

URBAN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND TOURIST SURVEY IN KORÇA CITY

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Abstract: The demand of people to travel to cities has increased especially in recent decades. The presence of numerous cultural attractions, urban development and liveliness have turned cities into destinations of one of the developments trends of tourism, such as urban tourism. Cultural and natural resources are the main elements that enable the presence of tourists in cities, while secondary elements such as accommodation, food, shops, and additional elements as transport and tourist information are important, as they best complement the tourist offer in a destination. In this context, the diverse forms of urban tourism that are created such as cultural tourism, recreation, sports, business, events, visits to friends and relatives, etc., make tourism in cities a complex phenomenon to be analyzed. Regarding culture, Korça is one of the cities of Albania, which is distinguished for its rich cultural and cultural heritage, material and non material. The aim of this study is to identify of the current situation of tourism development in this area, through the evaluation of the primary, secondary, and additional potential that affect the attraction of visitors to it. The urban typology of the city with special architecture, the presence of attractive attractions, the development of numerous events and celebrations, the increased number of tourists, the increase of accommodation units, has been defined the city as a developing tourist destination in recent years. Culture plays an important role in the life of the city and promoting the tourist movement towards the destination. In its support and development operate several institutions such as museums of different categories, theater, library, some creative, and cultural sectors, etc. Rural areas around the city are also supportive as they provide rich natural resources, traditional settlements, rich cuisine, for leisure and activities. The paper also aims to analyze some characteristics of the profile of tourists by assessing the behavior, motivations, experiences, and pleasures during their stay in the city of Korça. This has been made possible through surveys and interviews conducted with foreign and domestic visitors. As a result, from the study of the situation and the profile of the visitor, it is declared that the interest for the development of tourism in this destination is high. The cultural and natural potentials that the study space contains are quite attractive to all visitors, but especially to foreign tourists coming to the area. What needs to be done, in addition to improving the tourist infrastructure, is the optimal use of attractions, increasing activities, organization of itineraries and preparation of guides to enable recognition of monuments in the city and surroundings areas. Furthermore, the local authorities need to implement a strategy for tourism development integrating the tourism policies and action plans, involving the contribution of all the stakeholders.

Keywords: urban tourism, cultural attractions, tourist profile, Korça city, tourist destination, tourist infrastructure.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world. According to UNWTO, in 2018 the number of people moving with tourism motivation reached 1.4 billion and the expenditure on tourism reached \$ 1.7 trillion. Europe continues to be the destination with the largest number of visitors with 710 million and spending \$ 570 billion. (UNWTO, 2019 Edition). In a global tourism trend that is on the rise, cities are trying to become more and more attractive. Cities like London, Paris, Rome, Madrid, Barcelona, Berlin attract millions of tourists from all over the world every year. The phenomenon of attracting people to visit cities is early, but the demand of people to travel to cities has increased especially in recent decades. The presence of numerous cultural objects, urban development and liveliness has turned cities as destinations of one of the trends of tourism development such as urban tourism. The level of urbanization and development of urban tourism ranges from large cities with millions of inhabitants, to small cities with tens of thousands of inhabitants to towns with several thousand inhabitants. (Cave & Jolliffe, 2012) But what is urban tourism? Although the phenomenon is old, the concept of urban tourism is new and complex to define. In many publications and research papers, researchers have given different definitions about urban tourism. According to UNWTO, a basic definition for urban tourism defined it as a type of tourism activity which take place in an urban space. G. Ashworth (1989) defines that “urban tourism is not a multitude of activities in the city, but is a case of tourism it is “an integral, traditional and proper part of urban life”. The author emphasizes that tourists visit cities for many purposes either as primary attractions or as providers of supportive facilities, especially transport and accommodation. (Ashworth, 2012) Having a large variety of primary attractions a city can be visited

for a variety of reasons, including leisure, business, shopping, conference attendance etc. (Pasquinelli, 2015) In this contexts term “urban tourism” can be considered as defining a category, in which cultural tourism, conference tourism, sports tourism and many others can be regarded as possible “urban tourisms”. (Lerario & Turi, 2018) In his book *Urban Tourism: The Visitor Economy and the Growth of Large Cities*, Christopher Law Christopher Law explains the relationship between tourism and urban areas. He distinguishes between primary, secondary and supplementary resources offered by a city (Law, 2002), arguing that primary elements (natural and cultural) are what attract tourists and enable the development of forms of urban tourism in cities, while the elements secondary and complementary are considered important in the experience of tourists to the destination they are visiting. The author defines the facilities and activities that enable the development of urban tourism as follows:

The primary elements include:

Facilities for activities:

- Cultural facilities: museums, exhibitions, theater, other attractions
- Entertainment facilities: events, celebrations
- Sport facilities: indoor and outdoor

Elements of leisure:

- Physical facilities: street with historic elements, interesting buildings, cultural monuments, parks and green spaces
- Social/cultural elements: country liveliness, folklore, hospitality, local traditions, way of life

The secondary elements include:

- Accommodation facilities
- Food facilities
- Markets

The additional elements:

- Accessibility
- Transportation, parking facilities
- Tourist infrastructure (tourist information offices, promotional materials etc.)

The elements of urban tourism development (Law, 2002)

Considering the development of sustainable tourism, these elements must be linked together and function effectively. (Zamfir & Corbos, 2015) In developing countries, urban tourism is seen as a good opportunity to generate socio-economic life, create jobs and increase the well-being of residents. In Albania, tourism is being seen as an opportunity for the country's economic development. In the years 1945-1990, Albania under the socialist system implemented the country's isolation policies, preventing the arrival of foreign tourists, relying only on the views of social tourism, a tourism for all and at low cost. This type of tourism will was controlled and administered by the state, both in accommodation structures and in various services. After the 1990s, changes in the political and socio-economic system oriented the country towards tourism, which increased the number of foreign tourists to Albania from year to year. The number of international tourists in 2017 marked 5.1 million tourists, dominated by tourists from European countries (Ministry of Tourism and Environment, 2017). The data from the ministry estimates about 6 million tourists in 2019. The country has many natural and cultural assets that favor the development of some types of tourism such as sunbathing tourism, natural tourism, cultural tourism, ecotourism, etc. In addition to sea tourism and natural tourism, a tourist attraction is observed in terms of cultural tourism. The cities of Albania contain various attractions of cultural heritage, including the historic centers of Gjirokastra and Berat, registered as World Heritage Sites protected by UNESCO.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study combines literature review and fieldwork. Research methodology is focused on the use of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Theoretical concepts the presentation of the current situation of tourism development, the values of attractions and others are analyzed through the use of written sources and various articles. Meanwhile, quantitative and qualitative data were collected through direct observations and interviews with local and foreign visitors. The questionnaires are designed by the authors based on research of the nature of the study. 200 local and foreign visitors were surveyed in September and October 2019. The interviews also aimed to provide additional and detailed information on the visitor's profile, outside of structured questions. The findings of the survey were made possible by data processing with the SPSS software method. The location of the attractions in the study area is presented through the map built with ArGIS 10 software.

