

Albergo Diffuso: Developing Tourism through Innovation and Tradition the Case of Albania

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Abstract

An **Albergo Diffuso** (*Diffuse Hotel*) responds to the needs of the new generation of tourist that is now approaching global markets. This generation wants to experience the possibility of establishing new relations, not only with the other guests of the hotel, but mainly with the residents of the locality, adding the search for warm and sincere relations to the privacy anyone of us wants when times come to relax and spend free time.

Albergo Diffuso (AD) it is a particular type of hotel conceived to provide to the guests a unique experience of living a historical centre of a town or of a village. The principle is that rooms, decorated in a consistently authentic and local style, are scattered throughout different buildings within the town but overseen by one manager.

This research contributes academically by increasing the understanding we have of how local people feel about tourism initiatives and how it must be implemented in Albania.

KEYWORDS: community – based, innovation, sustainable tourism, sustainable development, tradition.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism industry is a sector which develops with a good dynamism fitting with the economy worldwide. Statistical data suggests that the tourism industry in the global scenario makes up 11% of GDP. Statistical data opine that as many as 700 million travelers travel to international places annually¹.

The tourists demand increase in the recent years is associated with the tourists’ trend to visit places known for their authenticity, to reveal cultures and local traditions, while respecting in maximum the cultural environment on the other hand the offer is concentrated in the delivery of small qualitative hosting structures using the existing abandoned property buildings.

1. The concept of “Diffused Hotel” (AD)

To Diffused Hotel we can refer to as "a little house and a little hotel" and for those who wish to relax in familiar conditions it represents a new type of hospitality. Diffused hotel (from Italian – distributed hotel), it implies a horizontal structure and not a vertical one which we find in traditional hotels.

¹ World Tourism Organization Web: www.world-tourism.org

This type of hotel suits a new typology of tourists, who are more prone to contact with local residents than to contact with other tourists, who love more the native hospitality than the service in restaurants or having breakfast in room².

Diffused Hotel is thought to represent a special form for the evaluation of historical centers or provinces of historical and architectonic interests. In this way we make possible the preservation and reassessment of old buildings which are not used from a long time solving like this the problem of hosting structures with no need to make new constructions.

Diffused hotel originates from Carne (Italy). After the earthquake of 1976, became as a necessity to use the inhabited houses and buildings for tourism purposes. Later in 1982 came into use the term “diffused hotel” by the consultant Giancarlo Dall’Ara who was a member of a pilot project for tourism.

The objective in those years was to use the empty buildings in order to give life to historic inhabited centers, through the marketing logic “product oriented”.

In the late 80s the AD idea took its full and clear form. Now days with this innovation we understand a horizontal hotel or better say rooms located in different buildings but few minutes available from the main building that plays the role of the reception desk.

The innovation won the first prize within the first United Nations Development Program – European BICs Network contest which was held in Budapest in June 2008³. The innovation sets its roots in the European tradition of hosting tourists in homes, although this typical form of hospitality has been specifically engineered in Italy.

At present it hasn’t been transferred out of the Italian boundaries, although, as previously stated international interest has been expressed.

A trademark has been registered by the Italian National Association of Alberghi Diffusi and it is valid at European level. The trademark is managed by the association and identifies the parameters which need to be met in order to be properly defined an Albergo Diffuso.

Characteristics of a diffused hotel⁴:

- *Unique management;*
- Hotel services offer and *common facilities for all guests* who stay in different buildings (from restaurant service to the breakfast in room)
- An authentic environment furnished and restructured not any more for tourists *but thinking of them as residents, even though they are temporary.*
- A distance between buildings, which allows a better management and offers to the guests not only hotel services but even a new hospitality formula. Usually is recommended a *maximum distance of 200 m from the reception desk and the*

² Dall’Ara G. (2009). Le nuove frontiere del marketing turistico, Franco Angeli, Milano, pp 109-113

³ Italy’s National Association Of ‘Alberghi Diffusi’ Wins Prestigious World Travel Market Global Awards. Available online at <http://www.wtmlondon.com/page.cfm/Action=press/libID=1/listID=1/libEntryID=63>

⁴ Albergo Diffuso Web: <http://www.albergodiffusi.it>

other rooms of the hotel in order to be accessible by the costumers in a few minutes in any climatic situation.

