

Cultural Heritage in Mediterranean Countries: The Case of an IPA Adriatic Cross Border Cooperation Project

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The aim of this paper is to analyze the role of tourism in achieving economic, social and environmental objectives. Relevant literature highlights the importance of networks in tourism sector. The focus is on how an international project can valorise cultural heritage in Mediterranean countries by enhancing their management by means of the involvement of local communities too. We take in account such a case study an IPA Adriatic project involving 19 partners, belonging to 8 Adriatic countries. We carry out an analysis of cultural tourism strategies and relevant policies in each country and perform a systematic collection and review of previous successful experiences. Starting from Delphi methodology, we create a consistent strategic framework that can widely be disseminated. Our research hypothesis verifies if variables strategic to the development of tourism systems in the Adriatic countries can be identified. Policy implications draw outlines for strengthening the cultural heritage and tourist system.

Key words: tourism, cultural heritage, Mediterranean countries, IPA Adriatic project.



INTRODUCTION

Local development strategies of many of the EU policies target tourism as one of the principal areas of development (Dinis et al. 2010; Scott 2002). Despite tourism declined until the end of 2009 and rebounded in 2010 and in 2011 (UNWTO 2011), in recent decades, the tourism sector can be considered one of the industries with the highest development potential and fast rate of growth (Zarkesh et al. 2011). According to World Travel and Tourism Council, more than 1500 million people will be able to find employment, directly or indirectly, in tourism sector (Zarkesh et al. 2011, 693). Then, thanks to tourism development a country may achieve economic objectives but also cultural, environmental and social. Particularly in Adriatic countries, that are rich in cultural heritage traditions, tourism can be the engine of an economic growth with strong impact on employment. In these countries, the strategic importance of a tourism policy that puts in the foreground government incentives to tackle the current problems deriving from high competition and high transaction costs of the tourism market stands out.

There is a need for alternative strategies and a transition to sustainable business models including a diversification of tourism services. A tourism policy has as its pillar the design and the development of a strategy that encourages and supports the private sector and its relevant initiatives, supporting innovation and the creation of networks (OECD 2016). Several scholars advocate the importance of collaboration in tourism endorsing the crucial role of mutual network in an integrated tourism system (Michael and Hall 2007; Scott et al. 2008; Svensson et al. 2006; March and Wilkinson 2009; Bramwell and Lane 2000). Comparative analysis applied to tourism sector involving general topics as networks, partnerships and collaboration are attracting increasing interest and gaining attention (Tremblay 2009). In the concept of «integrated rural tourism» (Saxena and Ilbery 2010), the key crucial elements are the networks based on relations (strong, weak, formal or informal) between the different local players, as well as on their respective traditions and models of behaviour. A consultation panel of scholars highlights the



role of tourism in economy and which may be strategies to optimise or reinforce its influence, with particular attention to integrated forms of tourism (Saxena et al. 2007; Saxena and Ilbery 2010; Ballesteros and Ramirez 2007). In fact, landscapes, the main tourist attraction in several tourist centres of the world, should not be segmented into monuments, architecture, natural elements etc., but considered in an integrative way too (Panizza 2003). Sustainable tourism, for example, is based on specific assets as heritage, cultural and natural, or economic aspects that are local productivity and adaptability of the territory (Fassoulas 2012). From this perspective, the perceived success of a tourist system is strongly influenced by a well-developed heritage theme.

Finally, the ultimate goal of a repositioning of the tourism destinations of the Adriatic countries will lead to a competitive advantage that involves a strengthening of cooperation between the involved countries. It is crucial to create a real network government that promotes the Adriatic as a single “tourism destination” and cooperates in the development of innovative tourism products, characterized by “service packages” that express the uniqueness and peculiarities of the “destination” itself, differentiating both the product offered and the marketing message. The horizontal and vertical co-operation, for example, creates competitive advantages such as economies of scale, lower costs and greater competitiveness on market in terms of price, as well as image and improvement of services and products quality. So the cooperation between Adriatic countries can be seen as a strategy to meet the new needs of the international tourism market and to fight the tourism seasonality and, at the same time, it can be considered the engine of development of the involved countries.

