncontrolled tourism development which brings potentiality in negative impacts. There a lot of potential risks related to tourism at Heritage sites, identified by the responsible governative and non governative agencies, and especially by UNESCO World Heritage Committee.

Positive impacts of cultural/heritage tourism development:

Tourism infrastructure often damage heritage values since sometimes it is developed using buildings, or areas which belongs to heritage and cultural patrimony, like in Berat, Gjirokastra, etc. but, at the other hand the need to arrive at the site there is needed infrastructure development. Communities are often not responsible to the right and proper use of cultural heritage and in its conservancy. Cultural heritage must be used in a sustainable way, in accordance with economic development objectives. Heritage and cultural sites are an important resource of tourism attraction

Also, there are a lot of threats related to cultural tourism development which include:

The risk in the quality of touristic visits and cultural values, because of the lost authenticity, especially related to souvenirs. Social structures are often altered by cultural sites use for tourism. Local culture is impacted by the arrival of many international tourists, which interfere with their attitudes and culture. There is low suitability of some sites with living heritage for large scale tourism, and also, benefits of mass tourism do not trickle down to local communities.

Cultural tourism gradually gives way to the tourist experience within which, in relation to cultural heritage, there are activities and practices such as organized or not group visits led by incoming tour operators, the pleasure of photographing cultural sites, buying souvenirs, etc. it means that visits to cultural / heritage sites do not always respond to conscious or culturally motivated acts and because the increasing number of visits to heritage does not always mean that the benefits provided by heritage massive use are higher or that the quality of the experience has improved as compared to other moments in the history of tourism.

In fact, for measuring the real economic effects of cultural tourism development its important to know the number of annual visitors in this sites, but that does not help in giving an insight in the real effects, because it is a quantitative information but not qualitative. Although economic benefits can be important in those monuments that charge an entry, there are other sites (which are yet the majority ), such as historic sites, great archeologic monuments or landscapes in which the entrance is free, and where such benefits do not depend on the number of tourists but rather on the characteristics of their stay and behavior as consumers of products and services only secondarily related to heritage.

### **Potentiality for future development of cultural/heritage tourism development in Albania**

Albania is facing a lot of problems related to cultural tourism development, and the most obvious, as presented by the SECTOR STRATEGY ON TOURISM 2007 – 2013, are:

- Awareness and Marketing;
- Product Development;
- Investments in Natural Areas to Strengthen the Tourism Sector;
- Investments in Culture to Strengthen the Tourism Sector;
- Human Resources;
- Infrastructure;
- Business Climate;
- Re-evaluation of Tourist Experience;
- Data and Information Management

Further development of cultural/heritage tourism development in Albania should be considered related to motivated international tourists who come and discover Albania, as a cultural/heritage destination, and with a completely different culture in the Balkan area. Strategies for sustainable development are needed to have concrete results which become real data in cultural tourist arrival in Albania. Although, there are made a lot of tries in designing and implementing tourism development strategies there is still a great need to fix valuable long term objectives as part of a well plan of management and action.

Also, local governance and communities must be given the right attention and role in the further development of cultural/heritage tourism development, not just as part of demagogies, but as a real focus on the right impact which certain governance level must have. It must be said that exist a trend on different municipalities in Albania, such as Berat, Kruje, Gjirokaster, etc, as part of a well known national cultural patrimony, for the focus which the have to this form of tourism, but the real problem is the lack of the concrete inter sectoral connection and cooperation between central and local strategies and also, governance.

The concept of sustainability is built upon the strategic position as per the need. Without aggressive efforts to ensure the sustainability of the natural and cultural resources, Albania cannot reasonably expect to maintain a market position capable of attracting international tourists. Without involving the local communities and providing real opportunities for them to participate in and benefit from the development process, the attractions will continue to degrade or will be converted for other economic uses – nearly all of which offer much less long-term development potential than the tourism.

Developing a successful sector requires substantial levels of investment in infrastructure, marketing, human resources, natural area management, preservation of historical sites and of the living culture. The country will not be successful, without a serious commitment for investments.