- A professional *management non-standard* and not similar to that of traditional hotels.

The **main advantages**⁵ of the Albergo Diffuso hotels, compared to traditional hotels are:

- They generate a high quality tourist product, expression of local areas and territories without generating negative environmental impacts (nothing new has to be built, existing houses must be restored and networked)
- They help to develop and network the local tourist supply.
- They increase sustainable tourism development in internal areas, in villages and hamlets and in historical centers, in the off-beaten tracks areas increasing the supply in the tourist market.
- They contribute to stop the abandoning of the historical centers.

2. Conditions for constructing an Albergo Difusso (AD)

According to the Italian law and definition a diffused hotel and a vertical hotel that should have at least have seven rooms to be defined as such. If the number of the rooms is higher the result will be better as it will be possible to accommodate a larger number of tourists and to fulfill demands of larger groups.

The direction of the hotel must be unique and not more than 200 m away from the central building that serves even as a reception. This allows the client to pass its holidays as an ordinary resident, but also to benefit from the hotel services (restaurant, assistance, common areas etc.) that the structure provides.

In an AD that is positioned in an historical center, it is fully allowed to live the atmosphere of the territory.

*Necessary conditions to create an AD*⁶:

- **Basic services:** Reception- booking-front office-show room (fully furnished room and suitable for housing);
- **Program for the territory reassessment:** services and favorable infrastructure, events with different themes, itineraries (about history, culture, environment). Participation in different activities of the community, and other additional services (trekking, baby-sitting etc.);
- Specific **unique resources of the territory:** demographic space that allows interpersonal relationships, availability of uninhabited buildings to become part of the hotel chain AD. Presence of basic services post office, shops, bars, communication network;
- Local actors must be willing to work together: Unique structure that will serve as reception and other services should be taken into consideration by whoever is

⁵ Scuola Internazionale di Specializzazione di Alberghi Diffusi. Web: www.sisad.it

⁶ Dall'Ara G.(2009) Come progettare un piano di sviluppo turistico territoriale, Halley, pp.89-114.

willing to bear risk. This can be accomplished by a businessman, from a cooperative or another form of collaboration;

- **Outskirts of the territory should have a special feature to visit:** (fields, mountains, sea, archaeological site etc.);
- **Rich and diverse life** of the residents, but overall **HOSPITALITY**.

Table 1. *Differences between diffused hotels and traditional hotels*

ALBERGO DIFFUSO (AD)	TRADITIONAL HOTEL
Feeling at home	Feeling in a hotel
Courtesy and Kindness	Provision of professional services
Authenticity	Efficiency
Non-standardized rooms	Easy booking
Local and warm furniture	Variety of tariffs, according to the different rooms
Attention to the details	Comfort
Link with the territory	Wide range of services
Contacts with local residents	Contact with other guests
Informal environment	Privacy

Source: www.albergodiffuso.it

Regarding the demand, the current trend in terms of tourism belongs to the needs of tourists who want to discover something "unknown" and "authentic." Is already out of date the image of the tourist who wants to visit common destinations, by organizing the same stereotype holiday?

The customer does not buy a service, a product or a package anymore but they buy a new life style.

This category represents that part of the clients who have other travel experiences as a life experience, which are now transformed into sophisticated clients.

Those are clients who want more real things, authentic, to live the culture of the places they visit always associated with service and commodity.

Diffused Hotel respects this principle because it does not create a negative impact in the environment because they don't built new facilities, using in maximum the existing buildings.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

1. The hypothesis of constructing a Diffused Hotel in Dardha

The used methodology to make analysis about the possibility of implementing an AD is based on Resource Based View (RBV) through which it is made possible the identification of strategic resources on which you can build a competitive advantage. In particular the analysis focuses on the relationship between resources and the locality.

