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**Old tradition to new reality:**

**Environmental, social, and economic impacts of tourism in Thethi, Albania**

Erin Marchington and Antonia Young

*A first impression of Thethi, on arrival after a bone-shattering many-hour drive over high mountains, is one of wonderment. The pristine magnificence of the surrounding mountain peaks; the purity of the fast flowing River Shala; the naturally forested quietness of this valley without motorized vehicles; the many vernacular local stone houses; and the gentle curiosity and welcome of locals, especially children, all these combine to create a Shangri-La – a vision of peacefulness and harmony, in a virtually hidden valley, at times cut off by snow from the outside world.*

Given his life-long interest in Albania, Hibbert must have experienced a similar feeling of wonderment during his first journey in Albania, into which he parachuted in 1943<sup>1</sup>. Returning to the region many times throughout his life, and a “brave advocate” of a country which was both physically and socially isolated for decades after WWII, Hibbert witnessed several points of transition in Albania’s political history that have shaped its development: post-WWII shift to communism, end of the communist period in the early 1990s and upheaval associated with the shift to a market economy. On a national scale, these drastic political and economic changes have been well documented by many scholars, including Hibbert himself. However, it is also interesting to consider the impacts of such transitions and development on a smaller or rural scale, which could be very effective in illuminating not only economic trends, but also environmental, social, and cultural impacts of such events. Since the majority of Albania’s population was scattered rurally in villages throughout the country until urban migration and depopulation of rural areas set in post-communism<sup>2</sup>, it is relevant to investigate these impacts on the village-level.

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<sup>1</sup> The Independent, Obituaries “Sir Reginald Hibbert: Albanologist and former ambassador in Paris”, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Hall, D. Rural tourism development in southeastern Europe: transition and the search for sustainability. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 2004.

Thethi is a northern Albanian village, remote and isolated- a characteristic that could lead one to assume that the rural population there would be relatively sheltered from the tumultuous national political and economic changes in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, upon closer inspection, various transitions have also occurred in the village as it emerges from each period and struggles to adapt to new realities. In order to understand the impacts of development in Thethi, one must understand the historical roots, or where a village ‘comes from’. Thus, this chapter will first outline influential factors of rural development in Thethi pre-2009, including environmental, social, and economic or subsistence strategies; this commentary is an outcome of personal and ethnographic research and visits to Thethi during the 1990s by Antonia Young, and later in collaboration with the Shala Valley Project (SVP), during which she had the opportunity to interview families in the village from 2005 – 2007. Following this is an exploration of the effect of modern (2009 – present) rural development on these traditions, which has accompanied the periods of transition in Albania. Specifically, environmental, social, and economic impacts of tourism are discussed which is the culmination of fieldwork and research conducted by Erin Marchington in 2009 - 2010 as a part of her MESPOM thesis.

The risk in the current transition period, where tourism development is being recognized as a great opportunity for growth, is that economic growth will be prioritized over all else, which is what happened in most parts of the world during the post-WWII transition period, leading to unsustainable development.

*That first impression can be abruptly changed by one of those locals pointing out that it's lovely for visitors and during summer, but not such fun if you live there year-round. Deep winter in the isolated Shala is not easy to contend with. Coping with these long and difficult winters, involves stacking wood and animal feed all through the summer in preparation for being totally cut off from outside supplies for several months on end. However, this situation is changing for most families as more and more migrate to Shkodër or further away, for the winter, returning in the spring to tend their properties and prepare to cater for tourists.*

### **Old traditions: Influential factors of rural development in Thethi, Albania (pre-2009)**

As Ethnographic Team leader of the Shala Valley archaeological Project, Young's visits with Thethi families enabled her to talk in particular to the older residents, thus obtaining memories of life in the region during the past half century. Without exception, Thethians were extremely hospitable and keen to discuss issues related to kinship organization, past and present subsistence strategies, historical data about native architecture and its change over time, as well

as their thoughts about the potential and logistics of future economic developments in the region and working patterns during the past half century and more. Their interest in and concern for the development of sustainable tourism, especially as it could potentially be linked to the cross-border Balkans Peace Park Project<sup>3</sup> was explored, in particular there was enthusiasm for the provision of educational children's programmes.

Thethi, in the Shala Valley, lies alongside the Montenegrin border, which had been theoretically closed since the borders were drawn by the Great Powers of Europe meeting in London in 1912. In fact, it was a porous border until the Second World War, and for a short period following that War, there was discussion concerning the possibility of integration, i.e. Albania becoming Yugoslavia's seventh republic. That consideration died with Yugoslavia's break with the USSR in 1948. Thereafter, Albania's borders were strictly sealed and few Albanians were able to escape. Penalties for such attempts could bring not only death to those who tried, but extremely severe punishment to remaining family members.