There are no “recipes.” Albania’s tourism products must be authentic, while meeting the general expectations of international tourists. International experience, knowledge and best practices should be sought aggressively in order to make informed decisions and plans for the country. However, the products themselves must represent, to the maximum extent possible, an authentic Albanian approach. The most likely outcome will be the adoption and adaptation of strategies and mechanisms from a number of countries with best practices in different regions of the world.

Local – national issues. Nature and culture tourism require actual involvement of local governments in tourism planning, urban planning, infrastructure development, cultural preservation and environmental protection among others. While there is considerable local capacity in the larger cities and identified cultural centres, many cities and towns will require substantial amounts of additional support from the central government, Tirana-based institutions and international experts.

The nature and culture tourism segment is highly dependent on very specialized human resources. Very high-quality tour guides are perhaps the most critical success factor for Albanian tourism and will need to be aggressively recruited and trained. The country will need qualified managers for natural and cultural sites. In addition, there is an identified shortage of qualified hospitality personnel at all levels and in all regions. Limited language skills (English in particular) across these categories and in particular in provincial areas, presents a challenge.

A number of alternative tourism strategies have proven to be non-complementary and potentially harmful to building high-value tourism. Large-scale “sun and sand” tourism represented by all-inclusive packages in isolated tourism complexes will likely do great harm to the country’s efforts to build a high-value sector based on nature and culture.

Tourism growth can be slow in the early years. If successful, the sector will begin small, but grow rapidly as it gains a positive international reputation. While it will be possible to observe progress and measure advances with meaningful indicators, the tangible benefits – critical for ongoing political support and commitment – will be observed in the medium term.

### **Key Success Factors of Cultural / Heritage Tourism Destinations. Case of Berat**

In the report “Sustainable tourism based on natural and cultural heritage”, financed by the European Commission, strategic factors for sustainable tourism in Berat are presented and the key success factors discussed. The factors focus mainly on cultural and natural assets and less on tourism business aspects of the single sites. The following key factors are considered instrumental in enhancing/limiting success in developing a sustainable tourism in Albania:

- **Significance:** The importance of the Cultural or Natural Heritage
- **Distinctiveness:** This refers to all that makes one particular area distinct from another, giving it a unique selling position.
- **Clustering:** Natural and Cultural Heritage is often scattered. If sites can be pooled together, they may collectively provide interest to attract a critical mass of tourists.
- **Branding and Networking:** potential tourists have to be attracted. Branding is a way to encourage the customer to buy a particular ‘product’ by creating an image around it.
- **Access:** The distance and the weather are deciding factors for many tourists when choosing a destination.
- **Seasonality:** Heritage-based tourism should be seen as an opportunity to overcome seasonality of visitors flow and should focus on periods with low tourism
- **Partnership:** Often development starts thanks to the initiative of one particular body, whether public, private or an organization, interested in the conservation of the Natural or Cultural Heritage.
- **Strategic planning:** Elaborating an overall tourism strategy involving all key players is an essential tool for developing a successful and sustainable tourism product.
- **Accessibility:** is distinct from access, and concerns presenting the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the area in an understandable and enjoyable way so that the tourists will be able to learn from their visit.
- **Sustainability:** Conclusively, conserving Natural and Cultural Heritage is fundamental to sustainable tourism.

Besides these success factors, the complementary development of tourism business, infrastructure and services need to be considered. Tourists travelling today combine learning, fun and recreation, therefore the development of tourism

business and the products offered are much interlinked. Building up new infrastructure and services should go hand in hand with the promotion of heritage sites. Standards regarding accommodations, energy availability, clean water, clean air, security, sewage and waste management systems, modern telecommunication systems, easy accessible booking tools, public transport etc. are equally important.