According to RBV, the creation of sustainable competitive advantage must be based on strategic resources which should be such as to satisfy the VRIO framework:

- To create value (*value*) **V**
- To be rare (*rare*) **R**
- To be inimitable (*inimitable*) **I**
- To be commonly used within *the organization* **O**

The purpose of this paper is to make evident whether AD, thought as a system of integrated offer, allows the achievement of competitive advantage in the area of Dardha. For this purpose data obtained in the field (from local residents) and even from different actors of the tourism field in Dardha has been processed.

2. Dardha village

Dardha is a mountainous village, 20 km far away from Korça at 1344 m altitude. The village is relatively new; if we accept as such the period of from since we have historical data's, three centuries ago⁷. It was established and became big because of the "fugitives" who had accounts with the Ottoman government, often because they didn't want to change religion, and then were hidden in the sheep "under the pear" from which the village received its name. In the early twentieth century, Dardha counted nearly 400 houses. It has distinctive architecture, unique in Albania.

The view that the buildings exhibit and the urban of the village, solid beautiful buildings, with carved stone covered with grey pole, cobbled streets, numerous fountains, craft workshops for major trading entities until the early 40s who gave to the village the appearance of a thriving town.

The local inhabitants of Dardha are reputed for their hospitality, generosity and their traditional folkloric dance, music and costumes. There are a number of churches in the village that can be visited. Activities for visitors include skiing at nearby fields which have fairly basic equipment at the present time but do attract the domestic market. Several small hotels, guesthouses and home stays are available to tourists in and around Dardha.

In the recent years, many of the persons who left town (who mostly live in the USA, Greece etc) are now coming back and reconstructing old and abandoned houses for years. In the meantime great attention is devoted in preserving the tradition of the characteristics houses, old and new buildings; to preserve with bigotry their building tradition of centuries ago.

Tradition is preserved very well in terms of traditional cooking. Baked pie and many other traditional food of the area are an indispensable source for the preservation of tradition.

Systematization and paving of the main road makes it possible to link the town of Korça, makes it easier for the tourists to visit, local or foreign, to enjoy the beauties of this village in all periods of the year.

Especially this number has increased in higher figures during the winter were the holidays are accompanied with the beauty of the snow.

⁷ Dardha , available on line at <http://www.visit-korca.com/site/article.php?aid=101&cid=122>

This made possible for tourism to be considered as a possibility for developing and increasing the revenue, for this purpose the private initiatives have increased in improving the accommodation facilities.

According to the collected data there are two hotels in Dardha conducting their activity and welcoming the tourists, the new hotel "Hotel Dardha Alpin" which opened its doors on the 31st of December 2009 has a high accommodation standard and a capacity of 25 rooms⁸.

Worth to be mentioned is even the houses that host the tourists especially in the summer season and are about 10, whereas in Boboshtica, there are nearly 5 houses that host tourists.

The average of staying is nearly two nights / per person, this especially during weekends. There are still untapped special natural objects of the municipality and numerous natural monuments.

3. The possibility of implementing an AD

The strategy of achieving this goal at first provides the definition of the mission and objectives which should be clear, realizable, but even motivating in order to include local actors, local residents in the first place. On note is the planned investment and the fixed target group which it runs, but not underestimating the fact that a touristic destination is a system composed by many actors. Watching in particular, areas of action consist of:

- **Building that will serve as reception.**

There is a building in the centre of Dardha that can be used to this purpose. It currently serves as a building that offers rooms, suites, and restaurant and provides information on Dardha. Its owners serve even as intermediates for the other houses around, which serve traditional products. Actually the higher price in this building goes up to 8 euro / per person. The furniture of the rooms with traditional style and decoration with traditional objects make you feel at home. The capacity of the moment is 12 beds.

Built in two floors, it provides in the first floor kitchen, bar, restaurant and sanitation services and part of the common residence. There is even space to be used for reception. The second floor consists of two apartments, one with five beds and the second with seven beds.

