



Preserving Local Character for Sustainable Tourism Development: National Park of Theth as a Case study

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Abstract

This paper studies the physic/architectural character in National Park of Theth, considering it as a tourist attraction of special importance. Despite the contextual qualities typical of this alpine area, the actual construction character in Theth is changing in relation to local architecture, which requires more attention and research. The purpose of this paper is to determine whether new development design in the tourism destinations making local character count and whether including of local community in this process, can contribute positive to physical attractive environments. The objectives of the study are analyzing the local architectural character of Thethi region, which is one of the most important protected and tourism areas in Albania, and offering to be applied in Theth of a model of international experiences of engaging local people in constructive debate about local character preservation in the new development design in a place.

To realize this study, authors used the information obtained from published material and also from made the observation of the situation in the Theth region regarding the physical/architectural character of its. The study was undertaken by following some logical steps. First, it explains the concept of sustainable tourism development and the concept of local character. Also, the paper argues necessity of preserving local character and involvement of local people in new development design of area for sustainable tourism. Then, the paper passed to assessment of local physic/architectural character of area and the problems shown to preservation of its in Theth. The paper presents a model to apply in Theth from international experience of engaging local people in constructive debate about how to help ensure that new development design in their area fits its surroundings and is in keeping with local character of the areas in which they live. Finally the paper gives conclusion of authors about the issue in the study for the preservation of local character in the alpine area of Thethi as we try to realize the concept of sustainable tourism development.

1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the world's largest industries, contributing at 9% of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 8.7% of employment, 5% of investment, 5% of exports on a global scale in 2011, and is one of the world's fastest growing industries, having a estimated growth in 2011/2010 at 4.4% of international tourist arrives, in a year characterised by a stalled global economic recovery (UNWTO, 2012; WTTC, 2011). While in 2012, international travelers are expected to surpass one billion for the first time, over the next ten years tourism industry is estimated to grow by an average of 4% annually, taking it to 10% of global GDP, and 9.8% of global employment in 2022 (WTTC, 2012). So, tourism industry is and is going a significant driver of the global economic recovery and growth.

Every country in the world with potential tourist resources estimates tourism as a catalyst for socio-economic development of the country. The return of these tourism potential resources in the real estate for sustainable development of a country requires active tourist policies preceding the commercial initiative of businesses to respond positively to increasing tourist demand.

In Albania there are strong attractive potential of natural and historical- cultural heritage as basic resources supporting tourism. The existence of many unique tourist resources creates opportunities in Albania to develop cultural, coastal, mountainous (green and white), adventurer tourism, etc. Now, tourism is made part of the country's development plans and policies of the Albanian government, considering tourism as a priority for the rapid and sustainable development of the country. Their main objective is development of a sustainable tourism, which protects and develops the historical-cultural and natural heritage of Albania. Tourism development plans in Albania gave a special emphasis the importance of providing an attractive environment, a prerequisite for a successful tourism (MTKRS, 2003, 2007).

An important role in providing an attractive environment takes urban design and architecture of buildings in the tourist areas. It is estimated that in addition to natural beauty, the local character of settlement forms, of a place is part of the beauty and unique of that place (Jive'N & Larkham, 2003; Gunn & Var, 2002; Oğuz, Diriöz & Belkayali, 2010; Swarbrooke; 2002, Versaci, 2005). Visitors come to visit a particular location for the beauty and unique of the place and surrounding environment. Researches and analysis of tourism demand model show that current tourists are showing a greater sensitivity to the local culture and the quality of environment in the tourism destination (Middelton & Hawkins, 1998; Oğuz, Diriöz & Belkayali, 2010; Swarbrooke; 2002; Weaver, 2006). So that local character of place contributes as a competitive advantage for the tourist area by providing a 'point of difference' of tourism area. Therefore preserving the local character of the place is very important for successful tourism. It does not require stopping the

development and change from happening, but requires the management of change and new development. So, it is vital to ensure that when change and development need to take place, it should be in harmony with nature and its sitting and protect and enhance local character and identity. The design of tourism landscapes taking into account the local character of the place have the possibility to give a positive contribution to diversity and distinctiveness of the local environments and making them more attractive for visitors and investments. To achieve this, an important role plays the involvement of local people in designing of the place because local communities have an unique appreciation and understanding of their own place and are affected by new developments in the place where they live.

