

FOST INNO



Action plan for fostering innovation in sustainable tourism –SHKODRA Municipality, ALBANIA

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Introduction

The main purpose of our Action Plan will be to implement several conclusions and remarks worked by FOST INNO team and developed in details on the document “Strategy for fostering Innovation in Sustainable Tourism for Adriatic - Ionian Region”. We will try through this practical document to develop several actions that can be taken to increase the awareness of the institutions and the population in the Shkodra Municipality for fostering innovation in sustainable tourism supported always by the expertise of Shkodra University academic staff.

The main objective of our Action Plan will be to develop a useful model of sustainable tourism certification including standards and criterias from which the tourism organizations and businesses of Shkodra Municipality could benefit. This Action Plan will be an effort to test how the sustainable tourism criteria's are implemented actually in Shkodra tourism business community and then try to present a model of tourism certification based on Western certification networks. In our Action Plan we will focus on Shkodra tourism businesses and tourism organization as main part of the sample of our research in the frame of FOST INNO project. The main interest is to verify the actual situation about the promotion of local products, traditions and wild life of the area. The main conclusions of the FOST INNO Strategy will serve as a guide of an improved use of sustainable tourism criteria as a country being in its first phase of international tourism development. Another objective of this Action Plan will be to test the effect that respecting the sustainable tourism criteria's might have on consumer's preference and loyalty and on international reputation of the tourism organizations and businesses.

Shkodra Municipality lies northwest of Albania in a territory of 873 km², which borders on the north with the Municipality of Malësia e Madhe, west of Montenegro, east of Tropoja Municipality, in the south with the Municipality of Vau i Dejes and with the Municipality of Lezha .

The Municipality of Shkodra consists of 11 local government units (Shkodra, Ana e Malit, Bërdicë, Dajç, Guri i Zi, Postribë, Pult, Rrethinat, Shala, Shosh and Velipojë).

In its northwest is Shkodra Lake, which with a surface of 368 km² is the largest lake in the Balkans. From this lake rises the Buna River (44km), which flows into the Adriatic Sea and whose bottom stream divides the border with Montenegro. Buna River joins the Drin River about 2km southwest of the city.



Source: Shkodra Municipality (1)

Tourism sector is especially an important development factor for Shkodra Municipality which is very rich with resources and a very diversified nature because it is situated nearby the biggest lake in Balkan, only 45 Km from Albanian Alps and only 28 km from Adriatic sea. As Albania is approaching its integration processes toward EU is very important that tourism development follows models and criteria of a sustainable way of certification.

1 Tourism in Shkodra Municipality

Tourism development in Shkodra Municipality is represented by four main kinds of tourism:

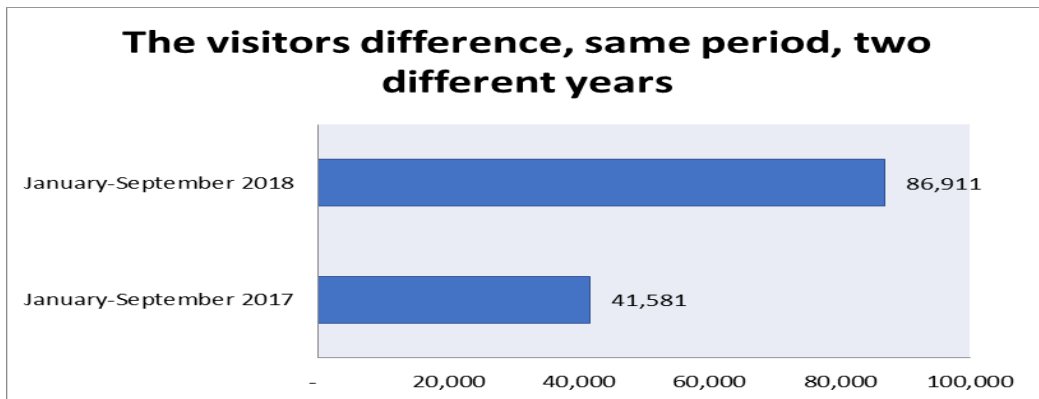
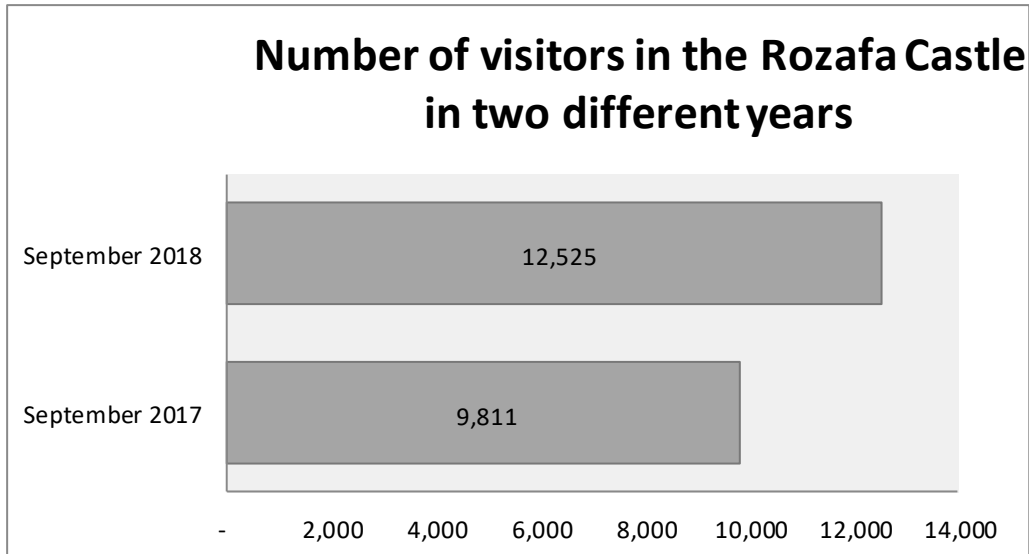
1. Historic-city tourism, represented by the city of Shkodra, by its cultural monuments and its characteristic houses. Shkodra has the greatest number in Albania of the cultural monuments, 90 (Illyrian castels, medieval bridges, characteristic houses).
2. Mountainous tourism, represented by the Razem-Boge-Theth area, 46 km far from Shkodra city.
3. Coastal tourism, represented by Velipoja coast (15 km of sandy beach) 28 km far from the city of Shkodra.
4. Lake tourism, represented by the touristy areas of Shiroka (a quarter of the city of Shkodra) and the village of Zogaj that are close to the coast of the biggest lake of the Balkans, named after the city of Shkodra.

There is a trend in increasing of the number of tourists visiting Shkodra Municipality by 30% during the last 4 years while the increasing of the duration of stay remains a challenge for the future.

The most popular destinations in Shkodra Municipality are Velipoja beach, Thethi National Park as part of Albanian Alps and Rozafa Castle, an Illyrian castle of 4th century B.C.

The number of tourists visiting Shkodra Municipality during 2017 has been 560 500 tourists mainly coming from Kosova, Macedonia, Poland, Germany and Italy consisting in an increase of 35% compared to previous year.

Tabel 1. Numer of visitors in the Rozafa Castel during september 2017/18 and January-September 2017/2018



Source: Regional directory of national culture, Shkoder, October 2018

The number of accommodation structures in Shkodra Municipality consisting in hotels, villas and private homes are distributed according to touristic destinations of this county as following:

Touristic Destinations of Shkodra Municipality	Accommodation structures	Rooms
Velipoja Beach	1500	5301
Shkodra city	50	546
Thethi National Park	47	90

Source: Shkodra Municipality 2017

Touristic Destinations of Shkodra Municipality	Overnights
Shkodra city	27 814
Velipoja beach	178 385
Thethi National Park	122

Source: Shkodra Municipality 2017

It should be mentioned that because of the high informality still present all over Albania the above information received from Shkodra Municipality office is still not real as the staff working in Tourism Department based on their evaluations has informed that the total number of beds in Velipoja Beach is in a total of 30 000 and with 20 days with full capacity in the peak season the total number of tourists visiting Velipoja beach during the summer 2017 has reached a total number of 600 000.

Also, it should be stressed out that there is a great potential and tradition in Shkodra County in the development of main business sectors in the function of tourism as following:

