

Smart village - a new strategy for the development of Finiq's reality

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DOI: 10.37199/o41009115

Abstract - *Finiq is an Albanian municipality located near the ancient city of Phoeniciae in southern Albania. It is located a few kilometers from the Greek border and a few kilometers from the Ionian Sea. Finiq is located almost at the foot of the slope of the hill on which this ancient city had developed, almost to represent its contemporary continuity. Many problems have plagued this village, including depopulation, isolation from the main roads of the region, and a loss of identity. Analyzing the city of Finiq, however, many resources can be used for greater enhancement of the municipality. What characterizes them is the strategic position close to the elongated and characteristic hill, from whose summit you can admire all the panorama, from the plain to the hills to Lake Butrint, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.*

The ancient city of Phoinike has developed on top of the relief and is a settlement that finds its most accomplished monumental expression around the middle of the third century B.C. also becoming the capital of the region, of which today some traces remain, such as the cyclopean walls, the ancient entrance, the theater.

Among the most important archaeological emergencies of the area, in fact, there is the monastery of San Nicola, which stands on a hill, surrounded by the wide bend of the river Bistricta. The ancient complex included a large wall with seven watchtowers, of which today only a few traces remain. Within the walls survives only the Byzantine monument, still used by the community for the celebration of their religious rites.

Other small villages were merged into the municipality of Finiq, such as Aliko, Dhiver, Livadhja, and Mesopotam. Finiq and the other towns could be conceived from the perspective of a smart village, enhancing the strengths of rural reality, and starting a transformation from tourism: the naturalistic and historical cultural potential can allow the villages of the area to become an important attraction of the area, obtaining visibility and funding for its development.

By smart village, we mean a rural area that, starting from its potential, tries to find solutions for its territory. At the basis of this challenge are the communities themselves that implement a series of strategies and shared projects to achieve a common goal: the development and growth of their rural area. In conclusion, this study aims to analyze other "smart" villages in Europe, which started from the enhancement of their heritage for the development of their area: each area is different from the others and each project is different from the others, but the common results are comparable. From these "case studies", it will be possible to understand how Finiq can become "smart", and which approach is needed to strengthen the area

Abstract - *Smart Village, Sustainable Development, Archaeological Emergencies*

Introduction - Finiq is an Albanian municipality located in southern Albania. It is located a few kilometers from the Greek border and a few kilometers from the Ionian Sea. It is fifteen minutes from the city of Saranda, which is one of the most popular seaside destinations in the country, which in recent years has seen a growth of clubs and hotels to meet the influx of tourists. With the reform of 2015, other small villages were merged into the municipality of Finiq, such as Aliko, Dhiver, Livadhja, and Mesopotam, thus creating a common administrative network among these small settlements scattered throughout the territory. [15] At present the population in the area is about 10,000, with an important Greek population. [15] This is in fact a rural area, which is mainly based on self-sustaining agriculture. Only a small part of the owners have plots of such a size that they can define their industrial production. [9] There is also no organization on the use of fields or the choice of crops by the various owners. Due to the lack of work and employment opportunities, the phenomenon of displacement has increased in recent years, as many young people and workers have moved to other parts of the country in search of more advantageous opportunities. [8] In addition, the area is isolated from the main cities and main poles of the country: for example, there is no connection between the territory of Finiq and the most important roads leading to Tirana and connecting the various parts of Albania in a transversal way. [15], [9] These problems have led to a loss of

identity in the territory, not so much for those who remained, who continued their lives with the same patterns and rhythms he has always had, but especially in the eyes of those who could come from outside, because it is currently an area without any attraction.

However, analyzing the territory of Finiq you can not see many opportunities for growth and development for the region. Finiq is located at the foot of the hill that in Greek-Roman times had housed the ancient city of Phoinike, of which today remain important remains, such as the cyclopean walls of defense, the ancient entrance of the city, the theater developed on the slope; the city had grown more and more, to the point of becoming around the third century B.C. the capital of the region. Because of its strategic position, it was used during the Communist period as a sighting post and today the traces of the bunkers remain. [10] In addition to the ancient acropolis of the ancient city, there are other areas of important archaeological interest in the region: the monastery of San Nicolas, the church quarry of Santa Maria, UNESCO World Heritage site of Butrint. [14] The town is also located in an area with a very important landscape heritage: it passes from the flat area at the foot of the mountains, which is exploited by the local population for agriculture in the hills and mountains, to the nearby Ionian coasts; There are also important naturalistic destinations such as Lake Butrint, the karst source of Syri i Kaltër, which are also currently the most popular tourist destinations. The monastery

of Saint Nicholas, which stands on a hill, is surrounded by the wide bend of the river Bistrica. [14] [3] The ancient complex included a large wall with seven watchtowers, of which only a few remain today. Within the walls survives only the Byzantine monument, still used by the community for the celebration of their religious rites. [14]