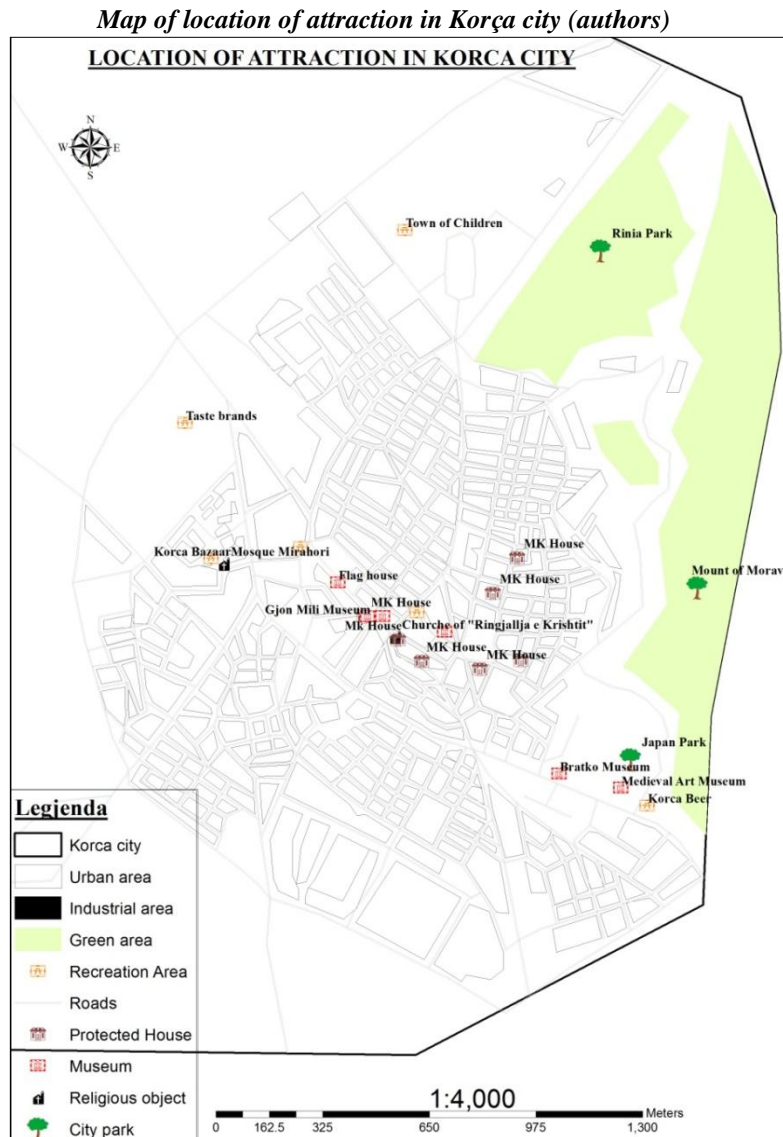
3. STUDY AREA (Tourism development in Korça city)

