

## **DEVELOPMENT OF TOURIST BUSINESS IN A RURAL ENVIRONMENT (CASE: MRIZI I ZANAVE – ALBANIA)**

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### **Abstract**

With the development of technique and technology and with it changes in society in their lifestyle, more and more families, especially in the last 20-30 years, are moving to cities. Depending on the countries, this process varies, in some countries, it is increasing, while in others it is decreasing, but there are also countries or regions where the situation is reversed. We have such a positive case in Albania, in the vicinity of the city of Leza, named "Mrizi I Zanave", which is the best example of a tourism business that can be developed in a rural environment.

There are such examples all over the world, where apart from the economic benefits for the investor and the region, there are also several other benefits such as social - by keeping and returning the population to live in that place, agricultural - by ensuring that domestic agricultural products will have a reliable placement, tourist benefits - with the development of tourism and hospitality and several other benefits.

Apart from the local population, the development of a tourism business in a rural environment is also an opportunity for city dwellers to experience the natural beauty, cultural heritage, folklore, and cultural manifestations and of course to taste the local food products.

In this research paper, we analyze the theoretical part of a tourism business in a rural environment and the practical part with a description of a concrete successful business in a rural environment such as the agro-complex "Mrizi i Zanave" in the village Fishta, Albania.

From the results of the research, we hope that our work will contribute to the use of such good examples in other rural environments where conditions exist.

*Keywords:* rural environment, economic benefits, development of tourism and hospitality, domestic products.

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### **1. Introduction**

Every state and country must use the comparative advantages and the potential it possesses, both natural and human, to achieve sustainable economic and social development. States, especially developing ones, should increase the intensity of tourism development by looking for forms and ways of alternative and selective tourism. Tourism of the 20th and 21st centuries is an integral part of the economic and social development of any country, therefore it is in the interest of all parties that tourism offers the best possible conditions and opportunities to satisfy the demands of consumers and clients. From this, we understand that without the inclusion of alternative tourism in the tourist offer, we will not be able to fully meet the demand of tourists.

Part of alternative tourism is also rural tourism. Rural tourism presents a very attractive opportunity in recent years to develop various activities in the form of tourism business in a rural environment. The importance and role of rural tourism are increasing, therefore many countries, regions, or countries are dedicated to the development of this type of tourism to provide the best possible conditions and opportunities for the opening, development, and support of tourism businesses in the rural environment.

To concretize the goals of this paper, in our research, we have processed a case study that proves to us that the development of tourism businesses in rural environments is quite attractive, sustainable, and still profitable

not only for investors but also for the place where it is located and the people of who are directly or indirectly related to these businesses.

As a case study, we have taken the well-known "Mrizi i Zaneve" complex, which is located near the city of Lezha, in the village of Fishta in Albania.

### **The subject and purpose of the research**

The subject of this research is, first of all, to define and describe rural tourism and tourism businesses in a rural environment, using adequate literature. Secondly, using concrete sources we will mention some examples of tourist businesses in a rural environment, taking their positive elements and thirdly we will research and present the results from our case study "Mrizi i Zanave".

The purpose of this research paper, among others, is to emphasize the excellent achievements of this tourism business, describing from the inside the capacities and ways of operation and to take as an example this business and other countries that have the opportunities and resources to develop types of those of the tourist business.

### **Research Methodology**

To realize the purpose of this paper, we will use literature and adequate materials from the author and concrete sources for the field of rural tourism, and rural tourism business, in particular for natural resources and agriculture in the region where the complex "Mrizi i Zanave" is located. We will use the empirical method during the collection of original data from the research site and we will use the interview method of the leading persons of this rural business.

### **Results from the research**

Rural tourism - The beginnings of rural tourism in Europe are related to the first movements in rural areas since the 1800s of the 19th century. In 1863 Thomas Cook led the first organized trip to rural areas in Switzerland, which marked the beginning of the rapid growth of the tourism branch in that region, based on the preservation of health and mountain sports. Since then, this branch of tourism has been liked by different layers of people, but in particular by the European "elite" who have used it for recreation.

