Winter Tourism Image Improvement with ICT and Future Challenges
(Case of Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia and Monte Negro)

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ABSTRACT

ICT has taken a dominant role in the front office sector, global tourism industry. Internet infrastructure acts as a massive platform offering the product directly to the tourists.
Tourism information systems based on web, not only reveal colorful picture but they also promote tourism products.
This paper is focused on winter tourism image based on ICT, in three regions of Albanian speakers. It will be a comparison between Albania and three other Balkan neighbors where Albanian is spoken widely, Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro.
The study notes that, a big part of the hotels that represent a good performance, have a dynamic web page. But what probably requires a bit more attention from the reservation systems is the on-line booking hotel that brings a loss of customers, which are seeking access to information and time.
After this analysis, it is noted that the standards of image web-based building of winter tourism in Albania are still not at the required level. They are positioned at a lower level compared with Macedonia and Montenegro, but higher leveled compared to Kosovo. This observed in terms of ease, efficiency and effectiveness.
This paper will conclude that improving the quality of the website, the advantage of booking on-line privacy and security in cooperation with the banking system will be future challenges of information systems in tourism to improve the image of winter tourism within the region Albanian-speaking.

Keywords: information systems in tourism, winter tourism, the region Albanian-speaking.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Tourism is one of the most important industries for a country. It has always been a very good choice to fulfill people desire for vacations. In the other hand we can say that we live in the information era Internet world, where the businesses are tending to bee digital firms.

ICT's are transforming the global economy and are creating new business linkages and opportunities that cross business sectors, cultures and distances. Developing countries have a necessity to proactively integrate themselves into the ICT Society in order to avoid remaining on the periphery of the global economy and this is particularly true of the tourism sector. Tourism is an information intensive sector and ICT's are a key driver for developing countries in organizing and marketing their tourism products. Moving into the e-business arena has provided opportunities for tourism stakeholders to offer fully developed web portals as comprehensive Destination Management Systems (DMS) that include booking and transaction facilities – thus promoting the opportunity to increase sales and to generate more revenue into a local economy. ICT's have become one of the most effective tools for addressing the imbalance between competing destinations in the global market.

Indeed for many tourism market sectors and tourism products, marketing and selling via Internet is fast becoming the accepted and preferred method.

Internet infrastructure acts as a massive platform offering the product directly to the tourists.

Tourism information systems based on web, not only reveal colorful picture but they also promote tourism products. We are going to study the web pages of winter tourism companies in three regions of Albanian speaking. It will be a comparison between Albania and three other Balkan neighbors where Albanian is spoken widely, Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro.

2. METHODOLOGY:

We are going to study the web pages of the most famous Campuses of winter tourism in Albania, Macedonia, Monte Negro and Kosovo.

The study will focus on:
- ➢ Page content.
- ➢ Design Quality
- ➢ Link building
- ➢ Speed of interacting with the page
- ➢ Security perception
- ➢ Domain name
- ➢ Online booking

Studying the web pages in this point of view will give us the level of e-commerce benefits used by these companies.

Page content is one of the key points of a good web page, so it has to contain clear and concise information, the information should be in a simple language to be understandable and it has to be interesting for the reader.

Design Quality. The first impact is very important; the web page has to be attractive for the web page visitors, so they could like it and wish to visit it another time.

Using *link building* could be a useful improvement to have a more dynamic web page. "Sites could be classified in a number of ways: **the core** made up of sites that shared links and traffic (about 30%); **origination sites** that directed people into the core (about 20%); **termination sites** that had links from the core but few back in (about 20%) and **isolated sites** that had few links and little traffic (about 30%)"[8]

Speed of interacting with the page- if the web page the client is looking for is not interacted quickly, he will be bored and loose the interest.

Security perception. The webpage must defend private data of the clients. Safety[9] and security has been identified as one of the five global forces that would drive the tourism industry in the new millennium.

Domain name. The web page name should be simple to remember and meaningful from the costumer.

Online booking. A web page should contain the reservation form via e-banking to accelerate the procedures of booking; unlike the tourists also manager feel insecure.