Early archaeological evidence reveals that it has been inhabited since ancient times. While written sources date the city to the first half of the 15th century, (Selenica, 1982) data on some cult monuments in nearby villages, such as the church of Ristoz, in the village of Mborje, built in the 9th century, e.s. show that the place where the city stands today, may have been inhabited even before the century. XV (Naçi, 1923) Qyteti filloi të zhvillohej me ritme të shpejta në mesin e shek. XIX. Aktualisht me një popullsi prej 75.994 banorë. (Municipality, 2016) Korça is the center of the region and one of the most important cities in the country, traditionally distinguished for its role in national economic, educational and cultural development. Culturally, it is distinguished by its rich material and spiritual cultural heritage. Culture plays an important role in revitalizing life in the city and promoting the tourist movement to the destination (Menkshi, Trashëgimia kulturore në funksion të zhvillimit social-ekonomik të qarkut Korçë, 2014). The town and the rural areas around it have been visited during the 1960s-1990s, mainly for annual vacations. After the 1990s, with the all-round changes in the country, the number of local visitors and at the same time the interest of foreign tourists visiting Albania increased in the Korça region. Healthy curative climate, special architecture and cultural potentials of the city of Korça and the settlements around it, are some of the attractive attractions for tourists. The tourist potential offers the development of several forms of tourism such as cultural tourism, tourism of events and celebrations, natural tourism, gastronomy tourism, etc. According to the data of the municipality of Korça, the number of visitors has been increasing from 43 000 in 2009, to 115 000 in 2012 and about 360 thousand in 2017. According to the data coming from the accommodation units during the period 2009-2011 have been accommodated 32 295 visitors. (Summary report on the number of visitors 2009-2011). Meanwhile, in recent years the number of accommodated tourists has increased from 48,649 in 2017 to 63,926 in 2018 and 85,000 in 2019. Of these, 75% are considered domestic tourists and 25% foreign tourists. The city of Korça had only 9 hotels in 2010, while the number of accommodation structures has increased accordingly with the increase in accommodation requirements, specifically from 43 accommodation facilities in 2016, to 66 in 2017, in 85 in 2018 and 94 in 2019. The categorization of accommodation units belongs mainly to the type of hotels about 66 such, inns, hostels and bed & breakfast. In these structures and those of the family tourism type, 4000 people are accommodated. In recent years, the focus on the tourism sector has always been growing and this has been favored by the initiatives of international organizations that have operated in the field of tourism, as well as numerous promotional materials of the region's values (guides, publications, websites) . Accurate data on tourist inflows and their origin cannot be provided, as there is a lack of authentic evidence or studies in this sector. According to surveys and information from accommodation units and other services. (Mjedisit, 2017). From the interviews conducted alongside the museums, foreign tourists like the architecture of the city (apartments), the Cathedral "Ringjallja e Krishtit", tranquility and gastronomy (Menkshi & Braholli, The Mapping and Evaluation of Cultural and Creative Industry in Korca City, 2020). One of the strengths of the city is the organization of holidays and events, which take place throughout the year. The Beer Festival (August) is the largest celebration in the city, attracting visitors from all over the country and foreign tourists visiting Albania during this period. More than 85,000 visitors visit the city and its surroundings during the five days of the festival. From the survey conducted with local and foreign tourists, the main motivations of local tourists are "special city landscape" (45%), "tranquility, relaxation and hospitality" (33%), "culinary, nightlife" 31% , "Culture and citizenship" 28%, "climate and nature" (25%), "celebrations and events" (20%) etc. What is worth noting is that the motivation "to visit cultural attractions" was chosen by only 17% of respondents. While foreign tourists, their main motivations for the visit have chosen "attraction to architecture and cultural attractions" (65%), "to get acquainted with history and culture" 48%, "the tranquility and not crowded" 38%, etc. In addition to the current atmosphere of the city and the attraction to cultural monuments, there are some problems identified by tourists, which are related to the valorization and poor tourist use of heritage attractions, the lack and in some cases inaccuracy of promotional materials, lack of tourist guides, poor informative signage regarding the location of attractions, lack of quality tourist services, etc. Local authorities promote and enable the development of local events and celebrations in the city and the entire territory of the municipality.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS (Tourist Survey)

The presence of diverse natural and cultural potentials, the increase in the number of tourists and their presence in the city and county of Korça, the increase of accommodation capacities, food and entertainment, the improvement of tourist services are evident to a developing tourist destination. To better understand the profile of tourist, the motivations of area attraction and their activities, we conducted a study in form of a survey and interviews with domestic and foreign visitors. (Menkshi, Qirici, & Shehu, Thermal Springs of Benja-Albania, Possibilities for Tourism Developepment, 2019) Although the number of foreign visitors and tourists is significantly increasing, accurate statistics on the number and distribution of them in the tourist areas of the region can not be given. Regarding the survey the majority part of vizitors consists of 75% of domestic tourists (inside the Albania) and

about 25% are foreign tourists. (DMO, 2019) The number of nights stay is estimated at 85 000 tourists, with an average of 2.5 nights spent sleeping. Regarding to this, 73% of foreign visitors and tourists prefer to stay in hotels (73%), while only 27% of them prefer other structures such as guesthouses, hostels, apartments, B&B, etc. Asked about “how money they have spent during their stay”, it is declared that a tourist spends an average of 7,919 lek, a value which is mostly dedicated to accommodation and food. (DMO, 2019).



One of the characteristics of tourists is their presence at the destination, mostly on weekends, which classifies them for the most part as visitors of the weekend (66%), while 34% are on other days of the week. Most of foreign respondents use the holidays as the most good period of the year to frequent the destination. As we have observed the area, the age of visitors has decreased in the dominant age of grup between 25-44, comparing with the dominance of age grup 45-64 in a survey in 2013, what explain their motivations for choosing the destination. Regarding the primary purpose of the visit to the Korça region, more than 50% of domestic vizitors have chosen the destination for local culture and traditions, 38% for architecture and cultural attractions and another not small part thave chosen as a natural attraction. From this point of view, the specific choice of destination is made first, to see the traditional tourist villages. (Voskopoja, Dardhë ..) The foreign tourist claims that the interés of visiting the city is mostly related with the cultural and historical motivation. In addition to the culturally motivated choice, a large proportion of visitors (44.3%) choose the destination to enjoy nature and a healthy climate. The natural lanscape of the villages is highly valued. We can say that at this point the combination of cultural values with rich natural

