LOCAL GOVERNMENT`S ROLE IN THE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT OF A DESTINATION

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Abstract

Recent statistical information indicates that tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world (WTO, 2013). The tourism industry plays a prominent part in the economic development strategies of many developing countries. However, the tourism industry can also be viewed as a destructive force, associated with negative externalities such as the loss of natural landscapes, congestion, environmental and cultural degradation. These problems are more likely to be exacerbated where there is a lack of well-designed planning and effective management of tourism development. Academic literature has examined how the development of tourism destinations involves collaborative relationships between the various actors that participate in tourism development.

Using the case study of tourism in the city of Vlora, this paper argues that it is essential to understand the role, responsibilities and benefits of both three most important stakeholders of a destination from sustainable tourism practice and policy and also how they respond to its adoption. The aim of this paper is to gain a better understanding of the evolutionary processes of tourism development towards sustainability in Albania according to the main stakeholders: local governance, tourism enterprises and local community, focusing mostly on the challenges and weaknesses that expand within and beyond the boundaries of local government and hinder the enhancement of Vlora as an important tourist destination in Albania.

The research data-gathering methods: literature reviews, secondary data and semi-structured interviews are all used to gain insights into the core research questions. Each method feeds into and is strengthened by the others and their combination.

The results of this study point out the fact that there are a wide range of factors that constrain the Vlora tourism industry from adopting more sustainable tourism practices. All of these factors play a crucial role in materialization the actions of all stakeholders in relation to sustainable tourism principles.

Introduction

There has been a growing recognition in many tourist destinations that current management practices may lead to undesirable impacts on environment and society, which, in turn, can threaten both tourism development itself and the economic viability of host communities and nations (WTO, 1996; Huyber and Bennett, 2003). These problems are exacerbated where there is a lack of well-designed planning for and effective management of tourism development (Walter and Alix, 2000; Huybers and Bennett, 2002).

The failure of development in many areas has dictated the need for a reform or a radical rethinking of the concept of development, and changes are required in both goals and methods (Harris, 2000). The growing awareness of these challenges to traditional development doctrines has led to the increasingly wide acceptance of a new concept – that of sustainable development.

Sustainable development has recently emerged as a key issue in the development agenda for the tourism industry in many developing countries (Tosun, 2001; Helmy, 2004). It can also be one of the most effective drivers for the sustainable development of regional economies. Many developing countries promote tourism as it offers the potential for creating jobs, improving community incomes, and increasing both foreign exchange earnings and government revenues (Smith, 1989; Sharpley, 2000; Bui, 2000). Local and national authorities are increasingly using the term sustainable tourism and placing it on their agendas. This is expected to increase further in the future when the potential of sustainable tourism for employment generation and for enhancing competitiveness will become more evident.

Sustainable tourism is not a discrete or special form of tourism; all forms of tourism should strive to be more sustainable. The concept of sustainable development has become widely accepted as the way to a better future. It has become a preoccupation for planning practitioners, policy-makers, and an area of growing research interest among academics. Certainly, the co-existence of multiple stakeholders is one of the defining characteristics of a tourism destination (Aas, Bramwell and Sharman, 1999; Laws, Scott and Parfitt, 2002; World Tourism Organization, 2004; Ladkin and Fletcher, 2005) and the stakeholders may include: the various levels of government (international, national, regional and local tourism organizations); tourism developers and entrepreneurs, tourism industry operators; non-tourism business practitioners and the broader community,

including local community groups, indigenous people' s groups and local residents (Freeman1984; Roberts & Simpson, 2000; Simpson, 2001).

Seeking sustainable tourism development in order to achieve the best balance between the economic benefits and the social and environmental impacts is nowadays a challenge to many governments in the world (McKercher, 2003). This paper examines two basic questions:

➢ What is meant by making tourism more sustainable? and
➢ Which are the local government roles and responsibilities in tourism management towards sustainability?

First, the research aims to investigate the issues that local governments face in tourism management and the practices and approaches that have been adopted to address these issues.

It is also commonly recognized that there is a big gap between the planning for sustainable tourism and its actual implementation. Many tourism development plans never turn into reality due to, amongst other things, a lack of information to support planning, and a lack of effective instruments to enable implementation (Briassoulis, 2002; Michelle, 2006). It also means that understanding why the gap exists between ideology and practice is a critical step on the way to transforming the concept of sustainable tourism into the daily practice of the tourism industry in Albania.

Methodology

Methodology of the study consists on the combination of the secondary and primary search. Secondary data collection relies on a vast contemporary literature, documents and projects connected to the sustainable tourism development and the role and responsibilities of public sector towards sustainable tourism implementation.