### **Geography and environment**

Thethi National Park was established in 1966, covering an area of 2,630 ha. With ranges in altitude from approx. 1,200m to 2,567m (at the summit of Mt. Radohima). At present rather little activity is taken concerning conservation, despite laws prohibiting hunting, fishing and logging.

Thethi's isolation is exacerbated by its very severe weather conditions and extremely poor infrastructure.

Unlike most other regions in Albania, this area received none of Kosova's half million refugees at the time of the 1999 Kosovar War, whereas on average for every seven of Albanian's inhabitants, there was a Kosovar refugee at the height of its hospitality.

### **Kinship and Social Organization**

Like all villages in the Shala Valley, Thethi is an exogamous village since all its families are distantly related to a common ancestor, the founder of the village, Ded Nika. Therefore, the

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<sup>3</sup> The UK charity envisions a transnational park spanning Albania, Montenegro and Kosova as a symbol of peace and cooperation, where communities from all three countries work together to protect their fragile environment, stimulate local employment and promote sustainable visitor activities in the region. See [www.balkanspeacepark.org](http://www.balkanspeacepark.org)

members of the village consider their community as a brotherhood (*vllazni*). When asked to sketch a family tree, it was fascinating to find that this was traced as a single line of son-father-grandfather-great-grandfather etc., back to as many as 12 generations of male ancestors. Women never featured in these diagrams, indicating their minor importance, all having married into the village from other villages. Until the 1950's, Thethians observed this rule of exogamy amongst the villages of Shala. Usually families attributed their settlement in Thethi some 300-350 years ago as a retreat to the mountains in order to avoid a conversion to Islam.

The six neighborhoods of Thethi, named after the six original brothers, are often also organized to pool labor in working the fields co-operatively, the most efficient way to work the land both now and in the past. Up until 2009, no mechanical agricultural equipment was to be seen in Thethi. On weekdays, in feudal tradition, the particular owner pays the participants for their labor in working his fields and hosts a lunch for them. However, on Sundays such a group may work without compensation for a family in need, but again the celebratory lunch is provided in recognition of the participants' goodwill. The work is seen as a charitable religious gesture.

Each neighborhood is further divided into clusters of closely related households. This follows from the traditional splitting of extended families. The northern Albanian extended family suffered a blow during the Communist regime, especially when land was collectivized leaving only 1-2 dylms<sup>4</sup> of land per each family. This led to many families dividing up, in order to retain more land. Traditionally the process of splitting and rebuilding involves an intricate division process that evolves over decades following the laws of the Kanun<sup>5</sup>.

The largest household in the years 2004-2009 had 14 members with three generations residing under one roof. It has more than one descendant of the head of the household (*zoti i shtepis*). The community kin-oriented links are strengthened in a number of ways; for example, *kumbar* relationships, or the traditional first cutting of a child's hair gives the cutter the status of a non-religious godparent. Many of the rituals related to weddings such as the tradition for a new bride to be available to receive and serve a wide network of visitors during her first month of marriage also strengthen these links.

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<sup>4</sup> 1 dylm is equal to a 100 X 10 m or 1000 m<sup>2</sup> parcel.

<sup>5</sup> Most families claim to be guided by traditional law, the Kanun of Lek Dukagjin for the division of property, resolution of conflicts, and for marriage rituals. Some voiced a concern for the conflict between customary and state law.

This perceived family link (however remote) has helped the people to retain friendly relations and to continue to work co-operatively. For example they still use six communal water mills to grind their corn. Even without any monetary exchange, the mills are used and maintained without dispute. However, we also found evidence of several feuds, some ongoing and others reported as ended. There were efforts made by the Communist state to uproot patriarchal ways, by breaking up large family units and by including women in the workforce outside the home. They were also successful in suppressing bloodfeuds. Nevertheless, several villagers have reported a feud incident in the past and surprisingly several were incidents within their own neighborhoods in the village. Each incident followed a particular routine in terms of settlement strategy (Mustafa and Young, 2008).