Diversity and distinctiveness are the part of Albanian nature, culture and history. This also is reflected in the unique natural and historical-cultural heritage of the National Park of Theth. Authors evaluate that the unique character of rural alpine settlement forms, landscape in Theth is an important part of the beauty and distinctiveness of this area. But, despite the contextual qualities typical of this alpine area, we believe that the actual architectural character in this area is changing in relation to local architecture, which requires more attention and research. The purpose of this paper is to determine whether new development design in the tourism destinations making local character count and whether including of local community in this process, can contribute positive to physic attractive environments. The objectives of the study is to analyze the local physic/architectural character of Thethi region, which is one of the most important Protected Areas in Albania and offers to be applied in Theth a model of international experiences of engaging local people in constructive debate about how to help ensure that new development design in their area fits its surroundings and keeps local character of the areas in which they live.

2. The Concept of Sustainable Tourism Development

Since, in 1987, World Commission on Environment and Development identified sustainable development as a global issue and indicated the need for all industries to develop practices based on the ideals and principles of sustainable development. According to this concept: "Sustainable development is development that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs." (WCED, 1987: 43) It is a process which requires preservation and clever use of resource in order to development don't degrade or waste resources which make possible the development. So, resources remain able to support future generations as well as current and future generations.

Based on the concept of sustainable development, since 1991 Inskeep gave a definition of sustainable tourism development which was approved and by the WTO-World Tourism Organization: "Sustainable tourism development concept emerged as to meet the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future" (Inskeep, 1991: 495). In light of the results of the Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development, the WTO in 2004 revised of sustainable tourism definition. It requires that sustainable tourism development principles and management practices should be applicable to all forms of tourism and in all types of destinations, including mass tourism and the various niche tourism segments. Also, it emphasizes that sustainability principles and practices should take into account „the triangle of life” and that establishing of a suitable balance between these three dimensions is guarantee for long-term sustainability of tourism. Thus, sustainable tourism should provide:

- *Economic sustainability*: Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders while resources are managed to support the current and future development
- *Environmental sustainability*: Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.
- *Social-cultural sustainability*: Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to intercultural understanding and tolerance.

In this way, sustainable tourism means economically successful tourism development for all stakeholders and not destroy the resources upon which the future of tourism will depend, in particular the physical environment and social fabric of the host community (Swarbrooke, 2002)

Sustainable tourism development is the necessity of time for some reasons. Tourism as every industry has the ability to influence, both positively and negatively, in many aspects of a community and country. But, as the largest industry in the world, tourism must integrate sustainability principles that sustainable development must be successful (Middelton & Hawkins, 1998; Swarbrooke, 2002). So, tourism can to maximize benefits and minimize costs of its development. Also, sustainable development of tourism is necessary because the tourism "is a resource industry, dependent from the gift of nature and the society heritage, and it sells these products as part of its product experience, but it should also share the same resources with other users, including local residents "(Murphy, 1998: 178). So, if tourism is developed and managed unfairly, it has adverse effects on the quantity and quality of attractive resources of the destination, but on the other hand, it is affected by the decline of the quantity and quality of such resources (Middelton & Hawkins, 1998 ; Swarbrooke, 2002). These attractive environmental resources are the first input for the tourist industry, are the basis on which tourism is built and prosper because they are what the tourist industry promotes as one of the few unique features of countries and regions, which give them the competitive edge (Dibra, 2007). Also, "Many (in tourism) decisions are irreversible because at a time when communities lose the character that makes them distinctive and attractive to non-residents, they have lost their ability to compete for income from tourists in a increasingly global and competitive market" (McCool, 1995: 1). Therefore maintaining of the attractiveness of tourism resources is important to be able to attract visitors and tourism to be successful given its significant contribution to the economy and community of the country. The tourism should be planned and managed wisely and responsibly for a sustainable future.

