

# Tourism enterprises in Korca region and their sustainability

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## Abstract

Tourism is considered as one of the economic sectors with the greatest potential to make a positive contribution in achieving sustainable development (UNCED, 1992). Sustainable tourism has become an increasingly popular field of research. There are a wide range of albanian tourism enterprises involved in the tourism industry. The informal nature of tourism enterprises can make it very difficult to spread awareness on sustainable policies, practices and to measure moves towards more sustainable performance. This paper addresses the concept of sustainable development in tourism and examines the degree to which tourism enterprises in Korca region are aware of the broad concept of sustainable tourism. The aim is to determine attitudes of tourism enterprises toward sustainability and understanding the influences on the adoption of sustainability practices, including motivators and barriers. The main findings stresses "a lack of a general awareness about sustainability issues within albanian tourism enterprises. Also as dominant barriers identified were lack of available money to invest, other business priorities, lack of incentive programs. A better understanding of tourism enterprise attributes, barriers, and responses is critical if we are to extend the theoretical concepts that underpin sustainable tourism development and to enhance sustainability in practice.

*Keywords: sustainability ,albanian tourism enterprises,sustainable tourism practices,motivators,barriers.*

## 1. Introduction

According to the UNWTO, WTTC and OECD ,tourism is one of the most important and influential economic sectors of the 21 st century. It is a very significant contributor to economic growth, by creating employment and income generation (Zarabi and Parikhany, 2010). Tourism sector is directly responsible for about 5% of the world's GDP. Among decades the demand for tourism has continued to grow. This is clearly seen in the following graphic.

Despite the positive impacts and the growing numbers of international arrivals ,tourism development transforms its destination, usually with many negative outcomes (Cohen, 1978). Tourism exerts considerable pressure on resources and the natural environment,so promotion of sustainable tourism is a necessity. The past years of tourism development have contributed in lot of examples of unsustainable development and the general conclusion has been that" *appropriate policy and its implementation*" are what are needed to make tourism more sustainable (Asher, 1984, Edgell, 1999).

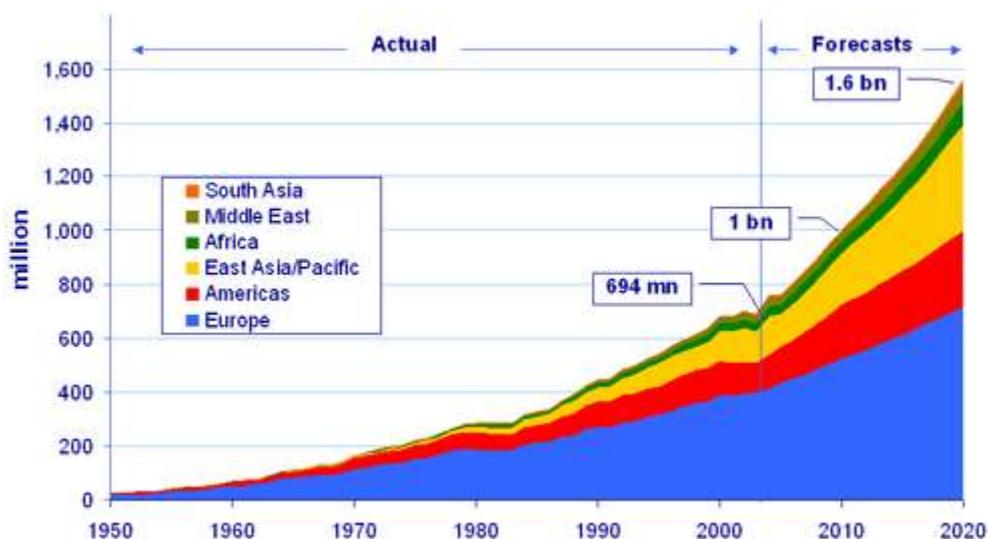


Fig 1 : Tourism vision

Source: (UNWTO)

As today's situation might not be perfect yet, tourism businesses are confronted with the question how to bridge and close this gap of the current realities to the sustainable status. The contribution of tourism businesses in the sustainability of the tourist product is considered crucial because sustainable businesses lead to sustainable destinations which in turn lead to successful businesses (Marin Jafari,2002).