Research issue

If you analyze Finiq and the network of villages that are part of its municipality you understand that there are no job opportunities, and access to simpler services, such as transport, and there are no tools for the public administration to be efficient and allow control and efficiency of the area.

However, precisely the cultural and landscape archaeological heritage can become a potential for the inhabitants of the place, first of all, to create a stronger identity of the place, also perceptible from the outside. The creation of a new image for the region would help to create local tourism, creating new activities based on offering services related to tourism. [23]

Objectives

The main objective of the research is to understand how to make the entire area more attractive for young people and families, to stop the phenomenon of depopulation, and to trigger processes that can create a network of services.

The research wants to understand through which practices, projects, or funding the municipality of Finiq can be improved, and how Finiq can become a "Smart Village".

Method

The methods used to model this research have been carried out through literature reviews, case studies, and previous projects and analysis of the results obtained from the projects carried out. [1] The definition of "smart village" was analyzed through the literature and then the case studies from a vast network of projects carried out in the European context, all of which followed the objective of improving some rural or marginal realities.

The case studies were chosen on the basis of their initial situation, namely rural areas with a heritage to be exploited, and the final objective that had their project and were compared according to the validity of the results obtained. [1]

Smart Village

The development of urban areas in recent years has meant that rural areas have been relegated to a secondary and marginal role in innovation and the improvement of living standards. But lately, thanks to digitalization and technology, the life model linked to rural areas has been revised, which could guarantee a more balanced pace of life in contact with nature. Precisely these two instruments should lead to the overcoming of certain problems due to distances, transport, and access to the labour market. [18] [20] [17]

What is meant by Smart Villages? According to the operational definition of the European Network for Rural Development (EN RD), these are "rural communities that use innovative solutions to increase their resilience, starting from local strengths and opportunities. They are based on a participatory approach to develop a strategy that can improve their economic, social, and environmental conditions, exploiting in particular the solutions offered by digital technologies. Smart Villages benefit from cooperation and alliance with other communities and actors in urban and rural areas. The launch and implementation of strategies for Smart Villages can be based on existing initiatives and can be financed from various public or private sources". [21]

There is a network of smart villages in Europe that develop programs based on the strengths of the various localities. These are the following case studies considered: 1) Southern Estonia, 2) Northern Portugal, 3) the Kujawske-Pomorskie region in Poland, and 4) a shared project between Romania, Belgium, and Scotland. [23]

Estonia of the South

Tourism in southern Estonia is concentrated in the city of Tartu, but in reality, the whole area as a whole has great tourist potential. The project aims to increase tourism throughout the area by spreading tourism services evenly throughout the region. There is a desire to take up the idea that has already been used in the Netherlands with great success to place in the most strategic places the yellow frame symbol of National Geographic, creating the illusion of looking inside a window. [12]

The objective is to strengthen the identity of the region and bring more knowledge of the region and more tourists to the area, increasing revenue for the development of the area. [12]

The project was started by 6 areas in the south of the country in collaboration with National Geography Estonia; several cities (Tartu, Valga, and Mustvee) and various organizations related to tourism were involved in the project, for a total of 21 partners. For the location of the cornices, 21 sites representing attractive historical sites in southern Estonia and sites of cultural and natural value were chosen. Some local information about the area accompanied each of the frames. All partners were involved in the planning and execution of the project. In addition to booklets of routes and web pages, excellent promotional campaigns were carried out, to ensure that the project reached as many people as possible and on the other hand there was a development of the tourist services offered, both for tourists at national and international level. Many other activities have since been initiated by local entrepreneurs who have often received funding from other sources, increasing the range of possible experiences for tourists. [18] [12] [19]

Poland

The Vistula Valley in Kujawsko, a region of Pomorkie, Poland, has a rich and important cultural and culinary heritage due to its natural beauty and great cultural diversity. The project was established to promote the cultural and gastronomic offerings of the area. So a package has been designed that offers tourists new cultural and culinary experiences, creating a brand of the region. Before the project, the region was unable to market traditional products properly and many of the locations in the region are considered to be day-trips. [6] [13]

The objectives of the program are:

- creation of a coherent tourist offer based on the cultural, natural, and culinary potential of the Vistula Valley;
- integration of local entrepreneurs in the creation of tourist packages;
- creation of a local label for local products;
- creation of new jobs.