3. The Local Character of Place and Its Preservation for Sustainable Tourism Development

The character of a place is often defined as the combination of those characteristics that make a place special or unique, as well as to those that foster a sense of authentic human belonging (Nelson, 1988; Jive'n & Larkham, 2003, Versaci, 2005). Those characteristics include all the physical and non-physical components, relating to society, local communities, physical context and time. So, local character is the distinctive identity of a particular place or community resulting from the interdependence of those characteristics.

According to the previous definitions, the character involves two dimensions: the physical/ architectural dimension, dependent on the characteristics of place and surrounding environment; and the civilized / cultural dimension, dependent on the qualities of community, its activities, traditions, its different behavior patterns and its various ideologies. So, it consists of the tangible and intangible components.

The Physic/Architectural character constitutes the most important dimension of the character of place. It is defined as the common expressive features of the built environment; spread enough to be perceived; distinguishing a place; providing it with a unique identity inherited from the surrounding environment; and expressing the community socio-cultural and economic traits as well as its habits and traditions.

The physical / architectural character has multiple levels:

- *National character*: the character that distinguishes the built environment of a nation with its civilized, social, cultural and economic values.
- *Regional character*: the character that reflects the peculiarity of a certain region, and that was developed through the interactions between the built environment and the region with its social and cultural conditions as well as its natural and climatic conditions.
- *Local character*: the character that distinguishes the built or natural forms in a certain location. Such features compose an expressive knowledge system typical to this place rather than any other place and are the resultant of the interaction between local individual and his local environment.

As local character elements is included landscape character, the form of the settlement as a whole, the overall shape of the building, its materials, craftsmanship, decorative details, interior spaces and features, as well as the various spaces within place (Nelson, 1988). The combination of these characteristics of the physical/architectural character contributes to make a special or unique place.

Architectural character refers to all those visual aspects and physical characteristics that comprise the appearance of every historic or folk old building. Local architecture of any given place had the strength to serve the physical and spiritual needs of people, from a single family to the entire community. At the physical level, it embodied centuries of learning with regard to orientation, climate, building materials and construction techniques. At the spiritual level, the built form conveyed total harmony with the lifestyle in all its daily and seasonal rituals, unifying the socio-cultural and religious aspirations of the individuals and the community. The architectural character represents the appropriate way that the settlement relates between the culture of communities and its built environment. It represents a dominant element in the built environment of communities. It can be considered as a lively record for the culture of communities, as the direct and unselfconscious translation into physical form of a culture, as well as the needs, dreams and passions of a community during decades.

Tourism is an industry that is reliant on a strong character of place. The natural or cultural values of a place are the primary resource that provides visitors with a reason to visit. Also, diversity and distinctiveness of places' character are an inherent part of our culture and history. The historic-cultural heritage of different country is one of the few unique features of a country and community. It can be used for tourism development. Tourism has a variety impacts, both positive and negative, on host community. According UNEP (2002), the social-cultural impacts are the effects on host communities of direct and indirect relations with tourists, and of interaction with the tourism industry. The impacts arise when tourism brings about changes in value systems and behavior and thereby threatens indigenous identity. Tourism can cause change or loss of local identity and values, brought about by several closely related influences like commodification; standardization; loss of authenticity; and adaptation to tourist demands. Furthermore, degradation of cultural sites may occur when historic sites and buildings are unprotected and the traditionally built environment is replaced or virtually disappears. But, tourism can also contribute to socio-cultural positive developments, not just negative impacts. Potential positive impacts of tourism include the revaluation of culture and traditions. Tourism can boost the preservation and transmission of cultural and historical traditions, which often contributes to the conservation and sustainable management of natural resources, the protection of local heritage, and a renaissance of indigenous cultures, cultural arts and crafts. This is due to the fact that tourists and investors are also attracted by distinctiveness. Places, which appeal for tourism, can gain a competitive advantage by virtue of their unique character. Tourism also helps raise local awareness of the financial value that natural and cultural sites take by tourism. It can stimulate a feeling of pride in local and national heritage and interest in its conservation. Positive images of places encourage locals to feel good about their home places and the quality of life that can be had there. These are some positive consequences of tourism that can arise only when tourism is practiced and developed in a sustainable and appropriate way because only by developing tourism in a sustainable way, we can maximize benefits and minimize costs of tourism. However, in a time of increasing pressure for development, there is an inherent risk of eroding local character and turning unique places into 'anywhere' settlements, with 'anywhere' architecture. Then, at this time the communities and places have lost their ability to compete for incomes from visitors in increasingly current global and competitive market (McCool, 1995; Middleton & Hawkins, 1998; Swarbrooke, 2002). Hence, preserving local character for sustainable tourism development takes great importance.