The existing literature has various possible definitions of sustainability and related concepts, therefore the aim of the paper is to identify the perception of the tourism businesses in Korca region, about it. This paper contributes to the growing body of literature on sustainability.

### Purpose of the Study and Formulation of the Research Questions

In particular the following research questions are :

*Do the tourism businesses know about the concept of sustainability ?*

*Are sustainable tourism practices the future for the tourism businesses in Albania ?*

## 2. Tourism development impacts

Above is mentioned that tourism development transforms its destination, usually with many negative outcomes. One of the differences between tourism and other sectors of the economy is that environmental degradation has a negative impact on the development of the sector itself. The past years of tourism development have contributed many examples of unsustainable development . Before that we begin with the concept of sustainability it is necessary to stop and to classify the impacts of tourism development which are as follows:

### Positive economic impacts of tourism development

Stimulates local production contributing to household incomes and standard of living  
 Generates investment in new businesses, growth of local businesses and business profits  
 Increases employment opportunities  
 Generates foreign exchange earnings for national economy  
 Improves development and infrastructure spending in areas such as water, sewerage systems, roads, electricity, telephone, information technology and public transport networks  
 Offers additional livelihood opportunities for local communities  
 Locally owned small enterprise development facilitates diversification of the local economy  
 Self-financing mechanism for natural and heritage attractions and so serve as tool for environmental preservation  
 Provides economic support for preservation of local culture

Negative economic impacts of tourism development  
 Increases prices and shortages of goods and services  
 Increases price of land and housing beyond local affordability  
 Increases demands on public services and facilities  
 Increases cost of living  
 Decline of other industries as resources flow into tourism industry  
 Higher levels of public debt and/or higher taxes to pay for increased infrastructure and services  
 Can lead to reduced public expenditure on essential community services  
 Local employment can be low-level or unskilled, seasonal, low-wage, part-time with little opportunity for advancement.

Positive environmental impacts  
 Foster conservation and preservation of natural resources  
 Encourage community revitalisation  
 Raise revenues for establishing administrative and planning controls to maintain quality of environment

Negative environmental impacts  
 Has a substantial carbon footprint with contribution to global warming  
 Adverse effects on water quantity, quality and use, air quality  
 Waste production, degraded quality of natural sites  
 Habitat destruction

Positive social impacts  
 Can lead to removal of social or national prejudices  
 Can promote better understanding and positive social change  
 Can play a supportive force for peace  
 Improves quality of life of locals

Increases availability of recreation facilities/opportunities

Negative social impacts

Increased prostitution, drug taking and crime

Seasonal nature of tourism promotes immigrant workforce and attendant social problems

Competition and conflict between tourists and residents for available services, facilities and recreational opportunities

Visitor behaviour may be perceived to be 'intrusive' by locals

Positive cultural impacts

Promotes cultural exchange

Facilitates meeting visitors (an educational experience)

Preserves cultural identity of host population

Increases demand for historical and cultural exhibits

Leads to the preservation and revitalisation of local ethnic and cultural identity such as cuisine, music, dance, dress, handicrafts, art and suchlike

Negative cultural impacts

Standardisation.

Loss of authenticity

Cultural deterioration

Multiple challenges arising from tourism development emphasize the promotion of integrated sustainable tourism model. If space is left to the degradation, a tourist destination will not be attractive anymore, therefore the region will lose an important source of incomes. On this basis the concept of sustainability should be considered on the business level through the examination of three principles: economy, society, and environment where the three components" social, environmental, and economic" should not be seen as competing with one another but rather as complementary and even, when handled well, making each other stronger over time. Achieving a balance between economic, social and environment is very important for long term sustainability.