### **Subsistence strategies and architectural patterns of change**

In characterising the three post-World War II periods (pre-1957, Communist, and post-Communist), the earliest era main economy was pastoral. During the Communist era, land and animals were collectivized and the villagers secured their livelihood through wage work for the cooperative. Currently, most households have developed their own small holdings for their domestic needs for crops and animals. Many families who have migrated return to Thethi for the summer months to enjoy the clean mountain air, to maintain their properties, to work the land for fruit (strawberries, plums, grapes, apples, pears, cherries, mulberries) and vegetables (tomatoes, lettuce, onions, garlic and peppers), as well as the main staple crops (corn, potatoes, beans)<sup>6</sup>. The pastures are utilized for cows, sheep and some goats as well as hay fields for winter fodder (mostly alfalfa). All this gives their children the benefits and freedom to play and live cheaply on freshly produced food. Some take their animals with them to the outskirts of Shkodra for the winter. Several families also have beehives. Plums, mulberries, wild strawberries, walnuts and hazelnuts are available to gather freely. They grow in the wild, and people can pick them as they wish. Almost every household makes its own *raki* (clear alcoholic spirit) from grapes or plums, which is traditionally offered to guests at any time of day, from early morning until late at night. Another local product is herbs which are plentiful and in several varieties, and also used as tea. Thethi used to be a collection centre for herbs and animal hides in Communist times, but now there is no proper infrastructure for profitable collection and sale.

Residential seasonal transhumance observed in Thethi has its roots in the old pastoral

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<sup>6</sup> Intercropping is a traditional practice. Beans and corn are the most common combination although grape vines may be found surrounded by other produce.

transhumance lifestyle and is still practiced by some of the inhabitants who reside in Thethi year-round. In the past all families would send up some of their members to spend the summer in the high pastures, now rather few do that. The numbers of these families has dwindled year by year.

Up to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, trade was made with Gusi, Plav, and Peja (over the Qafa e Pejes [Peja Pass] to Montenegro). Although the borders of Albania were drawn by The Great Powers in London in 1912, it seems that the effects were not fully felt until after WWII and the break with Yugoslavia in 1948, after which time access to the old markets was no longer possible. These markets were utilized for the purchase of corn, which was cheaper and more easily available in comparison to Shkodra. In turn, the Shkodra market was mainly used to sell animals and pastoral products and the purchase of salt, sugar, oil and other household needs.

The large stone houses which characterize the built landscape of Thethi have steep roofs to prevent the heavy winter snows from accumulating. Traditional beech wood roof tiles are very picturesque, but many have found that the less attractive, cheaper, and longer lasting corrugated iron serve their purposes better. Few houses are more than 200 years old, many of them were built about a century ago. Another wave of buildings coinciding with the first couple of decades after the establishment of the communist regime. Some of the older houses were only one storey, with an additional storey added at a later date. Commonly inhabited houses kept cattle on the ground floor, a custom well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Edith Durham gives some very graphic descriptions of such dwellings). Human habitation on the floor above benefitted from the heat of the animals in the living area. This changed with the opening of the cooperative in 1957 and the subsequent collectivisation of land and animals. As the villagers were for the most part left with only one cow and one pig, and due to hygienic directives from the board of health that required that animal shelters should be located at least 10 meters away from the house, the first floors that once were utilized as barns were converted into living spaces. Most homes have outside toilets at some distance from the house, though each year more and more villagers are installing flush toilets.

### **Early forms of modern tourism**

In the communist era, the government-controlled Trade Unions constructed a small holiday resort for workers' families, middle rank bureaucrats and trade union members. It was not deemed sufficiently comfortable for government ministers, especially with such a difficult and dangerous road to reach it.

Thethi remains the pearl of the Albanian Alps and is widely advertised (within Albania), as it was under the Communist regime. However, during communism advertising consisted only of pictures, stories, and the few first-hand accounts by foreign Marxist-Leninist party leaders visiting Albania at the invitation of the Party of Labour of Albania. Thethi was a symbol of Albania's wild beauty, though it was at the same time a forbidden area due to its proximity next to the Montenegrin border.

Although attempts are being made to ensure that Thethi conforms to sustainable tourism, tourism is not a new concept in the area. Between the two World Wars, Thethi was a holiday destination for rich families from Shkodër who had summer homes there, and also a place known as a cure for tuberculosis and other lung problems – though being nearer to Shkoder, the village of Razem was more attractive. It was King Zog's ambition to modernize his country, and one of his projects was the building of a dirt road from Koplík, 60 km over the mountains, north of Shkoder, through to Thethi in 1936. There was rumour that there had been a Tourist Information Centre in Thethi at the time the road was first built, though we were unable to confirm this. Several foreigners published books about their visits here in the inter-War period, so one might assume that this indicates that many more actually visited (e.g. Heseltine, Lane, Newman). The road built by Zog still remains little changed, though a portion of it has been tarmacked; it is the constant topic of conversation amongst all Thethi families, who would like to have it properly tarmacked all the way to the village, and even on down a further 20km. length of the Shala Valley. Ironically, when that happens, the influx of tourists may be the undoing of Thethi's attractiveness, which is now sharply in balance, and suffering from lack of any overall planning.

