

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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The role of railway infrastructure on the tourism development (case Albania)

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Abstract

Infrastructure is an important factor that affects the economic development of a country. Railway infrastructure is considered one of the most economic means of transport. On the other hand, tourism has begun to be recognized in recent years as one of the most profitable industries and with a secure future, especially for countries still underdeveloped. Albania has a strategic position in the Balkans and has great tourist resources as land, water, cultural and historical as well. Albanian Railways is underdeveloped and this transport is not frequented by people. Construction of Railway Corridor VIII that is supposed to connect the Adriatic Sea with the Black Sea will serve as a key factor in the economic development of Albania.

Keywords: tourism development, railways, rail corridor VII, benefits, tourist resources

1. Introduction

Transport is considered as an essential part of the tourism industry. He is often regarded as a great activity that affects our lives. Almost all people, not necessary interested in became part of it at least once a year, participating a tourism stakeholders. Tourism involves a large number of employees, sources and income becoming a set of activities [3]. For this reason, in recent decades there has been a significant increase in revenues from tourism. On the other hand, tourism is a growing industry during these years. Its development is interconnected with a numerous activities, that playing together an important role on regional development of the country. An important reason for tourism development is increased travel opportunities such is the transportation. Means of transport are diverse and serve to transport people and materials. In the case of the transport role on tourism, transport serves the movement of people from one destination to another. It is the process by place of origin to the desired destination [8, 10, and 12].

Transportation also plays a significant role on the development of international tourism. On the other hand, the interaction between tourism and transport provide hotel services, fuel supply stations, and other necessary services. Literature suggests that the movement mostly affects tourism seasonality, activities which are carried out in a certain period of the year at a target destination. The price of planes, trains and ferries tickets is equally important on the linkage between these kinds of industries. Our country has an excellent tourism development potential. There

are many cultural and natural attraction resources that attract high number of tourist, if they were more widely publicized from all the stakeholders on the right segments of this industry.

This study aims to examine the close relationship that exists between rail transport and tourism. So far railways in Albania are not treated with the attention it deserved from the state and the other stakeholders. At the end of the study expect to get important findings that can be used in the future in Albania. More specifically:

- The identification of the close relationship between tourism and rail transport in our country
- To point out on the influence of transport on tourism development
- Awareness of state structures for investment in the rehabilitation of the railway network in Albania and accelerating the procedures for starting the project of Railway Corridor VIII
- Creation of a wide overview of tourism in Albania and development opportunities arising from the rehabilitation or construction of railway network
- To fulfill the lack of an academic study that links the tourism and railway transport in our country

Hypothesis

Rail transport is one of the main pillars to support the development of tourism in Albania

2. Material

Access to tourist areas related to several factors, the most important among them are nature, various tourist attractions, infrastructure and providing access to most of the public transport [10]. Improving of the

infrastructure has generally been recognized as various tourist destinations previously unknown. Many attractive places were unknown from the tourist because of the lack of infrastructure. Consequently, communities or businesses operating in these areas were more obscure and backward. Development of tourism provides opportunities to attend various tourist destinations, thus adding revenue and jobs in these areas. On the other hand, the development of different types of transport causes environmental pollution due to emissions from vehicles traveling case. In various economies transport and tourism are considered related to natural resources. These are the main reasons that provide a linkage between transport and the entire tourism industry [7, 8, 12].