### **Relationship between Governance and Tourism Business**

Tourism is considered one of the main pillars in the economic development of Berat. In the Strategic Plan for Social and Economic Development 2010 – 2020, tourism is defined a priority objective boosting job creation and small business development. The Municipality of Berat has therefore launched a Tourism Strategy and Action Plan 2011-2021 (TSAP), with technical assistance in the preparation from the SNV Netherlands Development Organisation. A Tourism Action Committee (TAC) with representatives from public institutions, business and civil society and chaired by the Mayor of Berat has been established in May 2010 to support this strategic planning process: “The TSAP will be the operational framework for our institution, leading tourism development in the region and aiming to maximize the sustainable use of our resources. This document defines projects and future actions we will undertake together to develop Berat into a high quality, well known, international tourist destination.”

The task of the Ministry of Tourism is to support, protect, develop and promote the tourism resources, culture, material and spiritual heritage of Albanian people in cooperation with other central governmental institutions, with local governments, with the tourism private sector and civil society. Now, the Ministry is in the process of designing the new Strategy of Tourism development 2014 – 2021, where cultural and heritage sites will have a special focus in terms of actions to be taken for tourism development. The National Agency of Tourism, a public entity under the jurisdiction of the Minister responsible for Tourism, takes on the marketing and promotional aspects of tourism, as well as other functions provided for in the Law, and stimulates, supports and facilitates the access to funds for individuals and companies engaging or that intend to engage in tourism activities. The Regional Tourism Assistance Offices (TAO), recently (2010) established in each of the 12 regions of Albania including Berat, provide tourist information concerning entry requirements, available services and facilities, sightseeing information on tourist attractions, etc. and handle also claims made by Albanian or foreign citizens against hoteliers, restaurant owners, tourist guides, travel agents, tour operators and other tourism enterprises in relation to the products and services offered.

Local government units, in compliance with the provisions of the Cultural Heritage Law, have the responsibility to:

- a. make an inventory of the main tourism resources and of the local tourism businesses present on the local territory;
- b. send the above-mentioned inventories periodically (twice a year) to the Minister responsible for Tourism, in order to create a national database;
- c. provide technical assistance to support the creation and development of tourism businesses in compliance with the provisions of the law;
- d. monitor that the tourism private sector respects all laws and regulations and suggest the necessary steps to be taken by the responsible state institutions.

A priority in the tourism planning is the establishment of a tourism business focused on Cultural Heritage with all the required services and infrastructure. In 2010, 50,000 international guests visited Berat and the 13 hotels and guesthouses, featuring 154 rooms with 318 beds, reached an occupancy rate of more than 60%. Several new guesthouses have recently been opened in the traditional Ottoman houses of the Mangalem and Gorica quarters. Berat has about 25 restaurants with both traditional and international cuisine, serving mainly local and organic food. A Tourist Information Centre and four tour operators started to promote and arrange visits and travels to Berat. Hospitality and 'table' taxes have been introduced in hotels and restaurants.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The key success factors show high potential for development of a Cultural Heritage destination in Albania based on strategies targeting quality and sustainability.

Obviously there is a need for further efforts, especially for enhancing the access and accessibility of the site and also for the creation of national and international partnerships for joint promotion of heritage sites.

Image and Promotion are important factors in the launching of Berat as an international tourism destination. The regional Tourism Assistance Office has been set up and the signage system has recently been standardized. The website of the Municipality and good quality restaurants contribute to the image of the site. On the other hand, night life is still missing but the frequent organisation of festivals and events is already providing positive inputs. Increased diversity in cultural life, 'quality' tourism packages and events could enhance the attractiveness of Berat as cultural tourism destination and foster also the media interest. The environmental aspects and the strategic planning need special consideration to assure adequate services for tourists and local people.

Tourism development planning has laid the basis for progress towards sustainable tourism development and shall:

- be based on the national inventory of tourism resources;
- be in accordance with national and municipal tourism development plans;
- focus on areas with a tourism development, capable of promoting socio-economic restructuring;
- shall be periodically reviewed and revised to ensure compatibility with the national and municipal socio-economic development situation.