During the study will be raised three hypotheses:
- ➢ H1-Albania stays in a higher level compared with all the other countries of the region
- ➢ H2-Albania is in a lower level compared with all the other countries of the region
- ➢ H3-Albania is in a intermediate level compared with all the other countries of the region

The results of the study will be based on the observation of winter tourism image based on ICT.

This paper will conclude that improving the quality of the website, the advantage of booking on-line privacy and security in cooperation with the

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[8] Research from AltaVista, Compaq and IBM in 2000
[9] The journal of tourism studies Vol. 11, No. 2, DEC. '00 45

banking system will be future challenges of information systems in tourism to improve the image of winter tourism within the region Albanian-speaking.

3. RESEARCH LITERATURE

3.1 The role of Information and Communication Technologies in developing winter tourism

Development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has transformed the contemporary business environment. It has led to new information economy which is digital in nature. ICT is a broad terminology referring to multiple communication technologies which range from simple and complex namely Cell Phone applications (SMS), Digital Cameras, Internet, Wireless (WiFi and WiMAN), VOIP,GPS, GIS, Convergence (data, voice, media), Digital radio.[10]

Destination Management Systems (DMS) is a technological tool that enable public and private tourism operators of a destination to integrate, manage, promote and commercialize information and services related to the local tourism supply and a good number of destinations are still implementing e-Business or does not have an e-Business strategy at all.

"Information Technology and Tourism is really a Challenging Relationship. Tourism is regarded as one of the most successful applications of electronic commerce. In order to provide a coherent picture, the work is located within a triangle of *tourism research, information technology and computer science, and management science*

With respect to these scientific fields, different perspectives are pursued and integrated: a value chain and its redesign induced by modern information and communications technologies, a discussion of organizational impacts and the implications on management strategies, focusing on a business (network) redesign"[11].

The tourist management must have real knowledge of operating in "cyber space". They seemed to have used ICT to improve their businesses, with increased occupancy, reduction of seasonal trends and a real understanding of the advantages of the internet for their business by attracting guests through promoting the uniqueness of their establishments and location.

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[11] Werthner, H. and Klein, S. Information Technology and Tourism - A challenging relationship. Springer-Verlag. Wien-New York, 1999

The Internet and Communication Technology sector is rapidly expanding in Albania because it is both a stand-alone sector as well as a cross-cutting enabling technology for other industries. Despite these challenges, there is significant potential for SMEs to use ICT as an engine for growth, "to overcome the disadvantages of distance to bridge place, space and time. We concluded that there were a core of "enthusiasts" using ICT effectively but if many rural hospitality business owners increased their use of, and had greater familiarity with ICT systems, their businesses would benefit more through supply and operational effectiveness".12

Information and communication technologies are crucial drivers for tourism providers to conduct business transactions, distribute their products and services, network with trading partners and provide information to consumers worldwide. An increasing number of consumers are using the Internet to obtain information, plan and buy their travel. This session will provide an introduction on the role of tourism for development and will highlight the role of technology innovation in the tourism sector, in particular in the context of digital divide and the urgency of actions to address its economic, social and cultural dimensions.

3.2 E-business challenges

Many tourism enterprises in developing countries have not yet been able to adopt ICTs, even though their application could offer competitive advantages. However, the adoption of e-business will facilitate the evolution of traditional tourism systems and the integration of tourism enterprises into the digital economy. This session will discuss the challenges and opportunities for the adoption and usage of e-business practices by tourism enterprises in developing countries. It will focus on capacity building issues and identify areas where technical assistance and training is needed to assist tourism enterprises in creating an enabling environment and seizing the advantage of ICTs for developing tourism.

Innovation process in the tourism industry

This session will shed light on current and future characteristics and dynamics of the innovation process in the tourism industry together with the related challenges, opportunities and implications for conducting business. It will examine today's online tourism market and propose suggestions to help

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[12] Wilson I., Alistair R. I CT, Peripherality and smallerhospitality businesses in Scotland

developing countries design efficient destination managements systems to compete on an equal footing on international tourism markets.

