Tourism and the Millennium Development Goals: The case study of Kosovo

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Objectives | To eradicate poverty and hunger; to achieve universal primary education; to promote gender equality, by giving women more rights; to reduce child mortality; to improve maternal health; to fight HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; to ensure environmental sustainability; and to develop a global partnership for development are the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were approved in 2000 by the member states of the United Nations. In 2008, initiatives to meet these objectives were developed in Kosovo, in order to promote economic development, social welfare of residents and environmental protection. Many countries have made continuous efforts, throughout the years, in order to achieve these goals by 2015. In Kosovo, these targets pose a real challenge.

Referring to the 2010 information on the MDGs, the basic characteristics which identify the current state of Kosovo are:

- Two out of five Kosovo residents are considered poor and poverty is more pronounced in rural areas;
- The rate of primary education has been low at the global level;
- The index of gender development is the lowest in the Balkan region (0.76);
- The infant mortality locates between 35 and 49 per 1000 live births;
- The health of mothers is considered to be the most worrying in the region and is estimated that, in 100,000 mothers, 43.3 die during childbirth.

Kosovo presents a low level of cases of HIV/AIDS, but with factors that increase the risk of transmission of infectious diseases. Environmental conditions are also considered of concern, ranging from natural resources’ protection, degradation of forests, air pollution from the operation of power plants, poor management of drinking water and wastewater.

Kosovo is a developing country and is under the influence of various factors in meeting the MDGs. Moreover, the objectives are connected with each other and they have a specific deadline to be met, meaning that they simultaneously constrain each other in their implementation. Therefore, the main aim of this work is to analyze the role of tourism as an important factor in meeting these objectives.

Methodology | To consider the contribution of tourism in meeting the MDGs, the methodology used was primary and secondary data collection and analysis. Data obtained from the Statistical Office of Kosovo, the World Bank and UNDP reports on Kosovo were used as sources, providing reliable information. This work is also based on the analysis of the literature on tourism development. Some conclusions are extracted from Web sites that provide access to statistical data related to the subject of the work. Primary data is also used, collected from questionnaires addressing issues, such as gender equality, education, participation and employment of women in tourism activities in Kosovo. These questionnaires

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targeted students of tourism and hospitality management studies, hotel managers and employers in tourism-related businesses.

**Main results and contributions**

Kosovo comprises an area of 10,908 sq. km, in which, according to the latest Census, live 1,773,872 inhabitants, of whom 54% are male and 46% are female. The distribution of the population by age groups, unveils that 28% is below 14 years, 65% is between 15 and 64 years, and 7% is more than 65 years, which means that Kosovo is inhabited by a population with an average age of approximately 27 years. However, almost half of the potential workforce in Kosovo is unemployed, being unemployment directly linked with poverty. According to the Statistical Office of Kosovo (SOK), the unemployment rate in Kosovo, in 2009, was 46%, and according to the World Bank the employment rate, in the same period, was only 26%.

In 2009, 34% of the population lived below the absolute poverty line with 1.55€ per day for an adult, and 12% lived below the extreme poverty line with 1.02€ per day. According to World Bank, the gross domestic product per capita in Kosovo is € 1,760, being the lowest of all countries of the region, therefore Kosovo remains one of the poorest Balkan countries. Consumption is one of the most important parts for the welfare of the population, therefore the structure of household consumption depicts the level of economic and social development of the country. In Kosovo, in 2010, most of the household budget was spent on food and non-alcoholic beverages (35%) and residential matters (33%), while the rest was spent on clothing (6%), transportation (6%), alcohol and tobacco (4%), household appliances (3%), hotels and restaurants (3%), health and recreation (2%), communication (2%), education (1%) and other expenses (3%).

Referring to the current situation reflected by these data, we can conclude that the current orientation of the country on traditional economic development activities has not given any major effect on the ongoing development of Kosovo. Therefore, Kosovo’s economic structure needs to be enriched with new economic activities such as tourism. Tourism should be considered as an important factor, which directly or indirectly creates positive effects on socio-economic development of the country. At the same time, the development of tourism can also bring negative effects, which can damage the attempts to fulfil any of the objectives set.