There are a large number of definitions for rural tourism, we will mention one that has a wider meaning. According to Momsen, rural tourism is that tourism uses the territory outside the city as a resource. From this definition, we understand that part of rural tourism is: agricultural tourism (agritourism), farmer tourism, nature tourism, mountain tourism, green tourism, eco-tourism, and all types of tourism that can be developed in areas outside the city.

**The program for rural development of the European Union** - The philosophy of EU structural funds programming - is that information starts from the bottom up ("bottom-up" approach). Success depends mainly on the degree of engagement of the local population and their active participation in the planning process. Some of the most popular EU programs are LEADER, IPARD, and PHARE, to which numbers are also added, such as IPARD1, IPARD 2, and so on. The purpose of these programs is to support, help, and finance rural development.

Since 2000, the countries of the Western Balkans, such as Albania, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, have been included in the map of the PHARE program to have access to the funds of this organization. Even the above-mentioned funds and other foundations contribute a lot to the rural development of these countries.

**The natural resources of the Fishta region** - At a distance of about 17 km from the city of Lezha, there is the village of Fishta. The development of agritourism has made this village and the region as a whole popular and attractive for investors, visitors, and the entire region. Tourism in this area plays an important role, especially agro-tourism, with the affirmation of all the assets that this region possesses.

The development of this area in terms of tourism has had a positive impact on the local population, especially in the economic aspect. Gastronomy, nature, agricultural and livestock products, as well as other activities that can be carried out in rural areas, are the reasons why this place becomes quite attractive for both local and foreign tourists.

**Complex "Mrizi I Zanave - Agro tourism"** - The complex or farm "Mrizi I Zanave" has turned from a forgotten place and village into a very attractive place known all over the world. The region of Fishta was also known earlier for its agriculture and animal husbandry, but with the opening of the restaurant "Mrizi I Zanve," this space was given fame and the opportunity for the whole village and the district to join by cooperating and supplying it with all the necessary products. There are close to 400 families that cooperate and have found a nearby "market" for their local products. The advantage is that all products from farmers and farmers are offered on time and fresh, with special care for the quality of their products.

All this activity has its origin in the hotel building where the restaurant with veranda and the hotel rooms are located. The hotel facility is also called the "Kulla e arnueme" which represents a work of art with the architectural adaptation of the past and the future.



**Figure1:** "Mrizi i zanave – Agrotourism"

Photo source: <https://www.myguide-albania.com/restaurants/mrizi-i-zanave>

Visitors also talk about the success of this business, but very significant is the presence and promotion on the most prestigious pages of world newspapers, internet portals, and websites such as TripAdvisor<sup>1</sup> the Booking.com<sup>2</sup>, My Guide Albania<sup>3</sup> and many others. As for internal functioning and quality in general, it is worth mentioning the cooperation with Alliance Slow Food<sup>4</sup>.

The Slow Food Alliance is a pact between chefs and small-scale producers to promote good, fair, and clean local food and protect biodiversity. The chefs of this Alliance undertake to constantly use products obtained from farmers, farmers, fishermen, and wine producers, whose products are controlled and cultivated with special care and love. The menus of these chefs include local products first, but in the absence of any products, they can be brought from outside this territory.

**Interview** – Unlike usual interviews, this time we used a much more original and professional interview. In this part of the paper, we have processed the interview that Dritare TV has conducted in the tourist complex itself, interviewing the main investor in this business Mr. Altin Prenga.<sup>5</sup>

The interview begins with a brief description of this rural business by journalist Rudina Xhunga where she says: It is one of the symbols of the slow food movement in Albania. What made it more popular recently is the tower transformed into a hotel, whose architecture has been published on the most prestigious pages of architecture and design magazines. He talks about good taste and the success of his project at Mrizi i Zanave. During the interview, several factors are mentioned that have influenced the transfer of this complex from a neglected place to a not only tourist attraction, but also an agricultural one. Mentioning the reason why he decided to return to Albania to invest and live, Mr. Atin Prenga says that during his several years of work in Italy, he has always looked for the value and importance of taste and says that taste cannot be bought, but it lies within the person himself. This is where the desire to return to Albania and make a tasteful investment arose.