4. Methodology

To realize this study, the authors first reviewed the literature to be familiar more with the concept of local character of the country and the design of the place and link them with the economic, social and environmental outcomes for sustainable tourism development. Also, authors studied from published materials the international experience that making local character in the new developments design. The published materials were also used by authors to know and appreciate the local character of the area of Theth. Also, this was followed by observation of the situation in area of Theth to take the information in connection with the local character of this area and its safeguard. For reasons of time and to fit the theme of the conference, authors focused only on the physical/architectural character as the most important dimension of the local character of a place.

5. General Overview of Physical/Architectural Character in National Park of Theth

Physical/architectural Character for National Park of Theth is described in three levels:

- ***Landscape character***

National Park of Theth is the only national park in the region of Shkodra and the second park largest in Albania after Dajti National Park, with an area of 2630 ha, of which 1680 ha of forests and the rest of alpine pastures and of the rocky surface. Thethi National Park is located in the central part of the Albanian Alps. It borders on all sides by high rocky peaks of the mountain blocks of Bjeshkeve Namuna in west and of Jezerca in east, leaving from the south a natural link with the other part of the Valley of Shale. These mountains reach elevations up to 2570 m and are located one after other as white castles with different forms and glacial carstic phenomenon, giving Thethit beauty of European Alps. The slopes of these mountains plunge into the valley with a large sloping 16 ° -35 °, but there are ° impassable cases of 45 ° -60 up to 90 °, creating views without repeated. Thethi relates to other areas through some necks which are over 1600 meters above sea level. Inside these mountain rocks there are 170 caves and semi-caves, of which 10 are of the international category for their large size and interesting phenomena such as: underground glacial lakes, the siphons and the galleries, the large stalactites and stalagmites. Thethi has affluent water resources (over 80 permanent water sources, clean and low temperatures) that make Theth unique compared with the European Alps. This water net flows from both eastern and western slopes in the valley and supplies Shale River. This river traverses the valley from north to south and has formed terraces on both its sides and a gritty earth. It is clear and foamy river (with flow 1000-1300 l / sec), with the average water temperature of 7 ° C and is rich with mountain trout. In the southern part of the park is formed Grunas canyon about 2 km long, 60 meters deep and 2-3 meters wide. Also in this part is one of the natural beauties of the Albanian Alps- Grunas waterfall (30 m height), the only of its kind in Albania. Also, the park has a rich flora with 1100 species of plants that make up 1/3 of species of plants in Albania. This mountain environment and this rich flora of this park is also the home of a rich fauna. Between suchlike mountains sea and green blinding, in highest 750-800 m above sea level, lies the picturesque village of Thethi.