1. Agrofood sector
2. Woodworking sector
3. Construction Sector
4. Handicraft sector

Innovation Overview in Albania. The vision of the Innovation Ecosystem in Albania is developing. The Albania start-up environment is fairly recent and fuelled by a push from both public and private sectors . In the past four years, grassroots initiatives have flourished, contributing to an active ecosystem. ICT entrepreneurs are thriving and looking to exploit opportunities with the unique advantages of Albania. Since 2009, the Government of Albania developed two strategies supporting innovation: the National Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation 2009-2015 (3) and the cross-cutting strategy “Digital Agenda for Albania 2015-2020” (4). The 2009 strategy focused on supporting centres of excellence, building communities of excellence in research and innovation that attract good scientific actors, increasing public R&D spending, diffusing innovation in 100 businesses and organizations, enabling integration with European counterparts, and officially recognized the importance of innovation in Albania. The 2015 strategy was developed with the vision of: “A society based on knowledge and information, through the consolidation of digital infrastructure in the whole territory of the Republic of Albania; improvement of the quality of online services and increase of governance and transparency”. The main aims were investment and policy measures to improve the ICT infrastructures, new digital services for citizens, and improvement of their livelihood. One key difference between this strategy and previous is the focus on ICT as enabler for innovation by providing more efficient and transparent public services, notably in education, as a means of driving growth, a competitive economy and socio-economic inclusion. The education focus will improve human capital and by consolidating the national infrastructure, the expected outcome is more open and competitive infrastructure in-line with European principles (2).

References:

1. www.bashkiashkoder.gov.al
2. ICT Centric Innovation Ecosystem Country Review – Albania June 2016
3. http://portal.unesco.org/en/files/47499/12677115709STI_english.pdf/STI%2Benglish.pdf 11
4. www.inovacioni.gov.al/files/pages_files/Digital_Agenda_Strategy_2015_-_2020.pdf 12

2 Activities in the function of fostering innovation in tourism

Strategy for fostering innovation in sustainable tourism for Adriatic – Ionian region set following specific objectives that should be achieved across the region:

1. Development of innovation taxonomy, its popularization and advocacy

Development of innovation taxonomy offer a way to organize and understand the diversity of innovation patterns for sustainable tourism in firms and sectors of tourism industry. Complexity of innovative practices for Sustainable tourism is very important influencer and an important limitation to be adopted by tourism businesses. These manuals and standards of Practices for Sustainable Tourism will help businesses to assure a better evaluation for the benefits of their respective implementation and will serve as a practical mean for their everyday implementation on the business operations.

A1.1 Development of Innovative Practical Guides for Sustainable Tourism (ST) to be applied by Tourism Businesses to integrate sustainability criteria on their businesses

A1.1.1 Literature research related to the programs and guidelines developed all over the world for Sustainable Tourism Practices (STP) for business tourism sector

A1.1.2 Processing of these STP guidelines using as criterion the importance and suitability of each STP for the sustainable tourism development program in Albania

A1.1.3 Developing of Delphi Analyze of tourism businesses activities from panel experts and creating a picture of the situation in Shkodra Municipality to select innovative Sustainable Tourism (ST) practices that are more close to sustainability principles and that can be more applicable in other businesses of the Shkodra county.

A1.2. Publishing and promoting innovative ICT practice manuals and successful business business experiences that have integrated these practices

2. Lobbying (nationally) for the simplification and improvement of legislative acts dealing with innovations

The competent governmental bodies should be active so that the tourism industry takes on some responsibility in developing TQ innovations and needs to extend the necessary initiatives and standards to move the industry in this direction. As soon as a standard set of standards for innovative ST practices is presented to businesses, then the competent official bodies should monitor the impact of these practices by setting benchmarks to evaluate the outcome of this adaptation process of these practices

A2.1. Lobbying to the public sector for establishing construction regulations for sustainable tourism destinations.

A2.2 Introducing to the public sector the procedure of the integration of STP into the classification criteria up to 5 stars of tourist accommodation structures.

A2.3 Lobbying to the public sector for the standards of STP placement to integrate into tourism businesses and the introduction of certification programs as sustainable businesses or tourist destinations.

A2.4 Lobbying to central and local governmental bodies for placement of three STP dimensional indicators to monitor the impact of these innovative practices for ST and to assist the Star rating process of hospitality structures and the certification process as tourism businesses or destinations stable

A2.5 Lobbying to the governmental bodies for tax relief when implementing innovative practices for ST that do not give the firm any direct financial contingencies.

3. Education of stakeholders about innovations, sustainable tourism and about the importance of monitoring of innovations (innovations indicators)

The ST concept, though not a new concept in the international tourism market, is a new practice for the tourism industry in Albania that opened to the international market after the 90s. As the matter of this fact, ST practices can be considered as a new type of innovation. Also, most of the tourism industry in Albania consists of small and medium-sized businesses, where there is a misconception that their operations are too small for significant impacts on the sustainable tourism development. Therefore is very important the raising awareness on the importance of sustainable tourism development and the potential involvement of businesses in integrating innovative ST practices into their activity.

