
The Past, the Present and the Future of the Albanian Tourism

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The issue of tourism is increasingly taking place in media debates during the recent years, due to the increased number of the visitors, our brothers from Kosovo and tourists from all over the world. Actually it is created the full concept that the tourism development should be seen as a goal to increase its influence in the Albanian economy.

I have been trying to collect data over 10 years and to be in touch with every progress in the field of Albanian tourism. I agree when you say that tourism is still in our infancy stages, but although it is talked of a "golden" baby, let me remind you that it's a baby born many years ago ... Recently it is talked about the important role that tourism plays in the economy of the country. In fact, this problem is discussed by all governments that have come to power after the 90s. But if you see reality, you are convinced that in most cases it was only PROPAGANDA. For someone who is in contact with the Albanian tourism developments, the more difficult question to answer is: Why aren't we developing our tourism with an accelerated and perspective system and to the pace of development why are we the lowest compared with all Eastern European countries? If I used the metaphor of the train entering in the proper rails, where the train symbolizes the Albanian tourism and the rails the proper ways of development, I would say that our current tourism has begun to join the rails. I say this more to relax myself with optimism and to show the civilized world that Albania has inexhaustible resources.



Total area 28.748 km²; Population 3.6 million; over 1 million Albanians lives abroad;

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Mafia and politics

Time ago, I came across an Italian version of the famous book "Mafia and Politics", written by Panteleone. Impregnated with the opinions of this book and indoctrinated by Damian Damiano movies, I identified Mafia with my consciousness with a group of starched people, absolutely powerful, ready to perform every human and state crime to achieve their criminal goals. Sometimes the opinions of Panteleones and the "horrors" of Damianos, didn't seem real to me and I often doubted about their truth. Being at a young age, I was optimistic and seemed utopian, that such a group of people would invade a day, our beautiful Albania. But apparently I am untrained, scholastic and not know my country. Utopia was realized. The "happy" day of anti-nationalists arrived (the damned year of 1997), the land of eagles would be invaded by a gang band, and which Al Capone himself would have envied. I do not assume to play the role of the "analyst" and even the role of the "hero" in the descriptions of the constant "rape" that these so-called catharsis, this thieves "FEDERATION", has made to the Albanians, the people with a fragile economy in Europe. I have often written

about the mafia in the temple of money (Bank of Albania), the “elegant” mafia of the Ministry of Finance, the mafia of privatization, the mafia of education, but would never think that mafia existed even inside the blue waters of our wonderful seaside.

Before a few years, two Scottish friends, my ex-professors at the University of Strathclyde (Scotland), were my guests for an Albanian “weekend”. I preferred to guide them to Durres beach and to Shkodra City. I’m proud that I’m from Shkodra. Trying to be as “modern” as possible I provided them with a tourist guide. The title of the tourist guide was really thrilling for the Scottish “Welcome to Albania”. Occasionally I came across a luxury guide, written in English. I take this opportunity to thank the author, Mr. Agim Neza, who with an easy, interesting and contemporary style, informed about the geographical position, history, population, national parks, seaside, language, religion, rituals, organization of state, etc. The coloration of the guide was even more impressive because of the photographic collages by the Irish photographer Joe Mc Mahon. To be more concrete about Durres, a friend in the prefecture provided me in the “underground” with a local guide, compiled by the “heads” of the University of Ancon and in particular by Prof. Renato Novelino. Until then everything was ok. As I am an old guy from Durres (half of me originates from Durres), I thought to start my odyssey from the beach of the Durres inhabitants, the famous “beach of Currila”. As an old Durres guy “half of me from Durres”, I started to play the hypocritical role of a guide: There are 86 hotels and motels in Durres, 1036 rooms, 1320 beds, 214 bars - buffets - restaurants, six tourist agencies, etc. (no doubt that I was talking rubbish, but I wanted to look interesting). Then I told them that Durres seaside is 68.1 km long, from which are only 4.8 km are exploited. My friends, highlanders of Scotland, looked at me astonished and said: Dear Ilir, why did you joke with us, you were our friend in Glasgow? You have told us that you are the poorest people of Europe. We say you are poor in mentality and strategy. (I thought as “poor in the brain”). During lunch they gave me a good “shower”, once as a tourist guide and then as an Albanian. With plenty of finesse, they took from my hand the patriotic guide of Mr. Neza and gave me a study of a very prestigious research society “Eurispes”. “Eurispes” is an Italian research company, established since 1980. It is an autonomous public information

and orientation institution in the study fields of politics, economy and sociology. It is a powerful and financing promoter of researches in the fields of important social, cultural, editorial interests.

The conclusion of “Eurispes” published in the annual report “Italy 2008”, was that Albania, although geographically is part of the Mediterranean countries, even in a strategic tourist position, is not part of the map of the tourist development of the Mediterranean resort! I was shocked. From the last former - communist President, “Comrade” Ramiz Alia, I heard that, we, Albanians: “we are neither east nor west”, but I didn’t expect the fact that we are not even in the Mediterranean.