Managing and promoting destinations online

The importance of ICTs for enhancing the competitiveness of tourism enterprises in developing countries is tremendous. ICTs can help them organize their tourism offer, and the Internet provides new opportunities for tourism providers to actually target markets worldwide. This session will discuss the key elements of national and regional e-tourism strategies in developing countries that have to be analyzed in the broader framework of ICT strategies for development. Representatives from developing countries will showcase best practices of their e-tourism strategy. It will focus on the challenges and solutions developed to overcome the barriers to ICT adoption in the tourism sector at the business-to-business and business-to-consumer levels, including the role of destination management organizations in support of e-tourism initiatives.

Technological progress in the recent decades has made tourisms enterprise across the globe more innovative than even before. The three important innovations, which have redefined the organizational structure of world truism industry, are the following:

➢ Development of the Computer Reservation System (CRS)
➢ Development of the Global Distribution System (GDS)
➢ The Internet.

It is however firmly believed that adoption of e-business will facilitate traditional tourism system to be gradually integrated with the digital economy.

It is essential for the tourism professional to understand the Tourism Value Net.

Development of ***Tourism Management Information Systems*** TMIS run to advance the tourism planning, marketing and research processes through improved use of IT by three main modules:

➢ ***Performance***
  o   processing & analysis of Immigration cards
  o   visitor surveys, other economic indicators
➢ ***Product Inventory***
  o accommodation, restaurants, attractions, events, etc
➢ ***Market Data***
  o   market research/intelligence, etc
  o   travel agent & tour operator databases

ICT alone does not increase productivity, but ICT can function as an enabler of new or adopted business models and / or to reduce the cost of tourism services.

An important dimension is infrastructure management: how the company efficiently performs infrastructure or logistics issues, with whom, and as which kind of virtual enterprise. Fast changing market structures and customer behaviors are challenges for tourism SME-s. Challenges are faced in service configuration and collaborative business models, imitation and differentiation strategies, changing customer roles (the customer as "prosumer") and multi- channel management and communication strategies[13].

It is the idea to include the Albanian winter tourism inside the Balkan tourism or South Eastern Europe (SEE) Regional Tourism Portal.

"The session will point to the need for public and private partnerships to establish successful dynamic ***customer-centric e-tourism platforms***[14] to fulfill these demands of winter tourism:

➢ *Goal*
  o A tool for information sharing, linking regional partners, and promoting cross border tourism
  o A compliment to the national portals by allowing "one stop" for consumers
  o An informational, educational, and promotional service for the tourism industry
➢ *Structure*
  o External Portal – for consumers, visible to any visitor of the Portal
  o Internal Portal – for the tourism industry, visible to members only, password-protected
  o Functionality: starting with basic, agreed upon functions and gradually adding sections/modules/functions at later implementation stages
  o Participation: starting with countries & organizations ready to participate and gradually adding more countries & organizations at later implementation stages

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[13] Elmazi.L,.Stringa A. ICT-DRIVEN TRANSFORMATION AND GROWTH IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY-A BUSINESS MODEL PERSPECTIVE: THE CASE OF ALBANIA

[14] Zhivkova S. 2009 *Regional Competitiveness Initiative (RCI) ICT Support - South Eastern Europe (SEE)*
Regional Tourism Portal

➢ *Sustainability*
  o SEE Implementing Partner's participation
  o Sustainability Action Plan – Among the criteria in the Request For Proposals
➢ *External Portal Outline must serve to give:*
  o SEE Map and specific country information
  o Where to Go information and links
  o What to Do information and links
  o How to Travel information and links
  o Accommodations information and links (tool(s) for making reservations and sales
  o Promotions (static during the initial implementation and dynamic, e.g. virtual tours,)[15]"

4. SUBJECTS:

According to the World Travel Tourism Council (WTTC) "…the total contribution of Travel &Tourism to GDP in Albania, including its wider economic impacts, is forecast to rise by 5.4% pa from ALL344.2bn (26.3% of GDP) in 2011"[16].

Albania, with geographic coordinates: 41N, 20E, with 28.748 km2 is wild and mountainous, with extensive forests and many beautiful lakes. The Albanian nature and ecology provide the possibility for the development of all kinds of tourism, green, white and entertainment tourism. Proceeding from this, it has been judged that this nature provides the possibility for the development of medium, high and elite tourism and facilities.