A_{3.1}. Training of stakeholders about innovations, sustainable tourism and about the importance of integration of innovative practice for operating as sustainable tourism business and destination, their role in this direction with focus on topics such as: Sustainable Tourism Criteria and Standards in a Business, Promotion of sustainable Tourism, Role of Local government to support Business Community

A_{3.2} Training of stakeholders about importance and ways of monitoring of innovations on the topics of: Innovation in tourism business, Marketing of innovation, Brand Innovation.

4. Lobbying nationally (promoting) for the necessity of introducing obligatory reporting on innovations

Today, in the conditions of wild competition in tourism, it is necessary to introduce certification programs such as: a sustainable tourist business or destination. Certification will provide a tourist business with a positive image, and also a competitive advantage over its competitor.

A_{4.1}. Training of tourist businesses for the necessity of participation in certification programs on innovation for ST.

A_{4.1.1} Lobbying nationally through the intensive promotion to the public sector on how to set rewards for companies with a high level of compliance or with the best innovative practices adapted to TQ.

A_{4.2}. Lobbying nationally (promoting) to the public sectors for the necessity of introducing obligatory reporting on innovations

A_{4.2.1} Promotion of pioneering firms in the development of sustainable tourism, so that they can be used as examples for others.

5. Creating an Open Innovation Platform

Today, in the conditions of fierce competition in tourism, it is necessary to introduce certification programs in Shkodra county for sustainable business or for tourism destinations. These programs should certify touristic businesses that meet standards as sustainable tourism businesses. Certification will provide a business or tourist destination with a positive image, and hence a competitive advantage over their competitor.

Competent official bodies can create rewards for companies with a high level of compliance or better innovative practices adapted to ST. These rewards can become a key element of a positive image and reputation for the company, and provides a significant motivation to participate in the program.

For this, it is necessary to introduce obligatory reporting on innovations so that tourism firms are placed under constant supervision for meeting standards or adopting innovative practices for sustainable tourism.

A5.1 Work in a joint collaboration with Shkodra Municipality to create an Open Innovation Platform where a presentation of best practices in Shkodra businesses will be faced with international examples of sustainable tourism business model.

A5.2 Innovation center of Shkodra University will work together with representatives of business community to collect data and present in this platform analysis of consumer demand in tourism so that

tourism businesses can adapt to tourist demand through implementation of sustainable tourism practices while remaining competitive in the market

A5.3 The Creation of an Open Innovation Platform will enable the Innovation Center to present tourism market trends based on WTO or international hotel studies, as well as the international examples of the sustainable tourism business practices.

6. Promoting changes of HEI curricula – introducing courses dealing with innovations and innovations in tourism

Sustainable tourism development can not be successful without the support of scientific research of academia and Universities can play a great role serving as incubators for innovative ideas coming from business community.

A6.1 Organization of a scientific conference from Shkodra University with title: The role of academia for a sustainable world where experts from Albania and Balkan region will be invited

A6.2 Organization of a workshop with tourism businesses about introducing in HEI curricula of the courses dealing with innovations and innovations in tourism for ST

7. Development and support of cooperation and networking between crucial stakeholders, especially:

- Enabling the transfer of knowledge and innovations from other sectors into tourism
- Cooperation between SMEs and large enterprises (win-win)
- Cooperation between HEIs and enterprises

A7.1 Organization of a workshop about the importance and the ways of cooperation between tourism business in ST with the initiative of the Innovation Center.

A7.2 Organization of a tourism fair on the opening of touristic season to promote the best practices of sustainable tourism businesses in Shkodra Municipality.

A7.3 Organization of a round table on presentation to the local government of the main challenges facing business community regarding ST and trying to reach on some conclusions and remarks to serve as a guide to be followed by Shkodra Municipality.

8. Development of research activities related to innovations and tourism.

University of Shkodra will continue to serve as a bridge between Shkodra business community and the scientific research through publications, trainings and conference organizations

A8. Publication of a monographic study on the topic of Eco-Labeling as an important tool toward implementation of sustainable tourism practices in Shkodra County.