- ***The form of the settlement as a whole***

There is the archeological evidence of a settlement in the Theth area since prehistoric medievalism. It is a fortified settlement, discovered on 2008 in Grunas, the oldest district of Thethi (Tafilica, Z., 2008). Thethi emerges for the first time in documents in 1485 with the name Fusha and had 7 home. Coronelli was the first that has mentioned Theth in the map of 1688 year. In 1904 it lived 100 homes. In 1921, state of time built a school in Theth. In 1936, the auto road came to the village center. In 1956 some tourist structures as small hotels were opened in the center of the village which decided based mountain tourism. In 1968 a holiday house started working where it is today. In 1937, there were 125 homes in Theth with about 900 inhabitants. In 1987 Theth had 147 houses with 1300 inhabitants and in 2000 counted 74 houses with 650 inhabitants. According to records made in 2005 by a group of 14 archaeologists, anthropologist and historian, Thethi had 162 houses, of which 67 inhabited and 95 uninhabited (of which 24 semi-destroyed), a school of the 8 – year cycle, 12 water mills, 21 bunkers, some administrative and service units and 7 cattle stalls of the period of collectivization. (Galaty et al., 2006). According to these authors, the nature of typology and chronology of the structures shows that after a building period of the houses of stone, probably 200-300 years ago, in the last 100 years have occurred at least five 'swelling' in building activities: the first about 100 years ago, and others in the years 1930, 1950, 1970 and after 1990, where four of latter linked in advance with the coming into power of Zog King, the establishment of communist state, the programs of collectivization, and the period after the fall of the communist state. These historical events along with demographic processes of family's growth and leaving from local lands may have influenced the evolution of the current system of residence and agriculture in Theth, based on the construction of small scale terraced surfaces to support herds of cattle. Also, during the communist system, strategies for integration of this area approved too far outside the valley Thethi influencing to the damage of traditional systems of architecture in Theth.

Today, the Thethi village is organized in seven main and two secondary neighborhoods. Each neighborhood was established by an individual together with his family, which further expanded with increasing and sharing of the family. Neighborhoods of this village are lie on both sides of Thethi river, from Okoli to Grunas, where typical houses of stone, combined with alpine environment and blinding greenness, create landscapes without repeated. Although, Thethi is a mountainous hinterland isolated during the winter season, it permanently inhabited.

- ***The nature of the buildings themselves and spaces within the village***

Buildings in the area of Thethi are more faithful expression of the lifestyle of these communities. The residential houses in this area occupy a special place in the Albanian house typology of authenticity, age, the style of composition (Gjeta, 2008). Here, the typical houses are built in the form of towers that go in harmony with the high mountains surrounding

this valley. They are built strong with thick stone wall and without plastering on the outside, with small windows and some turrets, which distinguish them for defensive character. Generally, they are high up on 2-3 floors to take the benefit of height due to the small area of agricultural land. The ground floor was used, according to the divisions made in it, for keeping livestock (today, cattle are kept in buildings outside the residence house) and work tools or any dry food for winter. In another floor, the guest room immediately is distinguished for its size 6 with 4 m or 5 with 4 m. The uniqueness of this room is the fact that it is with the fireplace worked of carved stone, is with carved wooden ceiling and is treated with great care. Usually this room is more pleasant than other rooms of the house. This fact expresses the Albanian tradition to prepare better for the guest. Also on this floor, there is kitchen where women and children stayed. Other divisions of this floor are the bedrooms. The roof of tower house is alpine type, where the apex of the roof is high and creates opportunities for space between the ceiling of the last floor and roof. The roof was covered with pine plank. The ceilings and floors, doors and windows are of pine or chestnut wood. The front door finishes above the arch and this arch is given in the wall by a carved stone cameo and often worked artistically. This door and the door of the guest room are low that the guest to bend to respect the host family. Around the house, there is the farm, surrounded by wooden fence. In the village of Thethit, there are several traditional water mills, two of whom are still in working condition. Many of these the traditional houses and water mills need to be restored and maintained. Also among the most authentic characteristics of this mountain village are wooden public buildings such as bridges, hedges, etc. These give this village a romantic face, and soften the harshness and coldness of the rocks.

Today, there is, perhaps for pragmatism, buildings not in compliance with local nature and style of this place as in architectural terms, as well as of raw materials used in construction. Such are the use of sheet iron on the roofs, the plastering of the outside side of the wall, not using wooden doors and windows, and construction of the houses not according to local style and local materials, use of iron in the bridge, of metal grid surrounding the fields and the meadows. These alter the look and feel of the character of the Theth village. The continuation of these changes can lead to loss of local character of the Theth village that makes it distinctive and attractive to visitors, and in this way it can lost its ability to compete for profits from tourism in a today's market increasingly competitive.