There is a need for greater efforts in terms of the development of new tourist products and services (high quality oriented strategic tourism packages), of the improvement of professionalism and specialization level of the operators of the sectors throughout the supply chain, of the adoption of new business model, more results-oriented and in terms of the development of an Adriatic brand image that will involved the uniqueness of each country. The different Adriatic countries tourism policies are characterized by a high market-oriented approach, based on



public/private partnerships on extensive and transparent cooperation between the different actors, with the aim of reaching a competitive and sustainable tourism that may create a favorable framework conditions for the tourism sector. Adriatic tourism has fallen behind its direct competitors at various levels. First, the old and outdated hotels and tourism infrastructure that require massive investment for their renewal in short and medium term; second, the quality growth of the tourism services is not on a par with the international best practices, especially in small Adriatic countries, so a constant qualitative and not only quantitative development in tourism is required; third tourism creates jobs, but wages in this sector are relatively low compared with average wages, with a negative impact on service quality and more efforts in training and education are required.

Finally, the landscape and the natural heritage are a key competitive asset for tourism of the Adriatic countries. It is therefore necessary to preserve the attractiveness but, at the same time, to adapt it to the many “demands” of tourism market in terms of presence and quality of infrastructures and variety of facilities and activities for leisure time. So Adriatic countries has to act in terms of sustainable development, with tourism policy oriented on preserving natural resources, focusing on the development of a quality tourism and not just on a mass tourism, which will generate higher revenue with low environmental impact.

In this context, the project HERA “Sustainable tourism management of Adriatic HERitage”, constituted by 8 Mediterranean countries, is placed in order to investigate a potential overcoming of these problems by means of strengthening sustainable cultural tourism routes. Cultural route evaluation is one of the basic requirements of the Council of Europe (CoE) Cultural Routes Programme. The project HERA proposed methodology in line with the Council of Europe criteria that are used in the process of CoE cultural routes (activities and networks) performance assessment¹. The main aim of the CoE assessment is to increase

1 Khovanova-Rubicondo, Kseniya. 2012. Evaluation of the CoE Cultural Routes: from measurement to management, Cultural Routes Summer Seminar Strasbourg. 3-7 September, Council of Europe



trans-national connectivity of the cultural route networks bringing economic and social benefits to their communities and taking advantage of common marketing strategies. Finally, the principal objective is the preservation of a unique in its diversity European heritage by creating cross-border communities transcending national states and interests of individual Adriatic countries. So our aim is to understand, through the analysis of the project case studies if some variables can be identified in order to develop strategic tourism systems in the Adriatic countries.

The paper is structured as follows: after a description of the HERA project such as our case study (Eckstein 1975), materials and methods are described: starting from the Delphi-based study of Monavari et al. (2012), we analyze and assign weight to the successful experiences by the involved partners so creating a Best logical framework with the aim to be able to widely be disseminated. Then, we shed some light and some suggestions concerning the policy implications by summarizing the key issues. Finally, we draw our conclusions.

THE IPA ADRIATIC PROJECT

In the framework of HERA project (Project Code 1°str./0008/1) within IPA Adriatic Crossborder Cooperation 2007–2013 programme, 8 are the involved Mediterranean countries: Greece, Italy, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In particular, the HERA project involves 19 partners² by this 8 countries: Zadar County, Split Dalmatia County, Sibernik-Knin County, Dubrovnik Neretva County, Region of Istria, County of Primorje and Gorski Kotar, City of Mostar, Development Agency of the Una-Sana Canton

2 The project has undergone two final beneficiary replacements and one final beneficiary legal succession. The Ministry of Culture has replaced the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism; the Region of Epirus/Regional Unit of Thesprotia has replaced Region of Ionian Islands/Regional Unit of Corfu; Ministry of Finance and Economy of Republic of Serbia has been replaced by the Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications of the Republic of Serbia.



Bihac, Albanian Development Fund, Municipality of Postojna, Municipality of Piran, Ministry of Finance and Economy of Republic of Serbia, Province of Rimini, Province of Ravenna, Consortium Europe Point Teramo, Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism, Region of Ionian Islands, Abruzzo Region and University of Foggia. The project was born in 2012 and it is scheduled on three years (29 months) from November 2013 to March 2016 so the expected results are planned in March 2016. The start of the project implementation was delayed due to the gathering of the necessary documentation for IPA Subsidy Contract signature and because of the delay in the transfer of the pre-financing payment.