### **Transition: Post-communism until present (1991-2009)**

It is clear that there has been a massive exodus of families since the fall of communism in the early 1990's, slower at first but particularly dramatic in the first couple of years of the new millennium. Of the 249 families in 1991, by 2005 only about 17 families were full time residents (this fell to just 8 families in 2008), although as many as sixty families that have left return to their Thethi homes in the summer. Thethi's school, built in 1957, had served hundreds of children in its 10 classrooms, but by 2004 only 20 pupils were in attendance, and teaching presence was sporadic due to uncertainty and meagerness of pay.

On the other hand, as the country is opening up and Thethi is gaining in reputation as a tourist destination, some families who left many decades ago are currently returning to Thethi to take up summer residence and in particular to renovate their homes with an aim to take in tourists. While most families have relocated in Shkodra for permanent or winter residence, a good number of them have found their way to England, Greece, and Italy, and some as far as America. Lack of employment in Thethi is the major reason behind the exodus, although the villagers have voiced the need for adequate electricity, school, road, hospital, phone line, and an emergency evacuation service.

A small ethnographic museum was set up in 1985, as part of a national plan to have such museums in every village, containing artifacts supplied by the village residents. The scheme was supposed to be organized by the teachers of each village. Unfortunately shortly after the fall of Communism Thethi's museum was deceptively dismantled: uniformed men came from Tirana with false documents authorizing them to take all the contents of the museum. Additionally, considerable damage was sustained to the building during an earthquake in 2005, but the roof has been repaired. Several children promote themselves as guides to the museum and also to the *kulla* both of which stand out, on a high rocks.

Thethi has long had several advantages over most rural towns of Albania: a fast flowing river, supplying trout, a good and plentiful source of pure drinking water, lack of pollution, and until fairly recently, reliable electricity from their local waterfalls since the "electrification of the villages" of the late 1960s and the maintenance of the communal generator. Traditionally there was natural care of woodlands by local families. Such tradition was interrupted by large scale planning under Communism, which included such in appropriate projects as planting apple orchards on the mountainside which the fierce winter weather prevented any yield. In the aftermath of Communism, economic desperation has affected traditional ways. The old electric generator (built in the 1960s) is in dire need of replacement.

Life is hard for the residents of Thethi. With little government support, pensioners receive about \$70 each per month, the school has no equipment other than desks and chairs, and the building is in dire need of repair. There is no doctor or health clinic, their only medical assistance is from a male nurse with one year's training, who visits for 2 days a week from Abat (in winter he makes the journey on snowshoes, taking about three and a half hours each way). There was no telephone or radio communication until Vodafone linked up in 2007. Until 1997, by all

accounts, the Albanian government provided essential food supplies that were stored centrally and available throughout the winter at minimal cost.

Thethi's Catholic church (built in 1892) was used during the Communist era as a grain store, and later as a maternity hospital. Its steeple was demolished and its bell hidden illegally by locals. In 1991 the large hidden church bell was brought out and, for lack of a steeple, it was hung in the nearest tree to the church. Shortly after, men came, claiming authority to take it to be mended, but it was never seen again. A much smaller bell was later placed in the church. In 2006 with donations from Albanian-American Catholics the church has been beautifully restored as it had originally been. Those now seeking qualified maternity care need to travel all the way to Shkodër.

On the question of women's role, most locals agree that the woman's place is to produce, sweep, clean and cook. Few discuss child rearing, so we might assume that this is considered to be something automatically happening within the communal living situation, though clearly women tend babies. We heard more than once that women are no longer "laden like animals as they used to be", and this was confirmed by the fact that we now see very few women carrying huge loads which were a common sight into the 1990s. It is common that young girls are prohibited from walking alone at all in the village. They work hard with domestic chores in their homes, while their brothers may go to school or swimming in the river, once they have finished their laboring work.

Since the fall of Communism in 1991, all Albanian rural areas have been adversely affected by the withdrawal of central government support, resulting in serious feuds over land ownership, often followed by high migration rates. This, as well as the search for employment away from the Valley, or abroad, led to mass migration out of rural areas of young men and even whole families.

Although many villages in the area suffer deeply from both of these phenomena, it was interesting to find that this particular village, Thethi, is unusual in its relatively lower level of internal conflict. There is a division by social status between the two ends of the village, which are beginning to be exacerbated by international financial support given to those larger homes already more easily adapted to supply home-stay tourists.

With endorsement from the Shkodër Education Authority, the Balkans Peace Park Project initiated and supported an annual Summer Programme for the local children, using Thethi School. Starting in 2007, around 100 children attended daily for two months. Classes in Environmental Awareness are taught by Albanian teachers, and English language by volunteer teachers from the UK, US and Canada. Additional activities are also offered, depending on the qualification of the volunteers (who all pay their full travel and accommodation costs). Activities offered have included sports, music, drama, crafts, civics, and most recently an international Permaculture course ran alongside the Summer Programme.