As interpreted and argued environmental pollution cases use vehicles, vessels of any means of transport, railways remain the only mean of transport that is considered environment friendly. Among these reasons railways offer more economic prices than other means of transport. Thus, the choice of means of transport for tourists who will use depends on a number of factors, among which we can mention: the intended destination, the price, travel time, safety, geography and the purpose of the visit. There are several means of transport in tourism such as:

- Air transport
- Maritime
- Air
- Rail

Development of tourism has a positive impact on the lives of communities and tourist destination. Nowadays the road is the only mean of infrastructure in Albania to reach the tourist destination. The main tourism products of Albania are the following kinds [9]:

1. Tourism of beaches
2. Tourism of special interest
3. Tourism of business and conferences

On the other hand, there are three touristic areas in Albania such as following:

- Coastal area of Adriatic Sea (From Velipoje to Vlore)
- Coastal area of Ion Sea (From Vlore to Ksamili)
- Mountainous area (In North Albania, South and West)

Although there is a railway line which crosses some of the major cities of the country, it does not affect the tourist map. After the construction of Rail Corridor VIII, the Albanian state and stakeholders can integrate public transport systems. It can be

constructed railroad lines to link tourist areas many times a day. It is fully accessible for the fact that Albania has a small geographic extension. On the other hand in the railway stations can be offered services such as taxis, bicycles, motorcycles, or to guide and facilitate the travel of tourists to the desired destination. This kind of services can be offered in the railway stations of Tirana, Durres, Shkoder and Vlore. These areas welcome the largest number of visitors in Albania [4, 5, 6].

Tourism plays an important role in Albanian economy. The National Agency of Tourism declares an increasing number of tourists visiting our country during these recent years. This is clearly proved by the number of arrivals from Kosovo after the construction of the road Tirana – Morina – Prishtina. It takes nearly 3 hours from Tirana to Prishtina instead of about 10-12 hours it was until a few years ago. In the second place of the list are the tourist from Macedonia with about 399 281 tourist, tourist from Greece with 225 175 tourist and the tourists from Montenegro with 186 536 tourists [13].

Table1: Official data for foreign tourist during 2012

	<i>State</i>	<i>Number</i>
1	Kosovo	1 708 743
2	Macedonia	399 281
3	Greece	225 175
4	Montenegro	186 536
5	Italy	147 018
6	United Kingdom	78539
7	Germany	70060
8	U.S.A	58621
9	Turkey	42824
10	Switzerland	42546

Source: Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports [13].

According to the statistics of the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, Youth and Sports results that in 2012, the number of foreign tourists nonresident in our country has reached a total number of 3,436,236. Comparing to the previous years the number is about 26% larger than 2.73365 million of visitors in 2011. The data of previous years are: 2,302,899 in 2010, 1,786,045 in 2009 and 1,330,138 in 2008. So, we notice that the number on foreign tourist is almost tripled in a period of 5 years [13].

3. Results and discussion

Port of Durres has been identified as one of the most important in the Adriatic Sea. According to this

and for other reasons, is decided that through this port will pass the railway line Rail Corridor VIII. The network originates in Italy. In the virtual presentation, the branches are related with Bari and Brindisi, which end respectively in the port of Vlore and Durres.

According to forecasts, this Corridor, along the road corridor VIII, will serve as connection tool between east and west. Albania has a strategic geographical position and is favored by this project [1, 2].

Table 2: SWOT analysis of tourism in Albania

Strength	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature attractions of mountain, sea, lake, etc. • Unexplored area • Geographical position • Low prices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of infrastructure (water, electricity) • Lack of promotion • Lack of facilities for tourists
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquisition of EU candidate status provides development • Changes in the framework of the obligations generated by EU 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The uncertain political situation • The global economic crisis • Replacement with other tourist destinations • Absence of the visa regime for Albania

The benefits by the construction of this corridor are numerous, but we will focus specifically on the positive impact that it will reflect on the development of tourism. As mentioned above, the starting point of this corridor is Italy. Further, it lies in Albania through the port of Durres, following the railway line Durres-Pogradeci which actually exists. It's provided to build a new axis of 2.8 km from Struga to Leave. Corridor VIII, from Struge in Macedonia continues to Bulgaria, in the cities of Burgas and Vargas. Corridor VIII in Bulgaria passes very close to Turkey and Istanbul. The Turkish government has expressed its will to build the missing axis in order to connect with this corridor. The corridor also passes near the town of Florina in Greece. By the Albanian side is provided the building of an axis up to Kapshtica. Railway Corridor VIII network is expected to traverse Durres-Sofia, 500 km in distance and speed of the trains is estimated to be 100 km/h[2].