The aim of projects is to promote and valorize Cultural Heritages in Adriatic countries by enhancing their management and promotion. “For this reason, project activities are specifically addressed at developing and integrated Joint Action Plan for standardization of Adriatic cultural heritage sites through direct and constant involvement of local and regional actors” (Heradriatic 2016). In the project, the partners use a systematic benchmark of projects implemented by involved stakeholders and experts as instrument to capitalize previous experiences and develop Joint Action Plan. The expected result of the project is to achieve reduction of the “seasonality in tourism demand through the valorization of tourism products connected to the cultural and natural heritage of the Adriatic coasts and hinterland” (ibid.), developing coast and hinterland cultural routes and related tourism packages in order to extend and diversify the tourist season. In addition, the purpose is to achieve strengthening of sustainable tourism through the promotion of innovative tourist products based on cultural and environmental networks that will satisfy tourist demand and future supply requirements, and will create a better understanding of cultural tourism and its contribution to the territory’s economy. Cross-border institutional networks shall involve key stakeholders and joint agreement/proposal for policy formulation for the management of cultural heritage site of Adriatic area and sustainable tourist routes.



In detail, HERA Project is formed by several workpackages and activities. The Work Packages (WPs) are as follows:

- WP0: Project Preparation;
- WP1: Crossborder Project Management and Coordination, it shall ensure timely and quality achievement of all project objectives, coordinating at the consortium level the activities of the project and providing decision making, quality control and conflict resolution mechanism and efficient financial and administrative coordination;
- WP2: Communication and Dissemination, it aims to ensure the communication and dissemination of the project's objectives, activities and achievements towards target groups inside and outside the IPA territories in accordance with EU and Program's requirements;
- WP3: Capitalization and Sustainability, it aims to define Joint Action Plan from a systematic benchmark among National policies and results from on-going and previous projects in the project's theme within IPA Adriatic CBC (Cross Border Cooperation) and EU, National or sub-national Programs;
- WP4: Creation of Adriatic Cultural tourism destination trademark;
- WP5: Pilot Project for developing cultural tourism routes;
- WP6: Pilot Projects for promoting info centers.

A crucial driver of the project is to reach local population consensus on the wide level and to understand the consequences of changing image. Therefore, it is important that in aspiring to develop and to promote cultural heritage location it is clearly to be understood (among all stakeholders) what the opportunity of the destination is, and to identify the market niche in order to revitalize the involved countries.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The current research was conducted within 6 months in 2014 from May to October. There were several detailed steps. Here, in this paper, we focus on WP3 named "Capitalization and Sustainability"; this WP, as above said, aims at carrying out a



systematic benchmark among National policies and results from on-going and previous projects of the several involved partners. The considered projects are from IPA Adriatic CBC and EU, National or sub-national Programs. Three Working Groups (WG) were formed according to each partner's competences and experiences, as follows:

- WG Promotion (Awareness and promotional activities);
- WG Education (Raising and building capacity);
- WG Heritage (Cultural tourism development activities).

We performed an analysis of cultural tourism strategies and relevant policies in each country and a systematic collection and review of previous successful experiences and results (Case Studies). We deeply investigated and evaluated them in order “to create a reference framework of best strategic practices with high degree of repeatability and generalization that have a likelihood of being transferred in the involved territories” (Heradriatic 2016) and not only.

The research ahead was conducted through multiple stages, describe in the following part. Starting from the Delphi-based study of Monavari et al. (2012), a collection of strategies and policies by 18 involved partners were carried out. Two Delphi panels were implemented: it was composed of experts and specialists in the context of tourism management; 1. an Analysis, Research and Evaluation panel (ARE panel) and 2. a Check and Monitoring panel (CM panel) with control variable function. As first step of the ARE panel, the internal and external factors were identified as strategic pillars for each case studies. They are four: General Information; Management framework; Impact; financing resources. Each factor is composed and divided in several variables (Table 1) useful to a complete description of each case study. A draft form template was defined in order to support and make homogeneous the description of several case studies.