The information of the Scottish friends was not confident, but it was made public by the Italian news media. In the mentioned report were analyzed even the natural trends of each country that had the honor to be called Mediterranean. Specifically, regarding the increase of the investments and the trend of tourism in the coming years, Libya stood at the top, with an annual growth of 8 percent. After it was our neighbor Montenegro with 7.4 %, to proceed further with Slovenia with 6.4 %, Turkey with 5.8 % and Croatia with 5.5 %. I have no doubt in the objectivity of “Eurispes”, simply given the fact that Italy was presented to us with the lowest rates of development and investments in comparison with other countries (until end of 2014). For Apennines it was predicted a trend of 3.5 % per year. Italy, the classic tourism country stands behind Tunisia with 4.5 %, Egypt with 4.4 %, Morocco with 4 % and Greece with 5.7 %. Shocking to me, as an economist was Albanian and statistics of the tourism sector influence on the overall output (GDP). Our traditional neighborhoods, Montenegro stay in “pole position”, with an annual percentage of 15 %. Libya then ranked by 9 %, Tunisia with 6.6 %, Morocco 4.5 %, Greece with 4.2 %, Croatia by 4 %, Slovenia 3.4 %, Italy 2.6 %, Egypt and Turkey with 2.5 %. The conclusion is clear: in this field, Albania was a “black map” (map of the Mediterranean black). Of all the countries that surround us and who have influence and access relative to the Mediterranean, Sino for their bad luck history, in that period were unacceptable. Being an Albanian and economist at the same time, it was shocking to me the statistics of the influence of the tourism sector on the overall output (GDP). The conclusion is clear: in this field, Albania was a “black map” (black map of the Mediterranean). Of all the countries that surround us and who have influence and relative access in the

Mediterranean, Albanians for their bad historic luck, in that period were unacceptable.

The Scottish friends, with their typical customs invited me after lunch for their original whiskey. By then I invited them for a walk near the beach of "Currila". To be honest, we were found in front of a nervous "shock". All was transformed into a ruin. We instinctively took the cameras and began to take pictures like crazies. For the sake of truth, I felt ashamed. I received dozens of pictures, which I sent them as a "gift" to all the main leaders of the ancient seaside city of Dures (coming the second in Albania for the importance).

Already the sandy seaside barely existed, it was turned into a sludge, where during the night and day were unloaded hundreds and thousands self-unloading trucks with soils collected in the deep foundation pits of the buildings and of many constructions made in the city. For the citizens, it will remain an enigma the origin of these soils; since there was no control for these types of soils that were discharged to the sea ("Anecdotes" claim that they may derive from the contaminated areas of Spitalla and Porto Romano).

The sea of the classic seaside city, didn't have any more the color of the sea, the blue color of the sky, but had the color of the earth, the color of death. Then it rises up the question: Who were and where are these starched criminals today, these irresponsible who take the courage and condemn to death the sea and the inhabitants of the beautiful ancient city? I'm ashamed to be realistic, but we watch their fatty faces everyday in TV, as members of the Albanian parliament. At that time it was celebrated as the last "victory" of the socialist revolution the creation of a miniport of yachts at "Brryl" area. In the beginning, if we make a time order, with the pretext to create the famous port for yachts, without a minimum responsibility, hundreds of tons of trash are thrown, collected God knows where?

Not much time ago (just before the election campaign), they began with a "revolutionary leap" for the extension of the road of "Currila", (2005) but even there without any responsibility at all, the soil of the hill was thrown into the sea. While on paper there exists the idea of building a bridge in the depth of the sea (a runway system). The absurd lies in the fact that for years did not appear any foot bridge, except the trucks that night

and day don't stop throwing soil, and endlessly. Whenever Poseidon got bored by the weight of the soil was enraged, seized and spread it to the sea. But the greed for gaining more didn't stop the "killers of the sea", that defeated the god of the sea, Poseidon, and they triumphed. Machiavellian amoebas stood stronger than a mythological god, whose laws the mankind has applied them in a blind and reasonable way and will execute them forever.

And the criminal and environmental tragedy goes on even more formally. You cannot believe the human eye and reason when you see mechanisms of all kinds, throwing ground waste near the walls of the port. Behind all this ecological chaos, there has remained a diabolical state mechanism with the idea of creating large areas of land (abusive) within the sea. If once at the time of the so-called "socialism", the order of the "mother" party was executed, "to turn the hills and the mountains in fertile fields", in those years to gain land for building purposes, the mafia of the government, with the characteristic diabolism had declared the leitmotif: "let's turn the sea into land, into plot construction."