Primary search consist on semi-structured interviews conducted with local government representatives in the city of Vlora. This serves to get a more detailed information and to create a clear picture about the concept of sustainable tourism development and the role of local governance in addressing sustainable tourism development within the destination and in stakeholders participation. The questionnaire had different questions which consist in destination tourism development and sustainable tourism. For this purpose are chosen 12 key local governments.

The first section of the questionnaire involved questions to identify and analyze current strategy and available tourism policy and/or planning documents for Vlora city.

The second section of the questionnaire consisted of questions examining the extent to which sustainable development principles underpinned the local government tourism destination planning practices as articulated in their tourism policy and planning documents.

The interviews began with basic questions about the background of the interviewees, finding out about their position in the public administration, work experience, their education and their previous knowledge on sustainable tourism development and environmental issues. These provided the information needed to understand the personal information about the interviewees and their position in the local governance.

The central themes of the semi-structured interviews cover qualitative information about the interviewees' awareness and adoption of sustainable tourism and environmental management initiatives in their destinations. The interviewees were also asked questions related to barriers and constraints in their adoption and performance of environmental measures and sustainable tourism practices. An important issue treated during the interviews was the role of local government in adopting the principles of sustainability by the private sector and local community.

Sustainable tourism development

This section discusses the general concept of sustainable development and its evolution, and so provides the context in which sustainable tourism has emerged and grown in acceptance, and the principles behind the development and operation of it. Sustainable tourism development should be seen as an adaptive paradigm, a part of the parental concepts of development and sustainable development, and it should aim at contributing to objectives of sustainable development.

The beginnings of the sustainable development paradigm can be traced back to the environmental movement in Europe and North American during the 1960s, and in the Declaration of the United Conference on the Human Environment which contained 26 principles on the preservation of the environment (Cruz, 2003).

The term sustainable development was employed for the first time in 1972, on a report to the Club of Rome entitled "The limits to growth", written by a group of American scientists from MIT (Meadows et al. 1972). The group analyzed the basic factors that could limit the growth on the planet: population, agricultural production, natural resources, industrial production and pollution. The report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, commonly known as the Brundtland Commission, in 1987, brought worldwide attention to the need for promoting a development that does not endanger the environment and takes into account the existing resources. In the report, it is declared that:

…the overall aspirational goal must be sustainable development on the basis of prudent management of available global resources and environmental capacities, and the rehabilitation of the environment previously subjected to degradation. Development is sustainable when it

meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs… (WCED,1987).

The Commission report created a strong basis for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Its goals were stated as:

Establishing a new and equitable global partnership through the creation of new levels of cooperation among States, key sectors of societies and people, working towards international agreements which respect the interests of all and protect the integrity of the global environmental and developmental system, recognizing the integral and interdependent nature of the Earth, our home.

The implementation of Agenda 21 and commitment to the Rio principles were reaffirmed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2002. In 2002, the United Nations officially adopted the Millennium Declaration (UN 2000). Eight main goals and 18 related strategies for the global development agenda were defined. Sustainable tourism is often seen as a strategy focused on how best to encourage tourism development while minimizing possible adverse impacts.

The World Tourism Organization (WTO, 1996) defines sustainable tourism as:

…tourism, which meets the needs of present visitors, and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future. Sustainable tourism development is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that we can fulfill economic, social and aesthetic needs while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems. (WTO, 1996: 21).

In terms of economic activity, the concept of sustainable tourism is defined as tourism- related activities that meet certain criteria to fulfill the needs of different stakeholders and contribute to overall sustainable development (APEC, 1996; McKercher, 2002).

The results of previous tourism studies (McVey, 1993; Sharpley, 2000; Velikova, 2001; McKercher, 2003) identified four pillars that make up sustainable tourism development:

➢ Economic sustainability: The industry is profitable in both the immediate and long term and maintains growth rates at manageable levels. This includes promoting tourism while keeping an eye on carrying capacities.

➢ Environmental sustainability: The industry is compatible with the maintenance of biological diversity and environmental resources. A focus must be placed on the capacity of the natural and built environments to handle tourism without damage.

> ➢ Social sustainability: The industry helps to increase people's control over their lives and local identity. It also supports communities to absorb increasing tourist arrivals without adversely affecting or damaging indigenous culture.
> ➢ Local sustainability: The industry has increasing levels of local involvement in its development, and it benefits local communities.

If the tourism stakeholders do not participate in the protection of the attraction or destination, there is a danger of overuse by tourists and the attraction will eventually be destroyed (Weaver & Lawton, 2006).