The design was divided into three phases:

- 1) identification of the potential of the territory;
- 2) four days of workshops entitled "Four Seasons in the Vistula Valley" which included these activities: working groups, led by experts in the field, focused on the development of cultural tourism and culinary heritage, identification of needs and services to be developed in the form of tourist attractions, what products to offer to tourists and how.
- 3) promotion of the project through pilot

trips with representatives of the tourism industry, journalists, and bloggers, who had the opportunity to discover and verify the offer in the target areas; presentation of packages and products during some important events; the tourist offer was promoted through interviews in local media, Facebook and partner websites. [18] [6]

Portugal

Villages in northern Portugal have invested in initiatives to develop tourism to promote economic development. "The economic development of the depopulated regions has been taken as the premise to encourage the permanence of the population within the country through the creation of new jobs." [5] [8] At the same time, they promoted actions to rejuvenate the population, promote local heritage, and strengthen territorial identity. [5] [8] A network of local partnerships has been set up, involving 83 municipalities, all of them convinced that it was necessary to consolidate networking activities in order to better promote activities. [16]

Objectives:

The main objective was to spread in the territory a method that would allow investment in rural tourism, also through the sharing of experiences between the different territories. [16]

A local association promoting sustainable tourism has led the various municipalities. The shared steps were:

- identification of good practices that could lead to the development of a village;
- dissemination of methodology through workshops;
- development of a common strategy;
- joint participation in fairs and exhibitions;
- creation of a web portal;
- recovery and enhancement of heritage and landscape. The aim is to offer tourists "country experiences"; promoting local rural culture through collective memories, the recovery, and enhancement of typical buildings, and cultivation in balance with the natural landscape. [18] [16]

Romania, Flanders, Scotland

Rural communities in Romania, Flanders, and Scotland have worked together to create a sustainable tourism development model. The participating areas believe that tourism in their areas could be increased, but not having a particular attraction that could attract a large number of visitors, they wanted to implement the influx of visitors consciously. [22] They therefore want to increase tourism in their areas, but with a view to integrating tourism

and the territory: the tourist must respect the territory without overwhelming the local identity. In addition, the various communities are placed in different socio-economic contexts: the challenge was to see how the model could apply equally. Moreover, the objective of the project is to give in the hands of local communities the management of tourism, just to integrate it into the life of the community. Finally, through this network of communities that involved several countries, it aims to be a mutual support in the application of the project model. [11]

Objectives and processes

First, local partnerships were created to involve local actors in the project; later, transnational meetings were held to talk about a model that everyone could apply to their reality. The different backgrounds have meant that the project has been studied from several points of view, to be applied to different solutions. In addition, each country had very different timing and funds, but the project had to respect the timing of all, proceeding in unison. First, the communities of the various countries proceeded in a local way, trying to understand how to welcome tourists and promote traditions, food, and drinks. [22] Everyone had to think of events with the involvement of local communities and the financing of the project. The three countries have demonstrated different approaches, but common themes and budgets have been guaranteed. Later, learning visits were organized in each area, which formed a key part of this overall project. [22] The aim was twofold: on the one hand, visitors had to ensure that each country saw and understood how the project had been designed and adapted in the others, and at the same time they had to be potential prospective visitors/influencers for local tourism, disseminating local projects, businesses, etc. These candidates are believed to bring value to the selected candidates, their businesses, organizations, or communities. Unfortunately, the trip to Flanders was not possible because of Covid-19. Local meetings were then held regularly to make the project more flexible and adaptable to different communities. [18]

Results

In each of these cases, tourism has been seen as a first step towards a "smart village", as it allows you to exploit an existing heritage to bring benefits to the community. [4]