All this happened because two - three most powerful construction companies in the city, which are causes of ecological crime and catastrophe, had their representatives in the Prefecture, Municipality and District Council. Everything is clear. So they are those who make the law, for their interests for enormous profits. And Gregg Judge (the greatest builder of the century, who implemented Las Vegas, JFK airport, etc.), would be astonished by the wisdom and diabolic of this Machiavellian Albanian system.

Throwing garbage into the sea, the governmental men benefit seaside area (construction site), later to build buildings. Then raises the question: What is the abusive criminal profit of such construction companies that have the power and money at the same time. I have the right to ask a question to these gentlemen: What is the profit? For 1000 m² land (gained by throwing soil (earth) into the sea) calculating that 1 square meter (land) by the seaside, the price varies from 600 to 800 Euros, which means that the profit X, (multiplied) with 1 000 square meters = 800 000 Euro gained only by just throwing earth. While in the seaside city of Durres are thousands of abusive land (of soil (earth)) thrown day by day. But these "starved" thieves must know very well that in any civilized country in the

world capitalism and the bourgeoisie are not created over the remains and blood of an ancient suffering and symbol country such as Albania.

These days a “government” decision defines 7 years of work for cleaning the seaside, where among other things, it was said: “A project of 11 700000 lek is expected to improve the coastal area of our country.” According to a draft, - On ratification of the development credit agreement, between the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Albania and the International Development Association (IDA) for the integrated management project and the seaside area cleaning “... Here at last a ray of light in the kingdom of darkness that has plagued the country during these years.” But estimating the costs it will need an enormous amount of money to clean it out and certainly we the taxpayers shall be injured? Isn't it the case to apply the law of serious crimes and the convicted shall be sequestrated the property for organized crime that they are doing, killing the sea and with that money to start cleaning the seaside.

Tourism and environment

It is known that Albania is among the countries with severe environmental problems across Europe, and that Albania ranks among the last countries in the environmental organizations reports, especially regarding the irreparable damage to the seaside. Naturally rises the question, where are state institutions for environmental protection? Before 2001 there existed NEA National Environment Agency which was indifferent to what was happening with the sea, (perhaps it didn't have the competences). But after the year 2001 to give to the environmental issues the importance that they really deserved, NEA became the Ministry of Environment. But it was surprising that in this case the Ministry made a blind eye and a deaf ear and didn't take any responsibility for the irreparable damage to the coast, although the high functionaries of this "ecological catastrophe" have had lunch and dinner on the shores of this seaside and are shareholders of most hotels, villas of the Albanian coast.

Tourism, national property

As an intensive participant during the changes of the '90s, I have seen the salvation of Albania from the economic point of view unequivocally on its own natural resources, to its geography. An old professor, a friend and a great man (Prof. Vladimir Misja), in a confident moment, told me "Ilir, remember one thing, tourism is our mine. Tourism is our golden baby." Such sentences, spoken in those years represented a political heresy. I have the impression and belief that this is a national reality. It is known that tourism is the biggest industry in the world. Its development in our terms means that there is a huge political, economic, social and historical cost. It is enough if I remind to the readers that only during the last year Albanians in the position of the tourists, have spent about 567 million dollars abroad. To be attentive to the importance of this indicator, we simply mention that this figure represents 57.6% of the remittances. On the other hand, it is important the actual ratio of the income by the services with the export of goods. Only during the year 2008, tourism generated 11% more income than exports, or more precisely 677 million dollars. It's pitiful, but during the recent years the tendency to spend holidays abroad has increased. This extra flux to go abroad relates to the lack of comfort of the domestic tourism. If we add to the realized profits from businesses in the area of services, the money that Albanians spend abroad, then the approximate figure obtained would be over a billion dollars. Tourism should not be understood simply as a separate sector, but its development must first be closely connected with other sectors such as construction, agriculture, transport, etc. We, Albanians have always been original and radical in our solutions. Once "we rushed to the mountains and hills, to make them fertile like the fields": then we proceeded to chrome that broke through the blockade, with metallurgical and superphosphate plants, while now we continue with electric trains and air balloons. We have never had been given the chance to judge "down to earth", for the present and the future of our country. And once that the ex - post - communist government, tried to talk "seriously" for Albanian tourism (not the Greek one), for the concepts of the massive tourism and the elite one, was wrong "by accident" in its demographic, geographic and regional conception. According to the so-called liberal economists, who are "ex-communist" acid residues, the respect to the

perspective policies of tourism varies on that of the Ionian coast and the "others". So the anti-national and regional nippy logic of these philosophers stood in the great fact: the working class and peasant workers, so called the working mass must be cleaned and washed by the old fashioned Adriatic. The elite, the enlightened leadership will come by the Ionian seaside.

With such denigrating provincial policies, nothing else is done but it is still continued with tales of childhood time, "Get opened Sazan, close Sazan". It is now the modern time of Albanian tourism. Nobody will allow that for the sake of caprices of irresponsible people, to put in flames the greatest property that we Albanians have: tourism. Millions of Euros are spent for the master plans of the tourism development and it is unknown the fate of their implementation. I have enough friends in Ksamil. All know the feats of the former - governments and their courtiers, about the distribution of false construction permits in Ksamil. Didn't you know honoured former - governors, that Ksamil is part of this national development master plan and is not owned by the political mafia?