Initially, the main goal was to renovate and adapt the tower into a hotel facility. And so it happened, the tower from an empty object and destroyed by the earthquake, considering it a "diamond" turned into a pearl. The tower was named "Kulla e arnueme from the very fact that the tower represents the Albanian past and the future. The tower is now among the most popular hotel facilities in Albania and all over the world. From the inside, the tower is distinguished by the restaurant and the kitchen with purely local and healthy food, as well as the hotel rooms in the upper part, also in traditional style.

Another additional object of this complex is the photovoltaic mill, so it is supplies and operates mainly with solar energy, then there is the space for processing milk, where various cheeses and many milk products are produced. There is also a department where meat or pureed yeast is processed and stored. There are also blocks for the production of jam, and the space where wine is produced is also very important.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.tripadvisor.com/Hotel\\_Review-g19261519-d17562889-Reviews-Mrizi\\_i\\_Zanave\\_Agroturizem-Fishte\\_Lezhe\\_County.html](https://www.tripadvisor.com/Hotel_Review-g19261519-d17562889-Reviews-Mrizi_i_Zanave_Agroturizem-Fishte_Lezhe_County.html)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.booking.com/hotel/al/mrizi-i-zanave-agroturizem.en-gb.html?>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.myguide-albania.com/restaurants/mrizi-i-zanave>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.slowfood.com/>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/c/DritareTV?sub\\_confirmation=1%E2%80%8B%E2%80%8B](https://www.youtube.com/c/DritareTV?sub_confirmation=1%E2%80%8B%E2%80%8B)



**Figure 2:** The first mill in Albania with solar energy  
Photo source: [https://twitter.com/mrizi\\_zanave/status/590857228938256385](https://twitter.com/mrizi_zanave/status/590857228938256385)



**Figure 3:** Production of cheeses from “Mrizi i zanave”  
Photo source: <https://www.regent-holidays.co.uk/blog/review-of-mrizi-i-zanave-agroturizem-albanian-slow-food/>

A very important part of this complex, however, is the part outside the complex, which means external collaborators. These collaborators are not few, there are more than four hundred families who supply the complex with all the necessary products. It is an excellent opportunity for the farmers and breeders of this area to develop and spread their activity. On the other hand, it is beneficial for both parties that the products have safe storage and are always fresh and organic.

In the framework of this rural business, however, the labor force in general and in particular the personnel employed there plays an unusual role. All the employees, about seventy, are residents of this area, who love their country, know the tradition and contribute by their example to influence the rest of the people, especially the youth so that they do not leave the country but to frame and develop it together.

## Conclusion

Above in this research, we mentioned the importance of rural development and the various European funds that support and help this development. From this example that we have revealed, we understand that the development of the tourist business in a rural environment can work fantastically, with less financial investment but with a lot of meaning. What is most important is that with the development of this type of business, everyone benefits. The very fact of how a place can be transferred from a forgotten village to a tourist destination is proof of how much it is worth investing in different rural businesses. The residents who have a place to sell their agricultural and livestock products benefit, the workers who have their workplace close by and work throughout the year, and the local institutions benefit as tourism and the hotel industry develop and with that, the financial income increases, which helps in the development of infrastructure, and in any case, the state also benefits, since through rural tourism businesses or any other type of business in rural environments, the entire state is affirmed as an attractive tourist destination.

## Suggestions

However, from this research and the obtained results, some suggestions emerge which we hope will positively affect our country so that this type of business is opened and developed as much as possible.

Given the natural conditions of our country (North Macedonia), Kosovo, and Albania, as well as the cultural heritage where tradition is a part, are very suitable places to develop alternative tourism through rural businesses.

The opportunities and support, especially from European funds, are great. When we have the natural, geographical, and cultural conditions so close, it is the responsibility of all of us to take advantage of these opportunities and contribute to sustainable rural development.

Unfortunately, in recent years, rural settlements have been emptied, and with it agriculture and livestock, so to stop this trend of people fleeing, this type of rural development such as "Mrizi I Zanave" is a golden opportunity that should not be missed. overlooked.

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