Public tourism management towards sustainability in Albania

A description of the national management structure of the tourism industry is important as it serves to illustrate the nature of government policy and the decision-making process which regulates the operation of the tourism industry.

The tourism management system in Albania ranges from the national to the local level. At the national level, tourism activities fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Urban Development and Tourism. At this level, there are some directories operating as an integral part of the Ministry structure: the general directory of tourism development, directory of politics and tourism planning, directory of marketing and tourist promotion. Albanian National Tourism Organization is a governmental organization too under the Ministry of Urban Development and Tourism. One of its principal duties is the promotion of Albania as active and potential tourist destination. National Tourism Agency is a public institution, which is under the Ministry of Urban Development and Tourism. The main task of the National Tourism Agency is to promote the country as a "tourist destination" in the Mediterranean, Europe and worldwide. At the local level, each municipality has a Department of Tourism which exercises administration over tourism operations.

This description of the management structure of Albanian's tourism industry clearly indicates the top-down nature of tourism planning. The central authority, which is the Ministry of Urban Development and Tourism plays a key role in setting out tourism plans and policies such and integrating sustainable tourism dimensions into national economic agendas and master plans in order to transform the tourism industry's development trajectory towards sustainable development. Some of the strategies for the tourism development in national level are: National Strategy of Tourism (2003), National Strategy of Tourism (2006), Sectorial Strategy of Tourism (2007-2013), Guidance for the sustainable development of Tourism in Albania.

Already is compiled the draft for the "Tourism Development Strategy 2014 – 2020". It offers a complete pattern of tourist destination management

and the framework that ensures the quality product. The basic principles of the strategy include sustainable development and market orientation, where tourist destination is considered as the core of the development. Albania's tourism strategy envision the strategic concept of tourism development by giving strategic directions and development of the tourist products and services, aiming successful future participation in the regional tourist market destination, achieving a competitive position alongside Croatia, Montenegro, Italy, Greece, etc.

Alongside significant changes to the institutional framework, a system of state tourism management agencies and environmental agencies has been established from central to local government level. Meanwhile, local departments of tourism are crucial to the implementation of these plans and policies and in providing baseline information for statistical responsible bodies. Central government also allows local authorities to engage and design specific plans and regulations, based on the national framework, that relate to tourism development in their local area.

A new and comprehensive Tourism Law was drawn up for approval this year. This law focuses on tourism development planning, the classification and categorization of tourism operators and the regulation of tourism enterprises. It also addresses issues of co-operation between the tourism sector and other industries where the exploitation and management of tourism-related natural resources is concerned. The Albanian government is increasingly interested in promoting more environmentally friendly practices in tourism development. A National Plan of Action for the Environment (2001), Manual for Environmental Management Problems at the Local Level (2006), Environmental Intersectoral Strategy (2007), National Plan for Waste Management (2010), Manual for the Assessment of Environmental Impact (2014), Guidance for the sustainable development of Tourism in Albania are some of the measures taken by the government related to the legal framework for the environment.

Even so, the country continues to be faced with many challenges relating to tourism development, such as environmental pollution, monument degradation, social issues, excess of carrying capacity during the peak season, uncontrolled development and the lack of planning for land use in tourist areas. The Government of Albania is implementing a wide range of policies in the field of environmental protection and natural resource management, moving its respective laws toward a gradual approximation of EU environmental legislation. Challenges include limited enforcement, due to the weak capacity of the environmental authorities at both the central and regional levels, and a lack of resources for monitoring and ensuring full compliance with environmental standards.

While tourism policies are often defined at the national level, there is still substantial scope for regional diversification in policy making for sustainable tourism development and environmental management. Central government often provides the overall institutional framework for environmental management and sustainable tourism development upon which decisions and regulations can be specified at the provincial level according to the local context and economic strategy. It is important to note that tourism resource management in Vlora is a multi sectoral issue. There are many local and regional agencies involving in environmental and tourism resource management, including here the Departments of Tourism, Environment and Resource Management; Cultural heritage management, Technology and Science; Culture; urban Planning, etc. While a coordinated management mechanism for inter-regional departments is still absent, there remains an overlapping of functions and duties between the departments with regards to environmental and tourism resource management. This multiplicity of organizations involved in tourism resource management, and the lack of reliable information about the tourism industry, has led to the ineffectiveness of current liability practices such as waste management of enterprises, the coastline and monument management.