Such schemes are nothing, except the Albanian variant of Panteleone and Sicilian mafia. One of the merits of the "starved band" is that they founded the bases of the theory of "the burnt earth", as if they were the properties of their fathers. We are all witnesses of the telecom privatization in Albania. These "sons of the wind" tried to privatize up to 15 days before the elections, unique event in the world economy. I do not want to linger with the concessions that constitute another chapter. The undeniable fact is that these hooligans wearing ties not rarely are presented to us as anti-Albanians, as dirty servants of their personal interests. Let us refer to the facts as they are numerous and stubborn. Are these the governors who sold for "five aspra" the mobile telephony and the Albanian Albtelecom, which have systematically robbed the Albanians, the most unique citizens of Europe? Are those the same who privatized banks, oil, power plants, different factories and plants? The former government of these starved thugs made Albanian citizen from the last citizen of Europe to a peon of foreigners on their own land. Thousands of temporary emigrants will be converted to permanent emigrants with the lack of desire to turn their head to their own country. All this has happened as a result of the current criminal governance strategy.

Do not forget that the national wealth is the most sensitive part of a country that aspires to democracy. And we Albanians must become braver and protect our rights. Let's not kill each other, "why did you see me or why I saw you", but arise and fight for basic democratic rights, such as private property. Let us fight with all means "even democratic ones" against gangrenes left to us by the former – clique in power. Do we expect that the so-called "socialists" to do such a thing? Every Albanian patriot knows what these monsters and their clique represent. Then we must give them a solution. The solution is: We must do it on our own.

Then naturally raises the question: Do the state and laws exist that must cut Goxilla's hands who ruined our coast? ... Some say that the state itself was corrupted, the state of monopolies, which was occupied by mafia (State Chapter). So we are left to nothing, let's hope that the government of the "Time for change" will restore our human dignity, and simultaneously return the seaside to the luxury identities of the Albanian coast?

Tourism and the Program of the Democratic Government

The successful realization of the project "with clean hands", is a revitalizing "oxygen" for Mr. Berisha, to the democratic government and for the future of Albania. The success is linked to causal way with the emergency resolution of each of the above links of the chain, which forms the institutional Calvary of Albania. I mean the relationship between the public official and his relations with the private sector. The unscrupulous greed for abuses is the official morality "homos corruptuss" and "homos administratus" that mystified the criminal government during the transition period. The leitmotif of the work of the Public Administration Department near the Council of Ministers in recruiting civil clerks, has been axometric "Militant and abusive". To hold back the galloping access of this phenomenon it is urgently amended the law on the conflict of interests, law that the ex - governments abstracted during the years of their own "invasion".

The democratic government must ensure that the ethical rules must be applied and be unique for all public officials and their associates involved in the public service. Here must not be made exceptions even the cases when the public officials move "accidentally" or not toward the private

sector. The concept of anti - corruption must pay attention to the abusive practices of the socialist government, where leaders of the most important state companies, after having stolen with both hands the state property, open private activities paralleling with those they have had in the state job. As a result of these abusive practices of corruption, in the Albanian market have sprouted dozens of mysterious companies of travel, pharmaceuticals, architecture, construction, insurance, banks, etc.

It is urgent that the Parliament requested to amend the law and its rigorous implementation, a law which provides that persons who create private companies must be screened regarding their criminal record or even restricting the rights that they may be exposed. At the same time the shareholders of the private companies must show the real source of income based on the foundation of the companies. If anyone needs more information about the way they “were born” many of the mysterious Albanian companies, I am ready to provide free service.

Tourism and Government transparency

So far the public discussions are more involved in what is called “hardware” or visible page of tourism: infrastructure and construction of accommodation units. While less attention has been paid to what constitutes “software” and that is intangible, i.e.: the service, the people, the behaviour of the hosting community or the hospitality in market economy conditions and problems associated with it.

I'm glad when I read that it is acknowledged that “It is time to speak openly ... it is really true that there has been evidenced an inconsistency between the statements we make and the concrete work.” But nevertheless I am not clear why this discrepancy exists and what is the role of the specialists and the ministry that deal with this key problem of the Albanian vulnerable economy. If politics and our politicians will continue to be the regressive part of the development of this country, shall we wait until they learn to do their duty properly? Would it be better that everyone does his duty, instead of waiting for solutions from “above”?

It is true that God has given us this “golden” baby, but to harvest its gold, a “master plan” is not sufficient, which is predicted to lay eggs of gold. A wise Shkodra saying says “With a swallow doesn’t come the spring.” The

fact that we are still in the infancy steps in this field, it shows that everything must start from the very beginning with a clear strategy for the tourism development, which I think is still not complete or not totally transparent! Excuse me if I am wrong but isn't it the duty of the responsible institution for the field of tourism with all its components?