### **3. Sustainable tourism development –Literature review**

Sustainability is an increasingly important issue in the tourism industry. The growing concern for environment, resources, social equity in the 1980s led to the emergence of the sustainable development concept. Sustainability development and the application of its principles to tourism are more important now than ever. Sustainability is shown to be a dynamic process of change, rather than a static goal to be achieved. The existing literature about sustainability allows various interpretations of the term. The concept is malleable and can be shaped to fit a spectrum of world views" (Hunter, 1997). The understanding can range from extreme environmental conservation to the extreme environmental exploitation, when the growth of the economy outweighs environmental concerns. Hunter (1997) concluded therefore, that different

circumstances call for different interpretations of sustainable tourism. The origins of the most widely used sustainability definition traces its roots back to the ‘UN report on Environment and Development’ published in 1987. This report defines sustainability as: “Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” .



Fig 2 Sustainability

Today, sustainability it is regarded as a desirable intention of tourism development. It embraces the natural environment, the economic situation and the society equally, which is important because these areas influence each other, problems in one area will affect another one. According to Weaver (2006), sustainable tourism can basically be regarded as applying the ideas of sustainable development in the tourism industry. Butler and Harris and Leiper defined sustainable tourism as the forms of tourism that contribute to sustainable development (Lui, 2003). In particular he calls sustainable tourism an adaptive paradigm and not a fixed framework that can be applied to every situation. Sustainable tourism is positive approach intended to reduce the tensions and frictions created by the complex interactions between the tourism industry, visitors, the environment and the communities, it is an approach which involves working for the longterm viability and quality of both natural and human resources. It is not antigrowth, but it acknowledges that there are limits to growth.’(Bramwell & Lane, 1993)

### 3. Sustainable tourism practices and tourism sector

The tourism businesses are responsible for waste pollution, increased water and energy consumption in destination areas, creating many (low paid) jobs for local residents, consumption of product and materials produced by the local economy. As costs for energy, water, etc. are rising, tourism businesses are more or less forced to act economically, environmentally and socially responsible. They have a crucial position in protecting and preserving the environment as they use huge amounts of energy, water and other sources. Nevertheless, sustainable practices implementation do not only help

to preserve the environment, it helps to reduce costs. Sticking to sustainable practices stands also for the tourism business's "long-term ability to stay in business and be profitable. On the other side, Cavagnaro and Gehrels (2009) argue that tourism enterprises in general are not really aware of sustainability concept. In particular, only few businesses implemented sustainable practices in their daily routines (Bader, 2005). A reason for this could be the unawareness of the public and industry that sustainable practices bring benefits to the surrounding society, economy and environment and of course to them at the same time.

### **3.1 Some of the possible reasons why tourism businesses should use sustainable tourism practices**

Growing demand – there is some evidence that a growing portion of visitors is seeking to spend their money on experiences that are sustainable (Uriely, Reichel and Shani, 2007);

Reduces costs – while some sustainability practices require investments in new infrastructure, most do not. By reducing energy or reusing available resources businesses can cut costs considerably.

Differentiates their business from the competition – as markets begin to prioritize sustainable options when purchasing tourism experiences, businesses that are well on the road and publicizing their achievements will differentiate themselves from competitors and stand a greater likelihood to benefit;

Helps attract labour – tourism is a labour intensive industry and attracting and keeping great staff is directly linked to the bottom line. The younger generations are learning about sustainability and are attracted to organizations that are pursuing it.

Adds resiliency to an operation – in an age of volatility, organizations that are more resilient stand a better chance of survival. Many sustainability practices cut costs, put businesses in a stronger market position and establish supply networks and partnerships that help businesses through tight economic periods.

### **3.2 Barriers to sustainable tourism practices implementation**

Many studies have identified numerous barriers in sustainable tourism practices implementation (Bohdanowicz, 2006; Graci, 2010; Kasim 2009; Kirkland & Thompson, 1999). According to Kirkland and Thompson (1999), the barriers may depend on the size of an organization, lack of information, lack of the necessary resources, its culture and management style. Scarcity of resources may affect the drive to implement sustainable practices; these resources include knowledge, skill, management, staff time, money, equipment and guidance for the environment program (Chan, 2008; Graci, 2010). Kasim (2009) demonstrated that resource constraint is the main factor in many tourism enterprises' nonparticipation in sustainable practices.