The role and responsibilities of local government in sustainable tourism
Little attention has been given to purposefully investigating the roles and responsibilities of local government in addressing sustainable development within tourism destination contexts (Dinica, 2009; Wray, 2009; Beaumont & Dredge, 2010). Governments nevertheless have a critical role in creating the context and stimulating actions to ensure that tourism is more sustainable in the future. Local government has become an important arena for discussions about the interpretation and implementation of sustainable development (Commonwealth Department of Environment and Heritage 2004; UNEP 2003). Discussions at international and national levels reinforce the importance of local government because it is at this local level that local policy debates unfold and decisions about resource use are made.

Governments should provide an environment that enables and encourages the private sector, local community, tourists and other stakeholders to respond to sustainability issues. This can best be achieved by establishing and implementing a set of policies for tourism development and management, drawn up in concert with others. The principles of sustainable development put emphasis on local determination and implementation of policies and actions. This should be placed within a supportive national policy framework.

Indeed, it is often local governments which assume much of this responsibility as they are closest to many of the problems associated with

tourism development (Aronsson, 2000) and they control most of the development planning aspects associated with tourism (Dredge & Jenkins, 2007).

Local governance get fast information's about the problems that have the community. Also local governance know with details natural resources and human capital so through the careful assessment it can plan the future to help the community in employments, local business, infrastructures etc.

Local governments are faced with a range of challenges to the effective planning and management of tourism at their destination level. The most important challenge is that of integrating the management of tourism with other functions and activities of local government. Table indicates some areas of local government responsibilities as they relate to tourism

Table: Local government responsibilities relating to tourism

Local government roles and responsibilities and areas of planning and policy development	Potential influence on tourism
Infrastructure provision and maintenance	Transport infrastructure may shape access to the destination and travel patterns within the destination. Basic infrastructure capacity may shape the destination capacity to absorb tourist and may limit development
Land use planning	Development assessment and strategic land use planning influences the built character and spatial integration of the destination
Environmental management	Protects and preserves unique environmental features of a destination and manages visitor pressures on natural resources
Open space planning and management	Protects and conserves open space, influences the character and amenity of the destination and helps create a 'sense of place'.
Public health and safety management	Protects and enhances visitor satisfaction, destination image and quality
Community development	Encourages a community supportive of tourism activity and enterprise
Local economic development	Encourages synergetic economic activity, the development of appropriate tourism business and support services.
Education, training and employment	Influences quality in the delivery of tourism services and facilities.
Tourism promotion and marketing	Fosters branding and destination image development.
Arts and cultural development	Encourages the development of unique and positive sense of community and belongingness attractive to tourism
Human services	Encourages positive attitudes and improved service delivery

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The findings

This qualitative research aims to gain a better understanding of the role and responsibilities of the local governance in the city of Vlora. This paper investigates the current context and nature of the tourism industry regarding the sustainable tourism implementation. It is focused on tourism public sector representatives' perceptions of and responses to the rise of sustainable tourism policies and practices.

- The role of tourism industry in the overall economic development of the locality

All the local governments agree that the tourism industry is the priority sector of economic development in Vlora destination and is expected to have a greater increase in the future. This is because the Region of Vlora has about 30% of the total coastal line of the country, a great diversity of natural, cultural and historical, necessary for the diversification of the tourism product.

- Strategy of tourism development

Municipality of Vlora has compiled the strategy of development based on sustainable tourism development. Although they were very clear about the principles of sustainability in tourism, most of them (9) thought that the main objective should be focused on the economic impacts that this sector provides: employment opportunities, economic development and increasing the number and the offer of the private enterprises.

- The role of local government

It is clear from all the interviews realized that there is a gap between awareness on the part of local governance and the transformation of this awareness into practical aspect and outcomes within the tourism sector. All the respondents agreed that the role of local government is that of driving the sustainable development agenda within the destination.

- The cooperation with the private sector in tourism

The interviews provided also the insights of key destination stakeholders, especially tourism operators. Although sustainable tourism often appears to be with great interest to tourism enterprises, these businesses do not invest in sustainable tourism development or environmental management. This is because they think is the responsibility of public sector. They aim to build an environmentally friendly attitude by the part of the tourism operators, considering natural resources as attractions to needed to be well managed by all the local stakeholders in order to achieve a sustainable development.

- Local community role in sustainable tourism

Another difficulty faced by the public sector in the implementation of sustainable tourism principles is related with different attitudes towards tourism by the local community side. According to respondents that part of

the community, whose economic interests are related to tourism development (such as commercial service providers in the area) have a positive attitude, while the other part, that don`t have economic interests directly linked to tourism do not show the same level of hospitality. The problems occurring especially during the peak season, mainly linked to the transport and simultaneous use of more services, especially during peak season.