The direct involvement of the private, public and relevant NGO sectors in all local and regional areas in developing Albania's tourism potential is a key factor for the success of the country's tourism industry, as highlighted in the law on Cultural Heritage. There is an opportunity to promote existing activities and to develop new events for attracting visitors throughout the year.

Efforts to attract and promote investment in key infrastructure will be required to enhance the Natural and Cultural Heritage Tourism. The UN Organisations as well as national and international funds have given support to build up infrastructure and services for the sustainable development of Berat.. In future, the international support will decrease and a long-term funding and fundraising strategy will have to be established. Public and private contributions will be needed to guarantee the restoration and maintenance of the heritage and tourism infrastructure. Berat is at the early stage of development and has the chance to adequately balance the needs of the Natural and Cultural Heritage, the local population and the tourism business.

Berat has a high potential to become a top eco - and cultural tourism destination in South East Europe. Strategic planning and development of this site will help avoid the risk of hit-and-run or mass tourism.

## References

- Boniface, P. (1995). *Managing Quality Cultural Tourism*. Routledge: London.
- Boniface, P. (1999). Tourism and Cultures: Consensus in the Making? In M. Robinson and P. Boniface, eds. *Tourism and Cultural Conflicts*. CAB International: Wallingford.
- Canadian Heritage (2006). *Cultural-Heritage Tourism: Review of Existing Market Research*, [http://www.pch.gc.ca/pc-ch/pubs/tourism/documents/2006-05/4\\_e.cfm](http://www.pch.gc.ca/pc-ch/pubs/tourism/documents/2006-05/4_e.cfm). Retrieved 21 January 2008.
- Cuccia, T. & Cellini, R. (2007). Is Cultural Heritage Really Important for Tourists? A Contingent Rating Study. *Applied Economics*, 39, pp. 261-271.
- Cultural & Heritage Tourism Alliance (2002). *CTHA: About the CTHA*. <http://chtalliance.com/about.html>, Retrieved 20 February 2008.
- Cultural Heritage Tourism (2005). *Getting Started: How to Succeed in Cultural Heritage Tourism*. <http://www.culturalheritagetourism.org/howToGetStarted.htm>, Retrieved 16 January 2008.

Herbert, D.T. (ed.). (1997). *Heritage, tourism and society*. London: Pinter.

Herreman, Y. (1998). Museums and Tourism: Culture and Consumption. *Museum International* 50(3):4-12.

<http://www.al.undp.org/content/dam/albania/docs/Final%20CULTURE%20MARKETING%20STRATEGY- Albania Culture marketing Strategy>.

<http://whc.unesco.org/uploads/activities/documents/activity-634-45.pdf>, Berat plan of urban management.

<http://www.slideshare.net/hoteleritourismalbania/berat-tourism-strategy-and-action-plan-2011-2021>.

Sectorial Strategy of Tourism, Albania 2007 – 2013, Ministry of Tourism, Albania: [http://www.dsdc.gov.al/dsdc/pub/strategy\\_of\\_tourism\\_2007\\_2013\\_1033\\_1.pdf](http://www.dsdc.gov.al/dsdc/pub/strategy_of_tourism_2007_2013_1033_1.pdf).

UN [United Nations]. 1999. Towards Sustainable Tourism: Governments, Tour Industry Seek Plan at United Nations to Cut Environmental and Social Impacts. Press Release, New York, February.

UNEP [United Nations Environment Programme] (1995). *Environmental Codes of Conduct for Tourism*. UNEP: Paris.

UNEP [United Nations Environment Programme] (1998). *Ecolabels in the Tourism Industry*. UNEP: Paris.

UNESCO (1995). Workshop on Sustainable Tourism Development in World Heritage Sites: Planning for Hue. Final Report, Vol. III: Executive Summary and Recommendations.

UNESCO (1998). *World Culture Report: Culture, Creativity and Markets*. UNESCO: Paris.

World Bank (1998a). *Culture and Development at the Millennium*. Washington: The World Bank, DC.