Tourism is an industry characterized by an intense involvement of the workforce. Human resources for this industry are rated as 'raw material' or are described by experts as the most important factor to be afforded by this industry over the last decades and ongoing.

But what quality do the human resources offer in the Albanian tourism? Does it satisfy the current customer requirements and needs, i.e. of the tourist? I think that despite the innovative efforts, it still remains too much to be done in this direction.

It is time to assess the motivation of visitors who pay to be satisfied. But when these tourists pay that amount that may be the same or even higher than in another country, they expect that the service is just as high, or better. It is this factor that will determine competitive advantages of our local tourism, but also between it and the tourism of our competitors.

During the many meetings held by CRTRA except the decision to demolish illegal buildings, often it is discussed about the future of tourism in Albania. My idea is that the time has come to have a scientific discussion on the concept of massive tourism and elite one. I want to express my opinion only on these two concepts.

First is to be congratulated the fact that at last it is paid attention to the tourism as one of the most important resources of the economic growth in Albania.

Tourism is one of the largest industries in the world and its effects on the economy of a country are equally great. On the other hand other than the very large and visible positive effects (mainly economic ones) the tourism is associated with negative effects such as big, such as environmental, culture damage, social problems etc. All these turn the dream of development through tourism disappointing, if they are not controlled or prevented by the right time. Long ago the main branch of our economy has been agriculture. Finally we are becoming even more conscious of the importance that tourism can have in the Albanian economy. Being still in the early stages of awareness on the importance of

tourism, this branch has not yet reached the stage of overestimation, to consider it as “a solution to all our problems”. So we must take care that in macro levels, to combine tourism with other branches of the economy to eliminate the dependence from a single branch.

The massive and elite tourism

Let's look inside the development of the tourism itself in our country. As we know the current developments in our tourism have been chaotic, without respecting the proper and no state-controlled laws. However, a positive factor to note is that these chaotic developments are not spread in alarming sizes throughout the country but only on a few hot points of it, mainly in Durrës, Vlora and Saranda. This has kept me alive the optimism that even so far non-development of our tourism has its positive side, because it is easier to develop something better there where doesn't exist any form of development, rather than recreate something good where the bad has given its effects on the environment and society.

10 years ago our politicians (who surprisingly had the decision-making about the fortunes of this country in every sector, ignored the opinion of the experts): decided to make the division with a knife: the Adriatic coast shall belong to the masses and the Ionian to the elite! Under such a logic it results that 2 / 3 of our coast to be destined for massive tourism! It also makes you not be enthusiastic about the decision of the recent demolitions... At least for the moment we have only a few hotspots. While with this massive way it exists the tendency only for mass tourism.

Which are the effects of a massive tourism I believe that all those who have little knowledge about tourism, know them. If you want to do such a thing, after several years we will need to demolish 100 times more of these that we are demolishing today. Have you ever thought to ask directly in these areas, the local residents and investors whether they agree with this kind of division? When will we begin to think more about the future prospects for tourism? To determine the future of tourism areas are made detailed studies and should be taken into account many factors. How can I believe that every decision is “well studied”? It is time that the only master plan for the tourism perspective development, doesn't meld in the drawers

of the Ministry but to fight for its rigorous appliance? My advice is that before such radical decisions, it should be thought of all the consequences.

Albania is a very small country, and by now is too polluted in many areas. There should not make decisions for the death of the other untouched areas! In this case I would be more satisfied if they were left in their primitive form, as nature made them, and we could turn back to agriculture and not think of tourism. All the factors (except for the short-term economic factor) show that Albania should avoid the massive tourism. Such a small country would not need more than a few years to return to “the successive hell” with the following consequences behind. We cannot shelter massive tourists, when you think of the small space, the unspoilt beaches, our culture (we are generous to a friend, but also say “too much but badly done”). The effects of the massive tourism in such places unexplored yet, with virgin nature and unique culture, we read every day in the tourism literature, media, the experience we have when travelling in these countries. When shall we learn from these bitter experiences of the others, who need millions of dollars and years to repair the consequences and improve the image?

I wouldn't like that the Albanian generosity vanishes because of the commercialization and turns to a shock and frozen smile as a result of another side of the medal of tourism, for which we hadn't warned. I would not like that pelicans of Karavasta, carp of Shiroka, the Koran of Prespa or other unique beings that we have the luck to have them, disappear from the influx of tourists masses. Instead I would like the Albanians to have the pleasure to offer his generosity to the tourists coming to know the culture, history and our nature.