### **New Reality: Current rural and tourism development in Thethi (2009 – present)**

From the above discussion, it is evident that there is an immediate need to initiate rural development projects in the region in order to mitigate and prevent further depopulation and economic disparity; but what project would be successful under such isolated and seemingly resource-poor conditions? It is apparent that the answer could lie in problem itself, and knowing that Thethi was used as a tourism destination in the past, utilizing the isolated yet *pristine environment* as the key resource to leverage rural development through tourism is an attractive concept for the community.

This pathway has recently been promoted by the local government and by international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the area. However, the visitor and local community visions for tourism development, although not necessarily mutually exclusive or unique to each group, expose tension between the idea of preservation of culture and environment and the need for development and increased quality of life. Although there are many potential benefits that can result from tourism in rural villages like Thethi, the risk of negative effects are also significant. There is potential for harm to the environment, the key resource for such a development project, and to members of the local population, the stakeholders whom development is intended to aid. In recognition of such risks, there is a need to examine the form, implementation, and the actual and potential impacts of rural development strategies such as tourism.

Erin Marchington had the opportunity to conduct such an examination in Thethi, Albania during July 2009, using participant observation research methodology. Following this fieldwork, literature reviews, semi-structured interviews, and interactions with stakeholders via meetings and conference attendance were conducted from February to June 2010. The point of departure

for the research was that the “pristine environment” represents the primary resource for tourism and its enfolding activities, where “environment” as the key resource for development encompasses both the natural and built landscapes. Following from this, sustainable tourism development (STD) in the context of the research was defined as “tourism development that contributes to rural development, increasing quality of life for all, while preserving the key resource for development, the natural and built environment”.

Potential negative impacts of tourism could be mitigated or avoided in Thethi, pursuing sustainable tourism development more effectively. In the summer of 2010 an international Permaculture course ran alongside the B3P Summer Programme.

### **Current tourism development in Thethi (2009 – present)**

Tourism development is apparent in many forms upon entrance into the village, where visitors are met with a large map supplied by GTZ indicating marked hiking trails in the area. GTZ also produced a walking guide, trail markings, and are working on an accommodation project. GTZ supplied grants to participating families, to renovate bedrooms and create bathrooms to meet tourists’ needs, range and quality of services, signposting those homes offering such accommodation.

Although this project has been largely viewed as successful, it is also believed by some to have created tension in the village between those families included in the project and those who have not, see below under **tourism impacts**<sup>7</sup>. One community member is cited as saying “...it is ridiculous to accommodate tourists, even we, local people, do not have proper supply of water or electricity”. Some families have started to develop accommodation projects privately, independent of GTZ. It is unclear which guesthouses were funded by GTZ; and competition between families for tourists was evident; for example, one family had children approaching tourists soliciting for customers. It was evident that most encountered tourists preferred to stay in accommodation that was ‘westernized’ with functional toilets and working electricity and water; however, this only provided income to those families who are already relatively financially secure. Some tourists are completely self-sufficient bringing all their own food and sleeping in their own tents.

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<sup>7</sup> Information in this section primarily from Satoko Hara’s M.A. Dissertation, University of Bradford (2009) and Erin B. Marchington’s M.A. Dissertation, Lund University (2010).

The Balkan Peace Park Project (B3P) is another actor involved in promoting tourism in the area, active in Thethi during the summer months, operating a school programme run by international volunteers for local children since 2008; the volunteers stay as tourists with local families, providing some of the first accommodation opportunities for many residents

Returning to the former Communist workers' holiday resort, developers (probably from further afield than Thethi) started converting this into a medium-sized hotel during 2009; it is not located directly in the Valley, but just outside the Valley. It is unclear what the source of water, electricity, and waste disposal will be. This will result in increased competition for tourist accommodation and place pressure on existing resources.

Other local entrepreneurship supports the use and payment of local guides to hiker, and several small "bars" and cafes have been established. The most innovative of these is a bar built very simply beside a wooden bridge over the Shala River, with a rough water mill run with plastic jugs, to turn a spit, which can roast a lamb. A single small shop opened around 2000, selling candy bars, snacks, and drinks. Another resident has begun to sell jams and preserves from her garden to tourists.

Several outdoor travel companies lead trips to Thethi and the area. At least seven travel company websites have been identified. Until recently, travel literature was very limited with little mention of the whole region. With the advent of social networks and private websites, some local residents, or people with connections to the village, are designing their own tourism sites (for example, [www.thethi-guide.com](http://www.thethi-guide.com)).