Then, this draft template was finalized and accepted by all partners during a workshop in the Kick-off meeting of the HERA Project, in which the study methodology was defined in order to get accurate results. The template was filled-in by all partners according to instructions given. Then partners



sent to the ARE panel 36 case studies. The second step was to select best practices from case studies by assessment criteria that enables fair and objective review to each case studies submitted by partners (Table 2). The final score of each factor is defined by the sum of the score of each variable. A panel of experts belonging to the CM panel assigned a score from 0 (if absent or not argued) to 5 (very good) to variables. Each score assigned is in turn “weighed” in function of the three strategic areas of action (Awareness and promotional activities, Raising and building capacity, Cultural tourism development activities) defined by the HERA project, which measure a strategic value from 0 to 5 for each variable identified. Table 3 draws the weight of the 18 selected case studies, that obtained best total score. In figure 1, you can see 18 selected case studies with the related country.

The evaluation of case studies, as stated in the HERA project manual, aims at documenting what happened in Adriatic tourism scenario in order to establish a logical framework of best methods and strategies.

In designing case studies evaluation 18 cases were selected in order to be studied on the basis of their comparability and usefulness of submitted data and information for preparation of the Joint Action Plan. The case studies were analyzed on the basis of their impact on the three pillars of the Joint Action Plan: 1. Awareness and promotional activities; 2. Raising and building capacity; 3. Cultural tourism development activities.

RESULTS

The analyzed case studies confirm that Adriatic countries are working on building and raising capacity and awareness and promotional activities in tourism sector. Here, we give evidence of the strength common point related to analyzed Case Studies that are as follows:

- Clear objectives and planning;
- Structured management model;
- Cooperation between local actors and partners;
- Involvement of local communalities (educational initiatives);



- Innovation of the project, the management model or the communication strategy;
- Project based on local strengths and valorization of heritage;
- Multi channel promotion and communication activities;
- Economic resources availability.

and the common point of weakness or lack of the submitted projects:

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- Absence of analysis to define tourism target;
- Absence of target point of view (market researches, interviews, studies, target perception of the existing tourism offer, etc) functional to understand how to achieve a more competitive market position:
 - List of specific actions or plan that they use to create network;
 - Absence of local communities need analysis to understand how stimulate local economic growth (income-generating activities);
 - Necessity of monitoring activities during and after the project implementation;
 - Absence of an external evaluation of the project (media, institution, public opinion, etc);
 - Better definition of the differences between protection and valorization of heritage project;
 - Re-investment plan.

However, it is important to achieve a clearer and more comprehensive common definition of what is meant by “capacity” in order to clarify the basis on which to establish the guidelines. All countries’ project has been implemented to face the same problems related to Adriatic tourism background: seasonality in tourism demand, request of cultural and environmental tourism offers, importance of valorization of cultural heritage, creation of institutional and stakeholder network (at this time not strong enough), guarantee of high quality standard of tourism offer (from infrastructures, services, etc.).



IMPLICATIONS

An explicit tourism policy of the Adriatic countries needs in order to improve the development of the tourism sector in general and the economy of these countries in the specific. Following surveys, interviews and direct observations (our primary data) and by means of the analysis of national and international policies by project's partners and of secondary sources (Canadian Tourism Commission 1999; Whyte et al. 2012; USAID 2009; Beyer 2014; Robinson 2006), the prime emerged objective is to improve the country's competitiveness as a destination in respect of following suggestions; the latter are borrowed from "Swiss Tourism Policy – background report" (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2000) and "Licensing Case Studies: tourism sector (FIAS 2009), that explain how a country with a long tradition of tourism, characterized by natural resources and unique geographical location, as Adriatic countries are, may become an example of modern tourism destination.

Those are as follows:

Creating favourable conditions

- To create acceptance of tourism in native population;
- To adopt an innovative approach to compete in an international scenario;
- To defend Adriatic Countries' interest on the international market with an approach based on co-operation and increasing of investment.