6. Physical/Architectural Character Issues in National Park of Theth

Communities and places have never been static. They have responded throughout history to changes in economics, technology and social trends. What we see today is the result of centuries of radical developments and social disturbance. "We tend to look at the place scene and imagine it has always been like this, whereas in reality it is a 'snapshot' in time. A thriving and viable place has to strike for a balance between its traditions and the needs, and demands of modern life and all that this implies." (Countryside Commission, 1996: 7)

Most of the changes have begun to occur in local character of Theth as result of the actions by individual householders and local traders or businesses. The loss of character of this place has several reasons:

- The absence of clear criterias and guidelines reflecting the authentic values of traditional architecture for planners and architects while developing the schemes of tourism areas caused the adoption of western models in development of local place.
- The lack of urban and architectural projects, due to being unsolved the problem of land ownership.
- The failure of approval of urban and architectural projects because of focusing only on short-time economic dimension and neglecting the socio-cultural and human aspects in projects, in providing an ideal built environment of tourism attraction.
- The degradation of the built environment has for reason adopting some elements of urban modern architecture without considering the real values behind local architecture.
- The existing of the confusion concerning the definition of the term "character" and its components is one of the reasons that led to the insufficiency of regulations. For regulations to control the character effectively, the process should include the control of the combination of its components.
- Regulations and executive decrees for evaluation and controlling of the character absent often in existing tourism areas. Although some building provisions make obligatory the existence of a character for some areas as cultural protected area, the existence of a sole character for the whole settlement of a place is not addressed by laws.
- Failures to apply correct the regulations for environment protection in natural protected areas which has resulted in damage to the natural physical environment of them.

7. A Model from International Experience for Local Character Preservation to Be Applied in Theth

For local people, the place in which they live and work, it is much more than a collection of individual buildings. It is the sum of all the buildings, spaces, streets and trees which make the material heart of the community. Local communities have an unique appreciation and understanding of their own place So, involving the local population in new development design is essential for preserving of place's character and improve the quality of their life in that place. This takes a great importance in a tourism destination. The community involvement in tourism planning is one of the basic principles of the sustainable tourism development. A community involved in planning and implementation of tourism has a more positive attitude, is more supportive and has a better chance to make a profit from tourism than a population passively ruled by tourism. Also, according to Swarbrooke (2002), through community involvement in tourism planning is given a voice to those who are most affected by tourism; is made use of local knowledge to make sure that decisions made are well informed; is reduced potential conflict between tourists and the host community by involving the latter in shaping the way in which tourism is develop.

International experience shows a successful model applied in many countries for preserving local character in new developments in rural areas with strong character of place (Barkham VDS Group, 2007; Countryside Commission, 1996; Daventry District Council, 2004; Woldingham WDS Committee, 2005) This is the preparation of VDS -Village Design Statement with the participation of local communities for making local character count in local development.

A VDS sets out clear and simple guidance for the design of all new development in a village, based on its character. It is an advisory document produced by the village community, not by the planning authority. The VDS describes the qualities that residents value on the distinctive character of their village and the surrounding countryside at three levels:

- the landscape setting of the village,
- the form of the settlement as a whole
- the nature of the buildings themselves, their characteristics and details and spaces within the village

Also, VDS draws up guidelines of design principles based on the distinctive local character village in the design of new development as: general guidelines, guidelines for new buildings, extensions, replacements and alterations, boundary.

VDS doesn't stop change from happening, but it can help to guide change in their environment towards harmonious with local character of the village. Used properly, VDS can provide a useful tool for managing long term change. So, it gives the community a recognized voice in the planning processes to high quality design and appropriate development that will improve the quality of life of the village. VDS cannot change existing policies of planning, but it can influence the operation of the statutory planning system, so that new development can be made in harmony with local character of the village and makes a positive contribution to the local environment. VDS is adapted by District Council as a Supplementary Planning Guidance Document, to support the Local Plan if VDS fits into the general policies of the government and planning authority. Compatibility of VDS with other policies will ensure that they can apply the views of the village community in their decisions. When approved as Supplementary Planning Guidance, it can help developers and designers to understand local views and perceptions on the character of village at the beginning of the design and development process and to serve these described visual qualities of character of the village as an guidance and inspiration for design. It can shorten the process of planning negotiation and application by reducing different conflict on new developments in village. In this way, the local community plays a constructive role in ensuring that development is designed to enhance the local character and identity of the villages and improve the quality of life of the village in which they live.