### **Current and probable future impacts of tourism development in Thethi**

Since tourism development is still on a relatively small scale, impacts will not be too detrimental, especially as the continual development is occurring alongside other significant changes in the region and country.

Table 1 outlines several impacts that are highly likely follow increased numbers of visitors to the region tourism develops. Impacts are organized thematically by the three pillars of sustainability, economic, social and environmental impacts, and described as a stakeholder cost, benefit or unclear, where the stakeholder is identified.

**Table 1. Impacts of current tourism development in Thethi.**

<b>Sustainability pillar</b>	<b>Impact description</b>	<b>Impact occurring as a result of tourism development? [Yes, No, or Unclear]</b> <b>Impact is a [Cost, Benefit, Unclear] to which stakeholder?</b> <b>Evidence.</b>
Economic	Influx of local, national and foreign tourists to the village.	Yes, benefit to local families and individuals able to participate. Bring income to <i>some</i> of those providing accommodation, entrepreneurs running small businesses (bars, cafes, local preserves, guided hikes, ethnography museum).
	External Outdoor travel companies, expeditions to region.	Yes, benefit to travel company and tourists. Bring income primarily to travel companies (aside from accommodation- indirect affects)
	Travel literature produced by private companies and individuals.	Yes, benefit to travel literature industry and tourists. Bring income primarily to private companies and individuals.
Social	Aggravation of socio-economic divides in the village.	Yes, cost to local people. Tension between families receiving benefits from tourism accommodation and those who do not, or are not participating.
	Placing needs of tourists before local people.	Yes, benefit to tourists, cost to local people. Development of tourist infrastructure before providing residents with healthcare, sufficient electricity, water, and waste management.
	Influx of tourists from other cultures or parts of Albania.	Yes, cost and benefit to local people and visitors. Bring in different ideas, and cultures to village. Some tension between patriarchal traditions, Albanian women.
	Influx of NGOs (local, international) promoting tourism, researchers, media.	Yes, cost and benefit to local people and visitors. Bring in different ideas, and cultures to village, capacity and skills. Some tension with resident expectations and feeling of use, distrust in promises. Minimal disruption to daily activities via tourist observation: Church, agricultural practises, cooking, etc.
Environment and cultural landscape	Increased demand and use of resources (water, electricity, food, transportation).	Yes, primary cost to local people (and tourists while visiting). Low availability of water, electricity to some homes due to increased use; need to bring in food from outside Thethi to feed guests.
	Accumulation of solid waste.	Yes, primary cost to local people (and tourists while visiting). The presence of visitors to Thethi aggravates the waste management problem by increasing the amount of packaging and construction waste to piles around village.
	Increase in production of wastewater (sewage and grey	Unclear, not tested; likely primary cost to local people (and tourists while visiting). The presence of visitors to Thethi aggravates the waste management problem by increasing the amount of sewage and

	water).	grey water released directly into the environment, potentially contaminating soil and waterways.
	Infrastructure construction.	Yes, cost and benefit to local people and benefit to tourists. Building: tourist infrastructure, modification of homes, road improvements, bridge reconstruction, preservation of Kula, church, 'museum'.

The majority of social and economic costs are to the local community; these can be correlated to the five common themes underlying negative impacts of tourism development: disruption to daily life (minor), disillusion with failed promises of tourism development, conflict, cultural change, and environmental degradation<sup>8</sup>.

### **Stakeholders and their roles in the current tourism development process in Thethi**

To address how STD in Thethi could be pursued more effectively, the impacts described above must be connected to the current tourism development process, by identifying stakeholders and their role or form of participation in Thethi tourism development. Multiple stakeholders existed, including: landowners (local, non-local); transportation providers (furgon drivers); investors (local, Albanian, foreign), Government (local, regional, national), international NGOs (B3P UK, UNEP, UNDP, etc.); local NGOs (IEP, SNV, GTZ, REC Albania); local community (distinct groups based on age, gender, year-long or part-time residents, socio-economic position, etc.); tour operators (Outdoor Albania, foreign companies, etc.); tourists (regional, foreign); and researchers (IPPE, SVP, independent).

An interesting concept to consider is the impact of geographical and timescale boundaries on stakeholder identification. This is especially pertinent when considering impacts of development on the environment, which can occur in much longer timescales than, for example, economic benefits or income, although they may occur on a similar scale to social changes. While geographical boundaries were limited to tourism development within the village, it should be noted that national and international stakeholders could also influence this process. If a sustainability approach is taken, then timescale for tourism development must be considered a few generations.