Seen from the map, virtual corridor VIII can connect Albania with railway infrastructure with some countries such as Macedonia, Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey. It also provides access to the corridor and links it with other countries and other parts of the corridors. One of the branches of this corridor starts in Vlore, passes through Fieri and meets in Rrogozhine the branch that comes from Durres. The railroad, as a whole, starts in Rrogozhine and follows the direction to Lin. In the other side of Albanian boundary, in the city of Kristallopigi, in Greece, starts another line that comes to Kapshtice and follows the way to Lin.

The railway passes through Macedonian cities of Tetovo and Skopje. It continues further in the final

destinations. It should be noted, that in Tetovo and Kumanovo where the corridor crosses, there are only a few kilometers from the Albanian town of Prizren. There is also an electric train line Prishtina-Skopje. Thus, Kosovo is added in the map of the states that have access.

Connecting the Adriatic Sea with the Black Sea, in addition to social and economic benefits, such as the development of trade, employment, benefits from the projects will create good opportunities for tourism development. From the description of the map of the corridor 8 and origin of tourists who have visited Albania on 2012, we can create a connection between major opportunities for tourism development that will be created by the construction of this railway. If trains that will travel in the Corridor with speed 100 km / h will offer suitable prices, the number of tourists will increase. The distance of 500 km from Durres to Sofia will attract eastern tourists to visit Albania. Until now, most tourists visiting Albania use vehicles such as aircraft, ships, vehicles. Albania, so far, is related by railway line only with Montenegro and only by the cargo trains. Passenger transport does not exist in this line. Corridor 8 is planned to be completed in a time span of 15 years, including reconstruction and building new lines.

Turkey is one of the favorite destinations of Albanian tourists during summer on purpose of vacation. Thanks to Tourist Resorts offers from the Turkish Companies, summer travel destinations are in the Top list of Albanian Tourist agencies. As we highlighted above, it misses only one segment to connect Istanbul to Corridor 8. Turkey is part of

Corridor 4. The built is important for both corridors [1, 5, 11].

4. Recommendation

To increase awareness of citizens to use rail in the future, the Government should focus on appropriate policies regarding to the locations of tourist destinations, and offers different prices in the busiest seasons for tourism. Construction of Corridor 8 line, that will enable the linking of the Adriatic Sea to the Black Sea, will create more opportunities for recognition of new tourist destinations in Albania and beyond. Corridor 8 has an important role in connecting Italy, Albania, Macedonia, Bulgaria and perhaps Greece and Turkey. There are some benefits from this connection are: Balkans is opening towards the world, it stimulate the economic development, it promotes the cooperation between the countries that will link from Corridor 8.

Alongside the development of this corridor, in the 10-year period plan, as expected, should consider promotion of rail transport as the most economic and environmentally friendly. Railways can help avoiding excessive travel by car, water and air, thus reducing costs. During this process, it should take into account the fact, that the planning of tourism in priority areas requires a thorough study of the relationship that they have with rail transports and opportunities, which can contribute to implementation of the needs of communities. In many cases the role of transport is minimized and therefore there exists the need to study all the effects that it has on the development of tourism. Governmental institutions and tourism transport should cooperate to support the tourism industry. The reconstruction of the Albanian railway network is a forgotten priority of the Albanian government. Transport and rail should be considered as a factor closely related to the continuation of tourism in our country [11].

Some recommendations arising from the study are:

- Awareness that rail transport plays an important role in the development of tourism in the future
- Stimulation of tourism through transportation, based on a detailed plan between the respective ministries
- The creation and stimulation of joint structures to transport and tourism to develop strategic plans for the future of these industries are so important

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