We don't need massivity. What we would receive for 2 - 3 years from 100 tourists who belong to the “so-called massivity” (but which later would drastically decrease), we can get for a much longer time by 10 quality tourists (not just elite). If we want to attract these kinds of tourists, we must not become a bad copy of a phenomenon already ugly, but we should enter the tourism market as unique, as Albanians. This is the only reason why these tourists would come to us and not to our competitors. We mustn't forget that tourism is not only the Adriatic and Ionian, but is also Korab, Lura, Thethi, the lakes, the castles, the characteristic cities etc. Tourism is not done only during summer but during the whole round.

This kind of long-lasting tourism needs more time to develop, requires more studies by the specialists of the tourism and the fields that are related to it, but we will harvest its fruit for a long time, and the coming generations will be grateful to us that at last we will leave something easier to be developed later and not chaos and destructions.

The quality of tourism

Now in Albania you can find hotels and restaurants built with expensive materials, marbles and granite, with TVs and air conditioners, bathrooms with bath etc. But meanwhile the bathroom is not cleaned well, the hotel may not have water or lights, the shower doesn't work, you cannot find anyone to communicate in foreign languages, the service starts to be offered after half an hour, the prices are higher for foreigners or for the Kosovars, and when you complain to the owners they say you can go somewhere else. All these have to do with the culture of service and influence in shaping the image of the tourism service in Albania.

The one who tries and lives the experiences of the tourist or the client of these services observes a "feature" of the Albanian tourism: luxury buildings, but in many cases remain icy, not filled with vitality and warmth of hospitality, and lose the luxury and elegance because of the offered service. It must be emphasized that guilty for this is not only the owners and employees. The latter often have the desire and willingness to do something nice, but the lack of adequate professional culture to distinguish which are the requirements and needs of tourists and their priorities.

If we analyze the history of the Albanian tourism industry we will see that we have very little tradition, taking into account the 40 year history of a regime which fought the concept of a consumer society, where the offering of the services of leisure and entertainment was considered foreign and micro bourgeois, where culinary art did not develop because of poverty, where in the area of services existed only popular restaurants or social food canteens, and the construction of the hotels in the main cities was made in the 1970s only when the need for foreign currency deemed necessary.

This explains the low interest of the public opinion on the tourism. Even though something has begun to move these last ten years, it still remains under the political propagandas during the tourist season. Still it is

not thought about the advertising sensitizing spots that show the public the importance of the domestic tourism in our economic development. They promote civilized behaviour and the service at the right level or criticize the phenomenon of benefit, robbing attempts, the indifference that is being seen frequently in the services sector in general. These should be financed by the Albanian government (in cooperation with the relevant NGOs) and to be broadcasted continuously a few months before the grand opening and during the tourist season, with the clear slogan "Message of the Albanian Government" at the end of the spot. This practice is often applied in western countries for combating negative phenomena, but also to transmit new ideas for positive development.

Albanian tourism, professional education and promotion

Since the time that I am watching the development of tourism in Albania, I have noticed that exhausting efforts have been made to show the profitability of this gift that nature has bestowed us. If Albania is lacking an awareness of the public on the importance of tourism, this is mainly because of the lack of a contemporary level of professional education in the field of tourism, there are no institutions that offer consulting, statistical data, studies and project designs on our tourism, seminar events, and training by foreign experts in this field (I believe you agree with the fact that some specialists who are qualified or are expected to be qualified again in the frame of "the swallow"), publications on the perspective tourism developments in our country (we heard that here are built hundreds of hotels, but the intention is to make these hotels known by the tourists) etc etc. So if you are missing all these mentioned above (and many other things that media and politics are interested to bypass), shouldn't we think that all the above mentioned factors, may play the most important role to somehow fill this gap?

Mustn't we think that for the moment we have what to show with modesty and that the promotion is on of the main tasks of these policy makers of this field, at least if we want to make our future way simpler? Because with the image of "a country with a fragile economy in the middle of Europe" only with an aggressive promotion and well studied may be the

optimal solution and what the Albanians and our brothers and friends from all over the world are looking for.

The fact that it is a “real success” to know what is being done with our tourism, has to do with little changes that happen in it, or with the negligence to give it the due importance to the promotion? It can't be different when it is not being understood that the internet is becoming the golden key of tourism in every aspect.

During my stay in Germany in the year 2002, and this time I couldn't leave without visiting the most important event of tourism here, the Fair of Keln. This Fair is one of the most famous in Europe and it is known that the German market is one of the most attractive for the business of tourism, because the German tourist, except being a tourist with high income, has the other advantage of going on vacation more than once a year in different countries of the world.