In each of the cases reported it is possible

to notice how the valorization of the own territory has been fundamental in order to make so that the local community found or strengthened its identity. The local community is the starting point of the whole process of valorization of the patrimony also for tourist purposes. The ability to have a plan and develop it makes it possible to attract public and private funding for territorial growth. [23] [18]

Estonia results:

The image and local identity have been strengthened, increasing awareness of their territory. Local communities and local entrepreneurs are now jointly active and involved in tourism development. In fact, the number of national and international tourists has increased. Income from tourism in the region increased, which in turn supported employment and economic investment in the region. [18] [12] [5]

Poland results:

The culinary and tourist promotion of the area has developed a local brand and six different tourist packages, involving fourteen municipalities and about one hundred people for the organization and development of these tourist offers. Therefore, there has been a great mobilization of investors and local actors involved; there has been a strengthening of local identity and increased local participation in the development of the territory. [18] [6]

Results Portugal:

A good part of local traditions has been recovered, strengthening their identity. The network of villages participating in the project are eighty-three and private investments in the villages should be mobilized. A "Villages of Portugal" booking center has been created. [18] [16]

Romania, Flanders, Scotland results:

Communities were much more involved and integrated in the processes of sustainable tourism development; local actors who actively participate in the activities and events to be proposed have increased. The impact of the project has been particularly noted in Scotland, where the government itself is investing in the tourism project of these communities. The same thing is being replicated in Belgium as well. Covid-19 reported slowdowns in all project areas. [18] [22]

In each case examined it can be seen that allowing the community itself to control

the project meant that the tourist activity would be integrated into the life of the village, without upsetting its nature; many projects were based on methodology "bottom-up", with active participation of the local population in decision-making processes. [18]

Tourism has grown, in some areas even internationally.

Conclusions

From the results of the various projects, one can find several common practices that have led to an improvement in the conditions of the various villages, economic and social. "Appreciate people's activity. The smart-village approach should not be planned without the involvement of local leaders, local government, NGOs, and other stakeholders. Existing resources should be utilized, such as active village heads and other local leaders." [13]

Finiq and the surrounding area have a vast landscape and cultural heritage, so tourism could be the first step to being "smart". [4] After these examples, the development process through tourism can be considered valid. In these cases, the integration of village life and tourism development is identified as a source of new economic revenue and new jobs and could be a tool for the community to rediscover its identity. [7] [13] Tourism activities would require personnel, facilities, and technology. It would be fundamental that the community of Finiq led a project to enhance the entire area, also creating a wider network of actors including the other villages that are part of the municipal area. In addition, a very important phase is to promote the project and possible events, to get to as many people as possible, and also take advantage of the proximity to Saranda, which is already a well-known seaside resort.

Tourism should be just the beginning to make the area a place of opportunity. "To promote the smart-village concept, it is worth showing rural communities the potential benefits of its implementation, for example with the help of identified, existing examples of smart solutions." [13]

This article would like to be just a first step in the analysis of the municipality of Finiq. The next steps could be to outline what tourism development processes, and what initiatives could be applied.

In addition, in order to move in this direction, it is important to understand which local actors can be considered and which funding can be requested, both

public and private, in order to be able to start the projects that could activate more the municipality of Finiq.

Discussions

All the case studies have validated the hypothesis that the reality of intelligent villages is possible. The results of all the case studies have confirmed that thanks to the redevelopment projects of the various areas there has been an increase and improvement of the activities related to tourism and a strengthening of the local identity.

These results make us understand that the reality of Smart Villages can lead to a significant increase in well-being in rural areas and therefore can be a valid alternative to the lifestyle model proposed by cities. [11]

Well-being, as we understand from the results, can be both at the community level - greater importance to traditions and a sense of local identity-, both economic, because it has given a new impetus to local tourism, designed to be sustainable by the community itself. [13] [11]

It can therefore be said that the basis of these good practices are: a project well structured and shared by the community, long-term prospects of the project, which allow the greatest possible adaptation to local reality, the creation of a rural network on the territory, well-structured and designed marketing campaigns.

It is very interesting to see how these projects with the active participation of the population of the area in the decision-making processes have developed more consistently the activities and new proposals: this would imply that the projects developed, having common goals and starting points, in reality, they are adaptable to the specificity of the places. [4]

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