Improving market presence

- To refine Adriatic's brand image;
- To develop integrated tourism products;
- To ensure high service quality.
- To promote Adriatic countries as a destination enhancing use of internet and its different applications to offer access to correct information at any time and from anywhere.



Increasing the international attractiveness of the destination

- To build capacity of human capital, creating tourism specialists;
- To improve the image and the labor condition of the sector to attract native labor force;
- To encourage structural change to enhance tourism sector's profitability;
- To safeguard the quality of the environment of the countryside and its sustainable development.

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Finally, as expected from the aims of the HERA project manual (Heradriatic 2016), the cross-border cooperation approach of the HERA project gives an added value based on participated processes: It appears how a systematic benchmark of national policies and projects of all involved stakeholders/experts (through participation in thematic workgroups – Promotion, Education and Heritage) for sharing results, experiences and for elaborating a Joint Action Plan. Measures and strategies structured by every single country do not allow enhancing and normalizing tourism flows; so a project as HERA can face new challenges of world tourism competition.

CONCLUSIONS

Empowerment of local communities, protection of natural resources, promotion of social cohesion and cultural identity are just some of the benefits that can be drawn from the development of tourism policies (Polnyotee and Thadaniti 2015) and creation of a strong network between the different countries. So it is fundamental to ensure that tourism policies may be based on a participatory approach, that actively involves local communities by promotion of residents' employment and local ownership over the natural resources (ibid.).

Adriatic countries, as countries like Thailand, characterized by natural and cultural heritage and by the need of a sustainable development of local tourism, as suggested in the work "Community-Based Tourism: a strategy for sustainable tourism development of Patong Beach, Phuket Island, Thailand" (Polnyotee and Thadaniti, 2015), may focus on policies about:



- Including, actively, local communities and stakeholders;
- Supporting the creation of tourism-oriented enterprise;
- Providing specific support to tourism development by raising and building knowledge and skills of community;
- Encouraging and providing incentives for major tourist businesses;
- Developing a local transport industry and integrating local transport services in order to generate employment and income;
- Supporting employment in tourism sector;
- Evaluating and monitoring a sustainable development of tourism activities.

Another aspect to be not forget is socio-economic empowerment, so results suggest to focus on policies developing skills assessments to identify current and future skills needs, and invest in education and training by raising and building capacity, operational requisites for quality of the sector (International Labour Organization 2011). Furthermore, also private enterprises may focus investment on training programs and skills development for workers and employers (International Labour Organization 2011).

Finally, HERA project is aiming at the creation of a strong network so policies may support the connection between different actors involved:

- Improving access to telecommunication services, which can help connect Adriatic countries to online tourist networks and strengthen supply and demand dynamics;
- Promoting inter-sectorial linkages and public-private partnerships, social dialogue among employers, workers and authorities;
- Creating and implementing tourism development strategies based on specific local resources and needs, with the active involvement of social partners;
- Strengthening a two-way communication between the tourism industry and local communities to facilitate high quality results;
- Catching opportunities by effective national policies, strategies and regulatory frameworks that support local development.



In conclusion, as argued by relevant and eminent literature, the key element are networks based on relations between the different players, as well as on their respective traditions through adopting integrated forms of tourism (Saxena et al. 2007; Saxena and Ilbery 2010; Ballesteros and Ramirez 2007) that promote resources to be considered in an integrative way too (Panizza 2003). From this perspective, results highlight the perceived success of a tourist system is strongly influenced by a well-developed heritage theme. Furthermore, results seem to be in line with the philosophy by Lisbon Strategy, UNESCO's Global Strategy and the Maastricht Treaty (where Article 128 emphasizes the protection of cultural heritage).

This research conclusively provides practical strategic planning directions for tourism sector operators and local authorities of Adriatic countries. In particular, EU project manager can have insight by these case studies and first result that are functional for the upcoming programming calling strategic policies aimed at promoting cultural heritage across the Mediterranean as places of life for local population and at encouraging dialogue between generations, integrating awareness raising and education at all levels.