- The socio-cultural pillar of sustainability

It is regarded as a very important aspect of sustainability. However, the responsibilities and role of local government was limited in the management of cultural heritage resources that are under its dependence museums, castles, monasteries; the polyphony Oral and Intangible Heritage of Mankind, such as the " Iso-Polyphony", safeguarded by UNESCO.

- The proactive policy

All the interviewed understand the importance of long-term planning in tourism. They recognize and accept the importance of proactive policy, especially for natural resources and heritage facilities provided in the area. But their budget for management don`t offer the possibility of such a focus. Local government, in order to increase the number of tourist flows is focused on creating artificial attractions, which often are accompanied with tourists from neighboring countries in terms of addressing sustainable development objectives in a tourism context.

Conclusion

Recently it has been paid more attention to tourism development in Albania. It is considering now as one of the most important branches of economic development. Economic evaluation of natural resource and possibilities for exploitation by development plans has begun to bring good opportunities for local development. Sustainable tourism is frequently present in strategies and plans prepared at different levels in Albania. The paper highlights the "top-down" nature of the current administrative system in the Albanian tourism industry. The characteristics of tourism and the destination have a vital influence on local governments' involvement in and response to tourism environmentally friendly practices. Local government is closer to the community, and recognizes the closer their problems and needs.

The local governments have concluded that a long road is often faced when trying to transform the concept of sustainable tourism from theory into practice because there are many barriers constraining the tourism industry from implementing sustainable practices.

The local government is aware of sustainable tourism principles, but they find it hard to accommodate them in practice. Additionally, not all the stakeholders have a good understanding of what is required to develop successful sustainable tourism. Despite great effort made by local

government to implement these plans and policies, this research shows they have limited effectiveness in driving tourism enterprises towards sustainable tourism. There is a lack of 'space' for local communities and tourism enterprises in setting out, as well as implementing, plans and policies on sustainable tourism development and environmental management (furthermore the environmental resources are almost all public goods).

The awareness of possible impacts of the Vlora tourism industry is more concerned with tangible detrimental influences such as road congestion, monument degradation, and water pollution, and is less aware of the possible long-term negative impacts that tourism might have on local cultures and social issues. Local government has assumed responsibility for driving the sustainable tourism agenda. But the roles and responsibilities of local government in working towards sustainable tourism have not been well defined, and that these have been confounded by issues surrounding the practical implementation of the concept. They often pursue policies focused on economic growth, improvement of the economic well-being of residents, job creation and infrastructure improvement, rather than emphasizing environmental management.

The local governance in Vlora region has in focus diversification of tourism products and encouraging involvement of different stakeholders in tourism sector. Excepting the tourism developed in coastal beaches, the cultural and special events tourism has known growth during the last years. A large number of activities with artistic and socio – cultural nature are managed by the municipality. The most important of them is "The opening of the tourist season". Conferences and sport activities with participants from region countries impact the reduction of seasonality in tourism sector.

Recommendations

Sustainable tourism is the future of economic development in Vlora region. Sustainable development requires that both levels of governments should take their responsibilities and collaborate on development. The holistic and equitable principles that underpin sustainable development imply the need to bring together a wide range of stakeholders to develop and manage tourism in a sustainable manner. Local governments and policy-makers should consider this in designing appropriate tools and strategies to encourage sustainable tourism development. An understanding of the attitudes and responses of the tourism enterprises, tourists and local community towards sustainable tourism initiatives will assist in the successful implementation of policies designed to encourage the adoption of sustainable tourism development principles.

Furthermore, national and local government should engage all the stakeholders in the formulation of a strategy and policies for sustainable

tourism, in order to represent all their perspectives and interests related with the sector. • Ensuring effective coordination of actions and an ongoing dialogue between stakeholders.

Sustainable tourism planning and destination development requires the ability and institutional capacity to integrate multiple policy areas; considering a variety of natural, cultural and human assets. A destination cannot successfully implement the principles of sustainable tourism strategy without the right laws and regulations in place. Especially important seems to be the Land use planning, in the current conditions of a high number of constructions, where a significant portion of which are in contradiction with area development plans. Legislation should protect all the public resources used in tourism industry as the prime tourism offer. In such a way the destination can have a greater opportunity to be differentiated from its competitors.

Local government should have a role not only in setting the direction for, but also in promoting sustainable tourism objectives within the destination.

To achieve sustainable tourism, small and medium scale tourism enterprises have to be given more voice in government planning and policy. By doing so, it will increase tourism enterprises' responsibility towards sustainable tourism development.

Finally, it is essential to consider that the strategy of sustainable tourism should involve the management of all tourism resources in a way that fulfills economic, social and aesthetic needs while maintaining cultural

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