The apartments vary from 50 to 70 m². Each of them has a space for cooking, wood stove in the dining room, sleeping rooms' hygienic services. The space in front of the apartment can be used even to blot clothes even though now it performs the function of a common veranda. Tourists accommodated in surrounding buildings, can live the real atmosphere of the village in the centre especially in the evenings where all exchange free moments.

- **Other buildings**

Around the main building were identified at least 6 characteristic buildings, where it's actually served with the system Bed and Breakfast. The distance from the main building is not more than 100 m achievable in a few minutes even though the mountainous terrain (the maximum capacity identified is 40 beds) currently the accommodation price ranged from 3-7 Euros per bed. There were identified uninhabited buildings in the centre of the village or near the reception building.

⁸ <http://www.authenticalbaia.com/hotel/hotel-dardha>

A factor that should be considerate is the presence of the hosting community with an inherited culture through centuries and the hospitality; presence of traditions (*cultural and gastronomic*); *the interest* of a part of the tour operators to experiment in this kind of projects.

To organize activities such as meetings, exhibitions or congresses can be used even one of the uninhabited houses which can be adapted.

It is needed a restoration of rooms, the expansion of common spaces, providing elements necessary for the protection of the environment from possible damages creating like this a chain link even with responsible tourism and the policy of the territory warship. Important for this kind of hotels are to provide an opening period for the public almost throughout the year.

4. RESULTS

Possible actions to be performed

1. Improve physical outside access, from signals to the creation of parking areas.
2. Raising awareness campaign with the community for the possibility of implementation of this hotel;
3. Restructuring of at least six houses that were mentioned above including (walls, painting floors, electrical power plants that does not fulfil the requirements of the village);
4. Decoration of six buildings; Construction of the meeting rooms, exhibitions etc.
5. Creation of a working group: private and public to conduct this integrated tourism offer;
6. Establishing an agreement of cooperation with tour operators and travel agencies for inclusion in the tourism packages;
7. Realization of supporting infrastructure for tourism activities (post office and telephone line laying, soccer field, playground);
8. Creating a web site in order promote the cultural property, with brochures or CDs.

Including the AD structure in the program “Authentic Albania”. Authentic Albania is a unique rating system that provides information on smaller hotels and other facilities offering a category of lodging described as “authentic tourism”. This emerging and rapidly growing market segment aims to offer a more personalized experience to the traveller that emphasizes local culture, environment, food, crafts and outdoor experiences. It incorporates the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria that is an international initiative to promote effective sustainability planning, maximize social and economic benefits to local communities, enhance cultural heritage, and avoid negative environmental impact of tourism development.

A way to let the visitors stay longer and spend more money is to increase and promote other activities, such as cultural events and tours in the nearby area. It was positive to notice an existing inter-regional link with Greek and Macedonian regions; this can be forced, especially tourists going to Korça, Thessaloniki (Greece) and Ohrid (Macedonia).

Possible cultural activities:

- Exhibitions of the works of Dardha's painters
- Days dedicated to the Albanian movies especially those filmed in Dardha.
- Literature evenings with the books of Dardha's writers, like Teodor Laço, etc.

All this would increase employment opportunities which so far turn dim. Nowadays the village numerates 142 residents (70 woman and 72 males). From a survey done by the municipality of Drenova the majority (about 48%) are not satisfied by their employment and only 25% of them are satisfied. As a result most of them choose emigration to fulfil their familiar's needs.

All the paper is seen from a new prism, for increasing the tourism flow, through tourism of relations optic. This kind of tourism develops by taking into account all the diversity of its territory as a result of opportunities to transform a "place" into a "destination" or a "source" into "attraction.

Within the Albanian territory this opportunities are innumerable. It is only required from the local actors and operators to further develop those relations with tourists that have begun to take their form even though in sporadic and isolated ways.

The Albergo Diffuso Concept is indeed as an interesting option for Albania. But there is the need for the competence and capacity available to elaborate a comprehensive concept for Albania. Then financial resources would be needed for the development of the Albanian version, the implementation as well as the operation.

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