The main stakeholder of interest is the local community because tourism development is a vehicle for rural development, which is their primary objective. However, although not typically

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<sup>8</sup> Moscardo, G. Building community capacity for tourism development, 2008.

included in traditional management or organizational theory stakeholder lists<sup>9</sup>, and excluded in IUCN stakeholder lists, Drisco and Starik have argued for the inclusion of the natural environment as a primary stakeholder, not just represented by environmental groups, organizations, or networks. It is interesting to note that although typically a community and environment are considered one stakeholder, believed to have uniform objectives and values, this is rarely the case. Thethi's community is very diverse from the point of view of age, gender, and socio-economic status. Similarly, the environment is also very diverse, in terms of multiple components and capacity to absorb impacts. The impact of tourism will be far less on the atmosphere than on the water supply.

There are multiple stakeholders and projects, all being implemented independently often allowing for little interaction between one another. Some projects, such as the accommodation project, went through a planning stage in their design; many unplanned projects lacked environmental, social, or economic impact assessments before (or after) implementation. Many also lack of monitoring and evaluation, especially in a holistic sense.

### **Sustainability of Thethi's tourism development process**

A lack of evidence was found in evaluating Thethi tourism development for four components in sustainable tourism and rural development literature: i) functional and efficient institutional support and frameworks, ii) communication and coordination between stakeholders, iii) awareness and education, and iv) redefining the perception of development to follow sustainability principles

There are some schemes outlining stakeholder involvement and how to include the local community in TD decision-making<sup>10</sup>. An example is the development project "Alps National Park" zoning. Since this model is project-based, it was compared to the development of one tourism project in Thethi. The GTZ accommodation project was selected for comparison because it is best developed, with information readily available.

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<sup>9</sup> Mitchell, R. K., Agle, B. R., & Wood, D. J. Toward a Theory of Stakeholder Identification and Saliency: Defining the Principle of Who and What Really Counts. *The Academy of Management Review*, 1997.

<sup>10</sup> Eagles, P., McCool, S., & Haynes, C. *Sustainable tourism in protected areas: guidelines for planning and management*. IUCN, 2002.

In making this comparison, the GTZ project includes some relevant steps of the ideal TD process, namely stakeholder identification and community capacity building via workshops. However, their project is solely dependent on tourism without consideration of other options, its lack of strategic planning, monitoring, and evaluation, indicates a lack of sustainability in project development.

### **Towards sustainability: Leverage points for change in Thethi tourism development**

The lack of sustainability observed above is problematic because it could act to damage the key resource for tourism development, the pristine environment, aside from aggravating already present resource management problems and social inequalities. It should be of interest to all stakeholders involved, but especially the local community in Thethi, to pursue sustainable tourism development.

Although some changes could be implemented immediately, via actions of NGOs working with the local community, many are long-term changes. Also, knowing that the activities and role of the central and regional governments are currently observed to be minimal in the region, it is unclear how effective changes in institutional structure would be in increasing the sustainability of the tourism development process in Thethi. Therefore, in the short-term, relying on these stakeholders to implement change may not be practical or useful for the local community; tourism is occurring to promote rural development for the local residents, but to do so needs to be sustainable while protecting their key resource, the environment. It is the local community that should theoretically have the highest interest in adjusting the current form of tourism to something more sustainable because they have the most to gain and lose from the development.

### **Thethi's local community as the main actor in tourism development**

Management stakeholder salience theory is based on examining single relationships between a “manager” and “stakeholder” who are connected to an “organization”. In the context of this research, there is no individual manager or an organization; rather, the manager is replaced by the person, individual, or institution who has the decision-making power in the tourism development process (landowner, local or regional government who control development, managers of individual projects, or those with access to funding) and the organization becomes the tourism development process. The “manager” is defined as the regional government or Commune, as they by law control development, landownership, and should technically be

responsible for protected area management. Second, the attributes of power, legitimacy, and urgency were defined for this research context. For the attribute of power, there were no examples of coercive power found in this research, utilitarian power was based primarily on access to financial resources, but also social connections in Thethi, materials, land, and local knowledge, and normative power could be based in deeds and contracts or institutions, such as the government or local traditions. The bases for legitimacy and urgency in the context of this research were similar to that defined by Mitchell, Agel, and Wood (1997). Results of this analysis are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Stakeholder typology in the current Thethi tourism development.**

Number of attributes	Stakeholder	Typology
3	Non-local landowners Investors: Local, Albania, foreign	Definitive
2	Transportation Investors: Albanian, foreign International NGOs Tour operators	Dangerous
		Dominant
	Local community, landowners Local NGOs	Dependent
1	Transportation National government Tour operators, Tourists Education, research	Dormant (power)
		Discretionary (legitimacy)
	Local government, Headman International NGOs	Demanding (urgency)

It is clear from Table 2 that investors (local, Albanian, and foreign) are definitive stakeholders, mainly due to access to financial resources; it should be noted that the percentage of local people with access to resources is likely low, but given their moral legitimacy, if they did have access to resources they have unquestionable salience in development. Also, non-local landowners are surprisingly definitive stakeholders because there is no management or enforcement of building activities, so they have the power to develop at will. The lack of enforcement of regulation and legislation also results in the local community as dependent stakeholders, because their power is based in land ownership, which is not defined or enforced. Similarly, local NGOs are also dependent stakeholders if they lack access to finances.