According to the World Tourism Organization, tourism is one of the greatest jobs creators, a services export-based sector, and can play a key role in MDGs, namely in eliminating poverty, gender equality and empowerment of women, environmental sustainability and Global Partnership for Development.

Kosovo has no direct access to the sea and possesses a mostly hilly-mountain relief; however it has a favourable climate, multiple natural cultural and historical resources, which constitute the resource basis for tourism. Tourism development has never been considered a priority for the country. Almost all the current tourism initiatives in Kosovo are performed by the private initiative and investments are undertaken by residents, in order to increase their income, but also to contribute to tourism development. But now the question is ‘where lies the relationship of tourism development in Kosovo with the MDGs’?

Tourism is an activity that creates favourable opportunities for doing businesses and creating jobs directly. Tourism development is indirectly conditioned by other activities such as trade, manufacturing, agriculture or construction. Such participation in the construction of the tourist system enables job creation in various fields, which offers the opportunity for raising the employment level of the population, both male and female.

Given that the average household size in Kosovo, in 2011, was 5.88 members and the breadwinner is traditionally the men, tourist activities and those which relate directly to tourism, such as agriculture or trade, are in favour of female employment. Thus, the creation of new jobs will, not only reduce individual unemployment, but also raise awareness on female participation on the labour market, education and their rights. The lower the unemployment level is, the higher the welfare of the family will be, which will directly affect the reduction of poverty and hunger. However, despite persistent efforts, the goal of eradicating poverty and hunger is very difficult to achieve by 2015.

Gender inequality in Kosovo continues to be another issue of concern. The fact that only 28.4% of the women are employed, only 12% are in a permanent employment relationship, which indicates a low participation of women in the Kosovo society. Although the level of female education differentiates only 5% from the male education, female unemployment is much higher than that of their male counterparts.

The exploitation of natural resources for building, especially in mountainous areas, has led to an increase in the quality of life of many families, but, on the other hand, the general environmental situation in Kosovo is very worrying, given that only 4.25% of the territory constitutes protected areas. Negative environmental effect has been exacerbated by tree cutting, the use of sand and gravel from rivers and mountains, and uncontrolled and illegal constructions.
Since 1999, it is evident the numerous benefits from the aid of developed countries in the reconstruction and construction in Kosovo. Also FDI is present, but with a significant concentration in the banking and telecommunication sectors. Investments in the banking system have enabled the access of local investors to credit, but with higher interest rates. Investments made in technology have enabled urban residents continued access to telephone and internet services. Surprisingly, no FDI in Kosovo has been made in tourism development.

Limitations | Circumstances, which has passed through Kosovo from 1990 onwards, have caused obstacles in institutional operations that deal with statistical data collection and processing. The consequences of this period are evident even today. Kosovo is faced with difficulties in obtaining reliable data for different time periods, which are necessary to make real measurements and assessments. On the other hand, the Census has not been conducted for 30 years, being the official results of the 2011 Census the first data to be released since 1980, taking into account that those are still preliminary. Also, the challenges are similar in what concerns tourism data collection and evaluation. However, despite these facts, information presented in the paper can be considered reliable and matched with the current reality.

Conclusions | Despite various institutional and individual initiatives, real options for MDGs fulfilment in Kosovo, within the prescribed period, are minimal. Initially, Kosovo needs to have a strategy for tourism development, which would allow parallel resource management and tourism sustainable development. This implies the participation of local residents as mediators between tourism and environment and awareness of residents to protect natural resources and environment in general. Tourism development in Kosovo will be followed by the creation of new jobs at different levels, greater involvement of females in tourism activities and an increase in the quality of life of local residents. The fact that tourism in Kosovo is not considered with any special significance for the country’s development, means that gender equality is not treated as a separate issue in the tourism context. Although the direct involvement of women in the tourism development process seems to be difficult, but not impossible, in the near future it may become a new profession for women who initially require to be the provider for the family and afterwards support of the society in generally. Therefore, participation of women in the development processes, affects the achievement of the MDGs.