Besides the professional interest, the other reason that made me visit this Fair has been the Albanian representation in it. Before visiting the Fair I checked the internet if Albania would be represented or not, but I didn't find it. I asked at the Information Centre when I entered the Fair, if there was any section where Albania was represented, but after they checked they told me that it didn't have any representation. Being bored I thought that our “tradition” didn't exist, because two years ago I barely found a little Albanian stand somewhere without any representatives in it, but only a few posters, while the last year I couldn't find them anywhere

So I began to see with what were represented our Balkan and Mediterranean neighbours. I started to visit the stand of Macedonia that has always been presented every time I've been in this Fair. It seemed interesting the fact that Macedonia has always had its stand near the Mediterranean countries! (which seems to me a very tactically smart solution while there is no any way out of it in the Mediterranean.). There, to my great surprise, told me that Albania is represented somewhere, but not in the Mediterranean stands, even not in those of the Eastern Europe or Balkans but.....in the booths of the Farway Countries! (like the countries of Asia, Africa, etc.). The reason was very "simple": in those stands the Albanian presentation was sponsored by an NGO organization.....

I waited no longer and hurried to find our stand at the “Fairway Countries”, but just like other times for my bad luck I found there only a few posters instead..... Disappointed I asked the Macedonian who had visited our stand before to see what our stand offered, with what they were presented this year, and he showed me some leaflets which had been given to him and that I had seen them since 3-4 years... In contrast to what I found the first two years, at our stand was added the “famous” poster of the girl with the red dress that has turned her back, which for coincidence perfectly symbolized our tourism in relation to our visitors. So we “accidentally” continued to say to the visitors: “Sorry, but even this year we are turning you our back ...”. On the other hand as for irony in that poster was written: “Discover (know) Albania”, while those words meant to me the opinion that we should first discover and know Albania ourselves, because with that presentation we are making to our country we don’t know it properly ourselves yet... This presentation not at all dignified (in succession), and the dignified presentation of our neighbours, made me get upset at the beginning, but later the revolt converted into a sad taste.

At first I was upset for that meaningless representation of an agency, which although it is not yet known whether it still exists or is dissolved, practically operated better than the Association (the legitimate one) of Tourist Agencies! On the other hand I was thinking if it is worthwhile to be represented in vain, or not appear at all when you do not have what to offer. Thinking to find the trace of the problem, the logic followed a spiral that led to the same weak point as well as important to our tourism: to the former - main leaders of tourism or in other words, to the former - Ministry of Tourism.

First of all this Ministry had to be presented itself to such important fairs like its counterparts. If it is presented itself, it should provide one or more tourist products. But to create a tourist product, the Ministry should formulate strategies for the development of the tourism in our country, should stimulate local and foreign investors to invest in a particular form of tourism, in accordance with the draft strategy, which should have taken into consideration our internal economic, social, cultural, demographic and natural factors. And this is the main problem. So, after a long term strategy was compiled, where all the factors mentioned above were taken into account, and the most important, after it is applied, it will be easier to

advertise its products not only by the Ministry of Tourism, but also by the tourist agencies themselves.

A good and contemporaneous strategy (though to my opinion - was not complete), was developed at that time (in the year 2002), with the help of GTZ, but that was not never applied... At that time, from an interview of the Minister of Tourism we could know that a new strategy was being drafted. As mentioned above, not that the previous strategy did not need to be improved but who guarantees us that the new strategy will not undergo the fortune of the former one?

There are more than 20 years that we are not giving a specific direction to our tourism. There are years that we remind of our tourism only some weeks before the tourist season starts. The experience of the developed countries shows that for the summer season of this year, the work begins since the closing of the season of the last year, so around August - September. While us by November start to think only for the demolition of the illegal buildings and in January we begin working to develop a new strategy! But when shall we start to rebuild? What will we offer to the vacationers this summer except some fewer illegal accommodations?! The fact that we think to develop a new strategy in January makes me think that its application (if it ever happens) may impact some small effects only next year. I repeat the question: What has thought the Ministry of Tourism about this year?! Shall we go again a week before the season starts, to beg to our brothers from Kosovo to spend their holidays to us, in order not to fail the summer season? I am sure that with what we offer, they will again answer to us with the enthusiasm of the last year?!

Like me, there are many others interested ones (Albanian and foreigners), who want to receive information from this Ministry what has been done, what is being done, and what is planned to be done in the field of the Albanian tourism. The invitation of the ex - Minister of Tourism in his article to the newspaper "Shekulli" for the need to exchange opinions with the other interested parties to our tourism, was to be congratulated, but first I think that this exchange of opinions should not be done in the common media but in a specialized media such as in the internet website of the Ministry. One other form of communication or information would be at that time the publication of a periodical paper by this Ministry, but when you think about the illogical lack of the website, the latter seems a "luxury".

However I repeat that, the invitation for giving opinions on the future of our tourism, which I consider as an invitation of cooperation with all interested parties - can be a turning point to our tourism fortunes. It is precisely the lack of cooperation and knowledge that have left our tourism in such a passive stage.

I think that together, Albanians and foreigners, interested in our tourism development, should create an independent Albanian Club Tourism, with the aim of contributing through articles in media on our tourism problems and possible ways of solutions. Let us contribute together in building a modern Albanian and long-lasting tourism, and not to be presented any more at the "Fairway Countries", but where we belong to.