Lack of financial resources.

Lack of relevant policies for sustainable tourism development.

Lack of local experts in S.T. Practices.

Lack of incentive programmes

Lack of education and training.  
 Lack of guidance from government agencies.  
 Managers do not have sufficient knowledge.  
 Lack of support from employees.  
 Lack of knowledge.  
 Insufficient physical infrastructure.  
 Lack of perceived benefits.  
 The consumer demand is low.  
 Other priorities

#### 4. Research methodology

This study focuses on albanian tourism businesses attitudes toward sustainability as well as the barriers they perceive in implementing sustainable tourism practices. Sustainability and STP are now a reality and albanian tourism businesses can not stay out of this reality. This study was conducted in Korca region during June – August 2014 .In order to capture quantitative information about tourism enterprises' awareness of sustainable tourism and STP and how this awareness affected their decision-making, 5-point Likert questions (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) were used in much of the questionnaire. A total of 80 questionnaires were sent ,but only 67 from them showed their readiness in completing the questionnaire.The questionnaires was sent by e-mail. This procedure resulted in a 83,75 % response rate.

##### Profile of respondents

##### Small,medium or large business

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Small	58	86,6	86,6	86,6
medium	9	13,4	13,4	100,0
Total	67	100,0	100,0	

86,6 % of the respondents are small tourism businesses and 13,4% are medium ones.

##### Years of operation in this business

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 1-5 years	26	38,8	38,8	38,8
6-10 years	30	44,8	44,8	83,6
more than 10 years	11	16,4	16,4	100,0
Total	67	100,0	100,0	

44,8 % of them have 6-10 years of operation,followed by 38,8% with 1-5 years. This shows that the albanian tourism businesses are new ones, with little experience in this field.

## Number of employees in the business

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 1-5	30	44,8	44,8	44,8
6-10	35	52,2	52,2	97,0
11-20	2	3,0	3,0	100,0
Total	67	100,0	100,0	

52,2 % of the respondents have no more than 10 employees.

## Implications of research findings

The majority of tourism businesses in the region of Korca are small & medium businesses therefore it would limit them to invest more in STP.

The main results from the research showed that tourism businesses in Korca region lack of awareness towards sustainability concept. The greatest barrier reported was lack of financial resources .This one both with lack of incentive programmes ,other priorities and lack of knowledge are perceived as the most barriers in implementing sustainable tourism practices.

## Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean
Lack of financial resources	67	4,13
Other priorities	67	3,76
Lack of incentive programs	67	3,72
Lack of knowledge.	67	3,42
Lack of relevant policies for sustainable tourism development	67	3,18
Insufficient physical infrastructure	67	3,16
Lack of perceived benefits	67	2,87
Managers do not have sufficient knowledge	67	2,87
Lack of local experts in S.T.Practices	67	2,85
Lack of support from employees	67	2,81
Lack of education and training	67	2,64
The consumer demand is low	67	2,39
Valid N (listwise)	67	

## Conclusions

The competitiveness of the albanian tourism industry inevitably is closely linked to its sustainability.

A better understanding of tourism enterprise attributes, barriers, and responses is critical if we are to extend the theoretical concepts that underpin sustainable tourism development and to enhance sustainability in practice.

To succeed in making tourism more sustainable it is crucial to work hand in hand with all

relevant stakeholders.

A sustainable approach to tourism will lead to the development of innovative, quality tourism products- services and make Albania an attractive destination .

The findings clearly show that there is no ‘one-fits-all’ solution to address the question of sustainability in tourism development by tourism businesses. Should be paid greater attention to the need for sustainability management and its potential benefits. Also putting greater emphasis on sustainability benefits rather than cost savings and regulatory compliance.

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