values, best meets the tourist offer of the Korça region and consequently increases the interest of visitors and tourists in its direction. Other choices of visitors are related to gastronomy and traditional food, celebrations, hospitality, etc. Regarding the evaluation of the visitor's profile, an important element is the satisfaction with the infrastructure and tourist services. Significant changes have been made to these two elements, but there are still services for further improvement. Regarding the assessment of tourist roads, in the profile of the visitor there is an average satisfaction in their direction 45%. The ease of reaching the visitable objects in the majority of respondents (48%) is moderately satisfactory, compared to 25% satisfactory and 19% who are dissatisfied with it. It is also very important to know the preferences of foreign tourists. Each group of tourists does not differ from other groups, only from the place of origin, but also from the preferences they have towards the offer and services offered. Regarding the survey the German tourists are the main group of tourist (18%) that are visiting the destination recently. They travel in small groups or in pairs and prefer to be accommodated in 2 or 3 star hotels, which means that they do not spend much on accommodation. German tourists are interested in outdoor activities (hiking, mountain climbing, cycling) as well as representing a high interest in knowing the culture and way of life in the place they visit. Besides the German tourists the destination is also visited by French, Italians, Greeks, Polish tourists etc.

Their requirements and preferences should be considered by specialists who design tourism development policies and local tourism enterprises. According to the data provided in relation to the satisfaction with the visitable natural and cultural objects, from the direct contacts with foreign tourists in particular, the cultural objects are presented with many values but with poor management. Among the most popular objects visited are the Museum of Medieval Art, the churches of Voskopojë, the Cathedral of the Ringjallja e Krishtit, the part of Lake Ohrid (Pogradec), etc. What is noticed in the profile of foreign visitors is also the interest in nature exploration and outdoor activities, which for the destination of Korça are few. From this point of view, it can be organized guides itineraries combined with visits to natural and cultural attractions. The role of tour guides is very important. Regarding the domestic visitors who visit the destination, they are mostly attracted by the gastronomy, the celebrations, the quite atmosphere and not crowded city, the special architecture, etc.

From the study of the profile of the visitor, the interest for the development of tourism in the region of Korça is high. The cultural and natural potentials that the city and the surrounded areas contain are quite attractive to all visitors, but especially to foreign tourists coming to the area. What needs to be done, in addition to improving the infrastructure, is to organize itineraries and prepare guides to enable the recognition of natural and cultural monuments in the entire area.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

As a result of the increase in the number of tourists, the increase in accommodation capacities, numerous events and festivals organizations, the city of Korça can be considered a developing tourist destination. The tourist products offered are diverse and enable the development of several forms of tourism such as cultural tourism, natural tourism event and celebration tourism, gastronomy tourism etc. Approaching the culture and cultural heritage in particular of foreign tourists, should increase the care for the preservation of these objects and putting them in full availability of tourism development. From the tourists survey compared to previous years, in addition to the third age that moves with travel agencies, there is an increase of small groups with young ages. This requires a review of the tourist offer by encouraging alternative forms of tourism. Korça is known for its activities, but outdoor activities are minimal (hiking, skiing, cycling, etc). The orientation of local visitors to the destination mainly during the weekend makes the destination a city-break or a stay of urban tourism of the weekend.

The design of the strategy and the definition of action plans by the local government should take into account the development of an effective and sustainable tourism. They must also be altered by the principles of sustainable development. The city needs to ensure that tourism develops sustainably in terms of the environment, cultural diversity and social responsibility. On the other hand, studies should be added in relation to occasional surveys of the profile of visitors, evaluation of attractions, evaluation of accommodation units and capacities, restaurants and all elements that enable the development of tourism in the destination.

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