VDS is subject to a lengthy public consultation process. The parish council has an important role to play in the production of a VDS. Its members are elected representatives as well as statutory consultees for local planning applications. It must find ways to introduce the VDS in order to encourage the community to engage in the preparation of VDS (as parish council meetings, local events or activities). It organizes establishment of a steering committee of VDS. In the service of the VDS compilation, this committee arranges the workshop inviting to attend it all interest residents. But, while the breadth of involvement is important there are some parts of the community which must to be pay a particular mention because their input can be both influential and central to the way the VDS develops as: local teachers, local designers and architects, farmers and landowners. The workshop for preparing VDS follows these steps:

- A public presentation of the nature of the VDS and its role, the outline how the proposed VDS would be prepared.
- Sharing ideas and local views about the character and important features of the village for three levels of local character of the village. In generally, maps are interesting and give people a lot of information about the physical form of a place — but they do not tell visitors what is important to the people who live there. For this participants are divided into three groups and questionnaires for them are made available to those attending and begin thinking about the map of “Ourplace”. Group A is to imagine the route that the visitor should follow, so that at the end of her/his walk she/he will have a clear and honest impression of what this place is like. This route will need to drawn on the map “Our place” and to identify clearly on it the features so that let her know when to change direction even when the visitor will not take the map with her/him. Also unlike outsiders who might see the village as a single whole, but village residents know that there are different zones or areas within the village. So, group B can draw these invisible zone boundaries onto the map “Ourplace”, and add notes explaining what these zones represent. Planners tend to use physical and statutory boundaries like ‘the Conservation Area’, but your idea of boundaries might include, for example, busy and quiet, green or built up, safe or dangerous, edges and middles. An important aspect of villages is the diversity of different buildings and places. Group C should mark up their map with the important landmarks of “Ourplace”. It is helpful to begin by jotting their thoughts down on paper first and then combining everyone’s contributions onto the maps.
- Starting to assemble and record local character. The assessment of the character of the village is based primarily on the physical appearance of the village —what it looks like. All the other information that is needed to produce a VDS, such as planning documents or local histories, should be used in association with the visual survey of the village. The initial survey should aim to record the qualities and features that contribute to the character of the village. The best way of assembling the record of character is by photography. The photographs from the survey provide the material for a preliminary assessment of the character of the village in terms of the landscape setting; the pattern of the settlement and boundaries or the edges of the village; and the buildings, their characteristics and details and open spaces in the village.
- Presentation of preliminary survey. The survey teams should assemble their material to show the characteristic features of the village. This means selecting those images that best capture the spirit of the village. Every team also needs to explain their selection to other teams and compare findings. Working as a group the teams sort their pictures and mount their selected photographs under the three headings on the large sheets of paper of ‘landscape setting’, ‘settlement pattern and spaces’ and ‘buildings’. Arrange them so that they illustrate your views and feelings about the character of “Ourplace”. Also, it is necessary to make notes of any particular points that add to and help describe the photographs.

Once that they have made their final selection, and added all their notes, they should use the last section on the sheets marked 'Your ideas', to put down all the issues that they do not think have been covered in the selection, and issues that are priorities. At the end of the session they will be pinning up their sheets and, at least one person from each group will be able briefly to present and describe the group's ideas. The presentations provide the first opportunity to discuss and assemble a shared view of the character of the village. The images, descriptions and presentation assessments provide the core material for the first draft of the VDS.