Until now, the primary focus of Albanian tourism development has been on the "sun, sand, and sea" market that has attracted a majority of its visitors from Kosovo and Macedonia. Looking ahead, Albania's best opportunity to sustainably expand tourism is to promote the country's natural and cultural assets, including rural villages, archeological sites, and its people.
But, "white tourism" is in our focus, on sixteen websites of mountains hotels (ten in Albania, two in Macedonia, and two in Montenegro and two in Kosovo).
Tourism has always been an important part of Montenegro's economy; the

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[15] *2nd Regional Tourism Workshop Tirana, Albania*

[16]

http://www.wttc.org/eng/Tourism_Research/Economic_Research/Country_Reports/Albania/

agribusiness and food processing sector is traditionally one of the strongest of Macedonia's economy. Forests and related natural environments represent as much as half of Kosovo's total area and are an important resource for the Kosovo economy.

Globally, the opportunities offered to mountain destinations by both domestic and international tourism markets have found success in specializing in activities such as hiking or adventure sports, guaranteeing a loyal clientele. Smaller and medium-sized resorts, however, are diversifying their supply with new products based on local resources such as culture or gastronomy.

Snow and Mountain Tourism will advance by a constructive dialogue among key stakeholders, professionals, policy makers and experts on current issues and future challenges regarding ski and winter tourism such as:

o Ensuring and upgrading quality development of mountain resorts,
o Developing strategies for confronting seasonality.
o Innovating products and promotion,
o Diversifying tourism activities and services,

Going beyond classic descriptions of picturesque mountain scenes, *creating* the attraction, its glamour, and achieving new targets – all of this appears to be a part of new communication concepts of winter tourism.

Let's take a glance on the albanian-speaking countries[17]:

Winter tourism in Montenegro

Tourism has always been an important part of Montenegro's economy; the agribusiness and food processing sector is traditionally one of the strongest of Montenegro's economy.

"Real GDP growth for the Travel & Tourism Economy is expected to be 0.7% in 2009 and to average 6.2% per annum over the coming 10 years. Export earnings from international visitors and tourism goods are expected to generate 41.5% of total exports (e565.8 mn or US$789.1 mn) in 2009, growing (in nominal terms) to e2,070.9 mn or US$2,648.2 mn (51.3% of total) in 2019.

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[17] http://www.neweuropeaneconomy.com/Award_Winners_2010/

Travel & Tourism Visitor Exports in Montenegro have seen a five-fold increase, supported by a surge in foreign visitor arrivals." [18]

Montenegro is the first country to have commissioned the new-style 'Travel & Tourism Investment & Development Programme' from WTTC, which comprises a number of different deliverables, including four reports:

• A Simulated Tourism Satellite Account • A comprehensive review of Travel & Tourism trends in, and prospects for, Montenegro, benchmarking the destination's performance against that of its main regional and global competitors. The review includes insight into, and analysis of, market trends generally, highlighting Montenegro's level of success at adapting to these trends; assessment and qualification of future opportunities for growth; market positioning vis- -vis its competitors; and the development of new products and services.

• Policy recommendations – including an assessment of Montenegro's national tourism strategy in the context of the country's overall development, and recommendations regarding the development of public and commercial policy in order to align efforts across government and industry with the overall aims of the Ministries of Tourism and Environmental Protection.

• A detailed investment portfolio, offering local, national and international investors an insight into current investment trends and opportunities for future direct investment across Montenegro.

Hotels consideration should have a dynamic website pages, with satisfactory information with speed, design and format of the page are to be evaluated.

Winter tourism in Macedonia

The direct contribution of Travel &Tourism to GDP is expected to be MKD6.5bn (1.4% of total GDP) in 2011, rising by 4.9% pa to MKD10.5bn (1.6%) in 2021 (in constant 2011 prices).

Macedonian winter hotels have a dynamic website that works in a satisfactory manner for customers and newsletter pictures possess facilities and   relaxing   surroundings. Websites are almost dynamic that realize contact with the client on-line.

Winter tourism in Kosovo

Forests and related natural environments represent as much as half of

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[18] http://www.wttc.org/bin/pdf/original_pdf_file/mon_economic_impac_low_res.pdf

Kosovo's total area and are an important resource for the Kosovo economy.