TABLE 1: Factors and variables selected for assessing the case studies

General Information
Description of case study
Description of geographical area of implementation
Local context
Objectives
Actors and partners involved in the case study
Process of the project implementation (optional)
Management Framework
Management Model
Communication
Innovation
Participation level of involved communities
Problems encountered
Impact
Sustainability
Market effect



Transferability
FINANCING SOURCES
Financing sources

Source: Authors' processing

TABLE 2: Assigning to factors and variables the strategic assets weight

Factors and variables	Strategic assets weight (Score 0-5)		
	Awareness and promotional activities	Raising and building capacity	Cultural tourism development activities
General Information			
Description of case study	1	1	1
Description of geographical area of implementation	1	1	1
Local context	1	1	1
Objectives	2	2	2
Actors and partners involved in the case study	2	2	2
Process of the project implementation (optional)	1	1	1
Management Framework			
Management Model	3	4	5
Communication	5	4	3
Innovation	5	3	5
Participation level of involved communities	3	5	3
Problems encountered	2	2	2
Impact			
Sustainability	4	4	4
Market effect	3	3	3
Transferability	5	5	5
Financing sources			
Financing sources	2	2	2
<i>Legenda: 0 = if absent or not argued; 1 = very poor; 2 = poor; 3 = sufficient; 4 = good; 5 = very good</i>			

Source: Authors' processing



TABLE 3: Case studies and total score

CASE STUDY	TOTAL SCORE
Holy Week in Apulia	513
Regional Restoration Camp in Gjirokastra	535
Peaks of the Balkans	447
Green Karst	478
Via Francigena di Capitanata	522
Development and implementation of a trans-boundary pilot tourism product valorizing the ethno-gastonomic heritage of the Shkodra/Skadar Lake Basin	470
EX.PO.AUS – Extension of Potentiality of Adriatic Unesco Sites	492
Eco-ethno villages of Split-Dalmatia County	417
PADNA - OLIVE oil and Chard festival	492
Development of eco-zone NP Una and Enrichment of Its Tourist Offer	500
Roman Rimini	512
Museumcultour-The Adriatic’s museums enrich cultural tourism	538
Romagna Visit Card	474
Revitalization of St. Michael Fortress	535
Sacred mount in Varallo	520
REVITAS-Revitalization of the Istrian hinterland and tourism in the Istrian hinterland	420
Way to Jerusalem	538
Reconstruction of Mascovika Han and economic revitalization of Vrana Settlement	515

Source: Authors’ processing

FIGURE 1: Selected case studies

	Selected Best Practices	
Country	Partner	Project
CROATIA	Sibernik-Knin County	Revitalization of St. Michael Fortress
SLOVENIA	Municipality of Postojna	Museumcultour-The Adriatic’s museums enrich cultural tourism
ITALY	Province of Rimini	Roman Rimini
ITALY	Province of Ravenna	The Romagna Visit Card
ITALY	Consortium Europe Point Teramo	Holy Week in Apulia



MONTENEGRO	Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism	Peaks of the Balkans
MONTENEGRO	Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism	Development and implementation of a trans-boundary pilot tourism product valorising the ethno-gastronomic heritage of the Shkodra/ Skadar Lake Basin
CROATIA	Zadar County	Reconstruction of Maskovica Han and Economic revitalization of Vrana Settlement
CROATIA	Region of Istria	EX.PO. AUS - Extension of Potentiality of Adriatic Unesco Sites
CROATIA	Region of Istria	REVITAS- Revitalisation of the Istrian hinterland and tourism in the Istrian hinterland
BOSNIA HERZEGOVINA	Development Agency of the Una-Sana Canton Bihac	Development of eco-zone NP. Una and Enrichment of Its Tourist Offer
ALBANIA	Albanian Development Fund	Regional Restoration Camp in Gjirokastra
ITALY	Consortium Europe Point Teramo	Ways to Jerusalem
CROATIA	Split Dalmatia County	Eco-ethno villages of Spit-Dalmatia County
SLOVENIA	Municipality of Postojna	Park Green Karst
SLOVENIA	Municipality of Piran	PADNA - OLIVE oil and Chard festival
ITALY	University of Foggia	Via Francigena di Capitanata
ITALY	Consortium Europe Point Teramo	Sacred Mount in Varallo

Source: Authors' processing



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