In fact, more than a full awareness on the potentials of the tourism in our country, there is confusion, an uncertainty, either in the public sector or in the private one. Nobody is able to say what direction our tourism will take, who will define these directions, how, and when shall be applied. The "salvation" from such questions which add confusion, comes with the answer: "There is a tourism master plan". This they say when they want to "get rid of" you in the Ministry, even in the communes with tourism development potential they say the same, although they don't know what is this "master plan" that will come from "those who are in the government".

The most tragic result of this indifference to our tourism, is that it is still not been seen as such a potential even by the new generation. This comes precisely as a result of the lack of public awareness that was mentioned above. And therefore, Albanian students who have the opportunities to study abroad prefer far less the tourism branch. So someone who spends large amounts to be educated abroad still doesn't see tourism as a sector that will take sufficient importance and development, to ensure that student a source of income to build his life.

But if this guarantee won't be given by our governors (because they themselves have no idea what will be done with the tourism), the private sector should be the one who must do more. Here we do not refer to those tourist agencies held with contraband visas, or those hotels that formally kept afloat, but for those serious private entities that have experience in tourism and will try to change something. It is their duty to try to create a new generation of managers, because they should look at them the increase of their profit and the survival from the competition. Of course that they

should require to do this in cooperation with the relevant ministries of tourism and education.

Even a master plan that won't be rigorously applied will not solve the problems of our tourism, even a ministry official who hears for the first time about the tourism when he is assigned to do such a task. The only solution to the problems of tourism comes through education with contemporary levels.

Modern tourist today, doesn't ask any more where he will spend the holidays, but what he will do when he gets there. Our tourism leaders must answer to the first question, as well as to the second. Therefore, to capture the rhythm of time, it must begin to think immediately about the preparation of the new generation of future tourism managers.

Conclusions

It exists a very large gap between the demands for such managers and the educational structure of the tourism profile. The three high schools that we have cannot prepare these managers. Even that half-semester of our universities cannot do this. It is time to think seriously about opening a University (attaching hectically to the very professional job and with the genuine profile of the contemporary program completely full and with objection the professional education for the tourism that is currently developed by the University "Aleksander Moisiu" in Durrës), which will prepare the best students of these high schools to the level of managers.

Opening such a school is not easy when you think about our conditions and experience, but if its importance is seriously assessed, the Ministries of Tourism and Education collaborated with the private sector, and the three high schools and the existing universities, this solution is not impossible. And if all parties give their contribution, the patterns or even the experience may be taken from similar western schools, which are always ready to help in such cases, when they see a serious engagement from the local party.

Until such a school is opened it must be seen the prompt opportunities (to proceed the close tourist seasons) for the preparation and absorption of new managers. We think that there are alternatives: The most important is the one which deals with the absorption of those few students

who have done or are doing such a school in countries with the tourism more developed than ours. To attract such students in the public or private sector, it should be taken into consideration that this is not done offering them a job as a receptionist or ticket seller. Also such students that often may have a richer background than their potential Albanian bosses themselves, cannot be paid with a salary of 10 000 lek when meanwhile the most common work they could find in the West is paid at least 1 000 Euro.

It is known that such amounts are not given by all companies in Albania, so a solution (especially for those students who have difficulties finding a job abroad), may be the compensation through the commitment offset by Albanian companies to local tourism product. If for example a travel agency undertakes the challenge to “reveal”, to include in the tourist package, and sell the Albanian product, then this product will develop more, which would bring the increase of the rate of profit, and therefore rewarding the employees. At the same time it will attract the attention of the foreign tour operators, and as a result the number of tourists shall be increased. So the orientation toward domestic product will provide more income and security for the future, as well as providing more opportunities for such students to put into practice their knowledge - and this may be a reason for them not to expect the same salary.

The second alternative is sponsoring the best students of tourism in Albania to study in a western school. This can be done through cooperation of the private sector (individually or organized) with the respective schools in the country. With these students may be bound a contract, in which different companies can pay a scholarship (the experience shows that it's not a big amount for these companies) to these students, while the students must achieve satisfactory results and turn back to Albania to work for that company after graduation. The latter is achieved by cooperating with the authorities that give the permission to stay in the country where the student is going to study, making this staying permission with the condition to turn back.

These were just some ideas, but if the interested parties get together with the concerns and problems as treated above, we should discuss such ideas in detail through round tables, conferences or seminars on tourism (which continue to be a rare phenomenon in Albania), to find the optimal solution, and to implement it as soon as possible in practice.

Now it's time to seriously think about human resources and culture of service, before the traditional Albanian hospitality commercializes and transforms to the culture of negligence, poor service, or extortion of the customer, facing the irreparable consequences of non-refoulement and flow of the number of tourists. It is time to understand that we are actually entreating to be included in the Courtyard of the Great European family; there we cannot go with these concepts. We must make the comparisons with the owners of the courtyard, because otherwise they won't even open the door of that yard, let alone to enter inside the house.

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