Dangerous stakeholders include transportation providers who are responsible for bringing tourists to the valley; however, as they probably have no urgent claim, they could also be classified as dormant. There are a surprising number of dormant, largely non-local and with access to finances but a lack of urgency; however, if their claims are urgent, they become dangerous stakeholders. Finally, only the local government or headman and international NGOs (if lacking funding) are considered demanding stakeholders, only possessing urgency in their claims.

Therefore, it is clear that primarily two elements differentiate stakeholders: access to finances, which results in power, and legitimacy. The stakeholders who do not have access to finances typically do have legitimacy, such as the local community, local NGOs and local entrepreneurs. The stakeholders with access to finances but not legitimacy, appear to be mostly non-local actors. However, given that contracts are not respected or enforced in Albania, and contracts form a basis for legitimacy, power overrides legitimate claims making dangerous stakeholders also definitive.

The local community could then become a definitive stakeholder in the current form of tourism development if they acquired access to financial resources; this could be through a micro-credit or small loan system operated by the government or an NGO. Currently in the EU, part of the rural development strategy is the establishment of the LEADER program, which funds small projects organized and implemented by local people on a local level. If finances are not attainable, the local community could form a partnership with other stakeholders who do possess power (utilitarian or normative) to increase their salience; for example, an international NGO that is well established has normative power and they could lobby the local government on behalf of the community to increase the communities' salience or landownership ownership, which would increase the communities' legitimacy. Partnerships or alliances could also be formed with non-local landowners, investors, and tour operators.

However, if the local community became a definitive stakeholder, or a main actor, in the Thethi tourism development process, this does not ensure that the process would change to become more sustainable; given the "low ecological" awareness and lack of knowledge of positive and negative impacts of tourism in the community, it is likely that development would continue on its current path unless capacity building occurred to increase the sense of urgency.

Remembering the other points and mechanism of change to increase sustainability in tourism development noted above, awareness and education and communication and coordination of stakeholders are also key. Therefore, in addition to leveraging the local community into a definitive stakeholder position, this must be accompanied by capacity building concerning positive and negative impacts of tourism. This could be carried out by other stakeholders; one who is invested in the development or who has an urgent claim, such as local or international NGOs. Communication and coordination between stakeholders would already be improved through the formation of partnerships, as noted above, but also the creation of a network between tourism development stakeholders would be valuable. There is indication that this may be occurring in the region through the development of LAG groups (personal communication, 2010).

## **Conclusion**

This piece has explored the tension between environmental and cultural preservation with the need for development. If the potential of the local community of Thethi to act as leaders in the tourism development of their village can be realized and capacity building takes place, then residents will be able to achieve sustainable rural development.

Associated with the post-WW II and post-communism periods of transition on international and national scales are the feelings of opportunity and potential for growth. Reginald Hibbert surely recognized these two things during his time in Albania, and it is clear that both local people and foreigners see the potential for opportunity and growth in Thethi. There is always the concern for the preservation of tradition versus the need and desire to modernize.

NGOs, like GTZ and B3P Albania, are keen to play central roles in building capacity and knowledge within the community, watching carefully the risks of the current transition period. There is a danger that tourism development, now so advantageously recognized, could prioritize economic growth over all else.

Just as Hibbert explored Albania and learned much from his experience (“In worldly matters, Albania was to be my university”), there is the potential for those involved with development in Thethi to both learn from the experiences others have had with balancing tourism, development, and preservation of culture, but also to set a new standard for rural development in the Balkans.

## ABBREVIATIONS

B3P	Balkan Peace Park Project
EU	European Union
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (German)
IEP	Institute for Environmental Policy
IPPE	International Peace Park Expeditions
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
LAG	Local Action Groups
LEADER	Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale (French)
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PA	Protected Area
REC	Regional Environmental Center
SNV	Stichting Nederlandse Vrijwilligers (Dutch)
STD	Sustainable Tourism Development
SVP	Shala Valley Project
TD	Tourism Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNEP	United Nations Environment Program

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