Table 1. Summarised action plan for fostering innovation in sustainable tourism -**Shkodra County, Albania**

Objectives	Activities	Responsible actor/s	Indicator/s	Timeframe (from mm/yy to mm/yy)
<p>Development of innovation taxonomy, its popularization and advocacy</p>	<p>-</p> <p>A1.1 Development of Innovative Practical Guides for Sustainable Tourism</p> <p>A1.1.1 Literature research related to the programs and guidelines developed all over the world for Sustainable Tourism Practices (STP) for business tourism sector</p> <p>A1.1.2 Processing of these STP guidelines using as criterion the importance and suitability of each STP for the sustainable tourism development program in Albania</p> <p>A1.1.3 Developing of Delphi Analyze with tourism businesses that are more important for sustainability and applicable in the Shkodra region.</p> <p>A1.2. Publishing and promoting innovative ICT practice manuals</p>	<p>Tourism Department of UNISHK and Innovation Center</p>	<p>10 -15 businesses will be as first sample</p>	<p>January-April 2019</p>

<p>Lobbying for the simplification and improvement of legislative acts dealing with innovations</p>	<p>-A2.1. Lobbying to the public sector for establishing construction regulations for sustainable tourism destinations.</p> <p>A2.2 Introducing to the public sector the procedure of the integration of STP into the classification criteria.</p> <p>A2.3 Lobbying to the public sector for the standards of STP placement to integrate into tourism businesses.</p> <p>A2.4 Lobbying to central and local governmental bodies for placement of three STP dimensional indicators to monitor the impact of these innovative practices.</p> <p>A2.5 Lobbying to the governmental bodies for tax relief when implementing innovative practices.</p>	<p>Albanian Tourism and Environment Ministry, Shkodra Municipality, Tourism Department of UNISHK and Innovation Center</p>	<p>Meetings with representatives of Tourism Ministry where tasks will be asked for main stakeholders: Ministry, University and Business Community</p>	<p>January – April 2019</p>
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<p>Education of stakeholders about innovations, sustainable tourism and about the importance of monitoring of innovations</p>	<p>A_{3.1.} Training of stakeholders about innovations, sustainable tourism and about the importance of integration of innovative practice for operating as sustainable tourism business and destination. A_{3.2} Training of stakeholders about importance and ways of monitoring of innovations.</p>	<p>Tourism Department of UNISHK and Innovation Center</p>	<p>10- 15 businesses will participate and their feedback will be collected and conclusions will be as guide for future activities of the Innovation Center</p>	<p>January – April 2019</p>
<p>Lobbying nationally (promoting) for the necessity of introducing obligatory reporting on innovations</p>	<p>A_{4.1.} Training of tourist businesses for the necessity of participation in certification programs on innovation for ST. A_{4.1.1} Lobbying nationally (promoting) to the public sector to set rewards for companies with a high level of compliance or with the best innovative practices adapted to TQ. A_{4.2} Lobbying nationally (promoting) to the</p>	<p>Albanian Tourism and Environment Ministry, Tourism Department of UNISHK and Innovation Center</p>	<p>Collecting reports from tourism businesses and support for their promotion to Tourism Ministry</p>	<p>March – May 2019</p>

	<p>public sectors for the necessity of introducing obligatory reporting on innovations.</p> <p>A4.2.1 Promotion of pioneering firms in the development of sustainable tourism, so that they can be used as examples for others.</p>			
Creating an Open Innovation Platform	<p>A5.1 Work in a joint collaboration with Shkodra Municipality to create an Open Innovation Platform .</p> <p>A5.2 Innovation center of Shkodra University will work together with representatives of business community to collect data and present in this platform analysis of consumer demand.</p> <p>A5.3 The Creation of an Open Innovation Platform will enable the Innovation Center to present tourism market trends.</p>	Tourism Department of UNISHK and Innovation Center	Testing of the benefits from an E- platform and having first feedback and communication with tourism business presenting their main challenges and exchanging of best practices	April- May 2019

Promoting changes of HEI curricula	<p>A_{6.1} Scientific conference: The role of academics for a sustainable world.</p> <p>A_{6.2} Workshop about introducing in HEI curricula of the courses dealing with innovations and innovations in tourism for ST.</p>	UNISHK	Periodic reports of Tourism Department on trends and proposals for introducing new courses on innovations in tourism.	January – May 2019
Development and support of cooperation and networking between crucial stakeholders	<p>A_{7.1} Organization of a workshop</p> <p>A_{7.2} Organization of a tourism fair to promote tourism businesses</p> <p>A_{7.3} Organization of a round table with Shkodra Municipality representatives.</p>	UNISHK and Innovation center	Analysis of the feedback of the workshop to put into practice the networking between stakeholders.	January -May 2019
Development of research activities related to innovations and tourism	A_{8.1} Publication of a monographic study on Eco-Labeling.	Tourism Department of UNISHK	Number of publications and conference organizations on innovationa and tourism	January – December 2019

Concluding remarks

This document will serve as a practical guide to the implementation of standards and criteria of sustainable tourism development in a sample of 10 – 15 businesses of Shkodra County and is subject to change and adoption according to the evolution of new trends in tourism development and sectors related to it.