Looking from the aspect of tourism, Kosovo is made up of five tourist regions: Region Albanian Alps resort, Sharr Mountains, the resort region of Pristina, Mitrovica tourist region (Shala of Bajgora) Anamorava tourist region. Albanian Alps Region tourist and resort region of the Sharr Mountains are regions that differ not only in Kosovo but also in the region with opportunities that exist for the development of winter tourism and especially the winter sports.

Snow and mountain hotels have a dynamic website that works normally. Websites are almost dynamic that realize contact with the client on-line. Furthermore excluding some hotels, others do not lead to a real-time communication with the client. So customers are unable to show consent, complaints, or suggestions.
It was seen, or rather the elements that made it critical item is the booking. A good part of these hotels does not have on-line reservation. This reservation can be accomplished through an e-mail sent to the manager.

Winter tourism in Albania

Over the next ten years tourism is forecasted to achieve annualized real growth of above 7 per cent in Albania compared to 2.8 percent in the EU, according to the World Travel & Tourism Council. Albania is considered to be Europe's last "secret" tourist destination, characterized by unspoiled mountain vistas, ancient villages and castles…

The Authentic Albania Quality Mark will become an important marketing tool for new and expanding businesses in the tourism sector as a mark of quality and customer service [19]

The best locations are National Parks of Thethi, Razma, Dajti, Voskopoja, Llogara, Qafë- Shtama, Tomorr, Lura …

Object of our study in the Albanian winter tourism is focused in the area of Tirana, Shkodra and Korca where distinguished three categories:
1. Dajti tourist complexes and modern rezortet Razma develop tourism not only elite but have quality websites, dynamic, on-line reservation, direct communication with clients. In these packages tourism website offered various events during the winter.

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[19] http://www.sustainabletourismcriteria.org/

2. Small mountain hotels in Llogara, Voskopoja, Dajti, Tomori, Lura, Qafe-Shtame develop a winter tourism promotion on-line with static websites of which we have already pictures of rooms and the hotel homepage. Reservation done through telephone or e-mail displays. This page does not have a detailed information for the client, then the means of arrival and travel packages it offers. Also the presentation of this site is not very attractive for what it sees for the first time.
3. Alps mountain areas of Albania, mainly in the area of Thethi are the "inns" where is developed the traditional tourism. "Inns" have simple static website with pictures of the magnificent landscapes of the Alps and their interaction with tourists is provided only through mobile telephony.

Only a part of these hotels present a good performance. Some of these hotels possessed a dynamic web page. On the other hand some of them were a static page. Some of the pages that constitute an attraction for tourists who visits for the first time, and that as this site contains a lot of information and detailed and timely replies to the demands of his client; other sites not only possess these facilities but are far, far from this new culture in our country's internet culture and its different forms…

5. CONCLUSION

After this detailed study and analysis of data is noted that standards of building web sites to winter tourism in Albania is not the right level.

o Only 60% of Albanian hotels should have a professional website design professional with information to be able to read and to be a simple language and understandable and to be abundant.
o 75% of websites operate on-line, others have serious problems
o 63% of websites are fast loading, others are slower considering the speed of interacting with the page
o 30% of websites are so much less enable dynamic on-line booking and simplicity and reliability are not the right level, this hindered by e-banking system in Albania
o 40% of websites have a professional design with attractive photo gallery for tourists
o About 25% have a website link to the site with more traffic

After this analysis, it is noted that the standards of image web-based building of winter tourism in Albania are still not at the required level. They are

positioned at a lower level compared with Macedonia and Montenegro, but higher leveled compared to Kosovo. This observed in terms of ease, efficiency and effectiveness. By of the managers is not given due importance e-commerce.

Internet networks have disrupted communication introducing masse personalization and giving to all the possibility of never-ending contacts. Then social networks produced a jump of quality multiplying networks' potential. Everything goes fast in this field and knowing well the know-how and possibilities of these new social media has become a top priority for every destination manager.

This paper will conclude that improving the quality of the website, the advantage of booking on-line privacy and security in cooperation with the banking system will be future challenges of information systems in tourism to improve the image of winter tourism within the region Albanian-speaking.

It the time to create a prioritized IT and tourism development action plan for Albania and wider.
A Virtual Regional Tourism Center links to tourism websites in South East Europe will be the final solution of winter tourism.

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