Following the workshop, the steering group analyses the information gathered and drafts a document VDS for wider comment. Local newsletters, notices, exhibitions and further village meetings can be used to keep people informed. But ensuring that the VDS is fully endorsed by the whole village must be a central role of the VDS steering group because much of the strength of the VDS is rooted in the breadth of the consultation process and the broad support it has received from the whole village. In order to be approved the VDS as Supplementary Planning Guidance, consultation must also be maintained with the local planning authority, to ensure that the emerging VDS is compatible with the local plan policies or other advisory design material that the planning authority produces. Supplementary information gathers to clarify particular issues identified during consultation process and is made relevant amendments to the VDS draft. This document represents the culmination of this effort.

Another important aspect of VDS process is finding the funds supporting the preparation of the VDS. These funds can be provided by Parish Council, District Council, Village Association, Village newspaper, the Village Design Committee. Also, village residents can support fund raising for material base in this process.

In Albania, the application of VDS is necessary because there are design guides for preserving the local character not only on Rural Areas but not on Natural Protected Areas as tourism areas. Given the international experience of application of the VDS in rural areas of different sizes and from published guides for the preparation of the VDS, the Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Public Works may authorize an official body to generate a comprehensive Advisory Booklet on preparation of VDS for Albanian village. The Advisory Booklet on VDS is addressed to the local communities, who take the lead in preparing of VDS. Also it is sent, for information, to the local planning authorities who will approve Village Design Statement as Supplementary Planning Guidance, if it is based on this Advisory Booklet. Application of the VDS in Albania should receive special attention to villages with a strong local character of the country. In this way, it is made sure that Albanian Village to protect and enhance local character and identity, and can used and enjoyed now and in the future. Importance for the application of the VDS model in Theth village is greater as National Park and as the tourist area with unique natural and cultural values of the place and as more important alpine tourist area in Albania. Great perspective of this area in tourism development requires maintaining and enhancing of the attractiveness of the place for the sustainable tourism development. The Theth VDS will identify the design principles to which proposals for new development will be designed to enhance the local character and identity of the village, to improve the quality of life of the village in which they live and to keep always Theth area attractive for the tourist market.

8. Conclusions

In Albania, tourism development is considered as a priority for the rapid and sustainable development of the country because Albania possesses many unique natural and cultural tourism values which derive from a rich natural and historical-cultural heritage of its. Among the tourist destinations of Albania, Thethi is the area with the most beautiful landscape of the Albanian Alps. He has a unique landscape compared with the European Alps. The unique character of rural alpine settlements forms and buildings in Theth is an important part of the beauty and distinctiveness of this area. The residential houses in this area occupy a special place in the Albanian house typology of authenticity, age, the style of composition. As such it is a tourist area with strong local physical / architectural character. Some changes, as in architectural terms, as well as of raw materials used in construction, have begun to alter the look and feel of the character of the Theth village. The continuation of these changes can lead to loss of local character of the Theth village that makes it distinctive and attractive to visitors, and in this way it can lost its ability to compete for profits from tourism in a today's market increasingly competitive. Therefore respecting of the local character of Thethi area is a necessity for sustainable tourism development in this tourism area.

Planning authorities, designers, architects and developers have an important role to respect the character of place by designing and building new buildings to suit the distinctive features of their settings, ensuring that it will enhance rather than erode the local character of place. To achieve this in a rural area, the VDS can help them. A VDS sets out clear and simple guidance produced by the village community for the design of all new development in a village, based on the distinctive character of their village and the surrounding countryside. VDS is adapted by District Council as a Supplementary Planning Guidance Document to support the Local Plan. When approved as Supplementary Planning Guidance, it can help developers and designers to understand at the beginning of the design process the visual qualities of character of the village, estimated by community and to serve these qualities as a guidance and inspiration for design. In Albania, the application of VDS is necessary because there are design guides for preserving the local character in rural tourism areas. In present conditions when the Albanian government is seeking making of the territorial planning of each parish within those two years, the preparation of the VDS can be used as a Supplementary Planning Guidance Document to support this process and can influence that new developments in tourist areas of Albania are designed to enhance the local character and identity of the village, to improve the quality of life of the village and to keep always tourist rural areas attractive for the tourist market.

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