CONVENTIONAL TOURISM FROM SUSTAINABLE TOURISM TO ECOTOURISM

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Abstract

Tourism is an important branch of every nation’s economy and an important source of income to the national budget. Romania, as a member of the European Union, with a remarkable natural and cultural endowment, has an extraordinary tourism potential, which only waits to be fructified so as to reach its real value. As an element of sustainable development, ecological tourism deserves to be studied thoroughly because, in our opinion, in a growingly alert world, it is a domain with an enormous development potential.

Keywords: Tourism, sustainable development, sustainable tourism, ecotourism.

THE IMPACT OF TOURISM ON THE ENVIRONMENT

By nature, tourism related activities have certain effects on the environment. All these effects may vary depending on the amplitude of the tourist activities, the factors which contribute to either their increase or their decrease. All of these effects have led to the emergence of the notion of impact of the tourism activity on the environment.

The way in which the impact in tourism is produced is determined mostly by the tourism demand and supply. The pressure put upon the environment will determine the impact from tourism depending on the carrying capacity of the area. The ways to control the impact largely influence the demand for tourist activities, and, by default, their development. The impact produced by the tourism related activities endorses both anthropic and natural elements. But the most important prejudices are those brought upon the natural environment. These are the following:

- Changes into the composition of the floristic and faunistic species: the species’ habitat destruction, the killing of the animals, the influencing of the internal and external animal migration, the destruction of rare vegetable species, the clear cut of the natural vegetation to build tourist facilities;
- Pollution: water pollution caused by residual waste, air pollution caused by the auto vehicles exhaust emissions, soil pollution caused by subsidence, noise pollution;
- Erosion: the soil’s subsidence, which leads to the growth of the pluvial leak and the superficial erosion, the magnification of the processes which trigger avalanches, the damage of distinctive geological forms such as caves, the deterioration of river banks;
- Degradation of natural resources: the diminishing of water resources caused by over demand; greater wildfires risk;
- Negative visual impact: the building of big hotels and vast leisure areas; the waste as a result of the tourist flow.

In order to limit the impact on the environment, in the past years a set of indicators has been used to determine the maximum carrying capacity of a tourist area. This maximum capacity varies depending on the forms of tourism, the size of the destination...
area, the technical and material endowment, etc. (Istrate et al., 1996)

Fig. 1 The relations established between tourism demand and environmental impact (Bran et al., 2000)

Table 1 Guidelines for the use of tourism resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tourist activity</th>
<th>Maximum number of persons</th>
<th>Peak time employment ratio*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Picnic</td>
<td>50 pers / ha</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports fishing</td>
<td>10 m /pers</td>
<td>0,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walks, hikings – managed forest</td>
<td>200 pers / ha</td>
<td>1,25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walks, hikings - unmanaged forest</td>
<td>100 pers / ha</td>
<td>1,25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer sports</td>
<td>150-200 pers / ha</td>
<td>1,25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beach</td>
<td>2 sqm of sand + 8 sqm of land</td>
<td>1,50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botanical garden visiting</td>
<td>150 pers / ha</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoological garden visiting</td>
<td>500 pers / ha</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walks in the park</td>
<td>100 pers / ha</td>
<td>0,25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter sports</td>
<td>1100 pers / HA</td>
<td>1,25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* the values of the coefficient range between (0-2)

Source: Antonoaie N, Foriş T, Creţu R. *Tourism Management*, p.69 (Antonoaie et al., 2002)
SUSTAINABLE AGRITOURISM DEVELOPMENT

The concept of sustainable development

Tourism represents one of the world’s largest industries and, at the same time, one of the most important factors to global economic development. Today, one of every 15 employees is working in the tourist domain, an approximate of 112 million people worldwide being involved in this sector (according to The World Travel and Tourism Council).

In the year of 1991, professor Hans Kueng (from the University of Tubingen) stated that: „If we continue to treat nature as we had so far, we will jeopardize our future existence. Nowadays, we are living in a post-socialist and post-capitalist era, and the future economy will most certainly be a social and ecological one”.

The concept of sustainable tourism development, a notion that has been debated for more than twenty years now, is intended to counteract the menaces of critical management in the tourism domain. In 1991, following the collaboration between the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the World Federation for Nature Protection (W.N.F.) and the European Federation of Nature Reserves and National Parks (P.N.A.B.E.), the concept of sustainable tourism was defined as the development of all forms of tourism, of a tourist management and marketing which respects the natural, social and economical integrity of the environment, with the insurance that the natural and cultural resources will be preserved for the future generations.

According to another definition given by the World Commission on Environment and Development, “sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

The Finnish economist Malasko elaborates on this notion “human development is ecologically long-lasting in relation to the environment, if the interventions and effects imposed by human activities - either economical, technological, social or cultural - do not affect in a negative manner the rate of nature’s and ecosystems’ change, in a way independent of nature’s control or in an irreversible form from the point of view of future generations”.

The tourism industry has accepted the concept of sustainable development and has adopted the notion of sustainable tourism. Thus, sustainable tourism develops the idea of satisfying the present needs of the tourists and the tourism industry, and, at the same time, protecting the environment and the future opportunities. It is considered the satisfying off all economic, social, aesthetic, etc. needs, of all those involved in the tourism are, maintaining at the same time the cultural and ecological integrity, the biological diversity as well as every pattern that sustains life.

The place of tourism within sustainable development is logically given by its role as an industry which sells the physical and human environment as a product of its own. Tourism is one of the industries that must get involved into sustainable development, as an industry of resources, dependent in the endowment of nature and of the cultural inheritance of every society; tourism is selling these resources as part of its product, and, at the same time, it’s sharing certain resources with other users, including the local population.

The development of sustainable tourism is a necessity, considering that economy and environment are two sides of the same coin, in other words, the two are tightly connected and interdependent.

Essential to the sustainable development is the respect for the best interests of future generations. The basic idea that lies at the core of sustainable development is not to waste away the resources we need. In support of the above affirmations, here is the statement of Lester Brown: „We have not inherited the Earth from our fathers; we are borrowing it from our children”.

The entire movement for fighting pollution, the impoverishment of the resources, for protecting the variety of the biosphere, for the sparing of the species and the saving of the planet, was based on a series of new values, which mirror a new cultural mentality in rapport with nature, adopted especially by the young generation.

Regardless of the number of definitions coined by the specialized organizations and associations for the sustainable development of tourism, the essential fact remains the same: protecting and maintaining the resources we all need, resources which practically keep us alive and which also ensure the life of future generations.

Being in the spotlight, the sustainable development of tourism supposes the confrontation with the fact that the research for the bettering of life quality has an inherent constant feature: there is a limit to which human population and the activity of our planet can resist.

This theory has given birth to certain challenges and unique opportunities for the tourism industry:
The tourism activity, if properly led, can be a powerful force with respect to the conservation of the environment and of the cultural inheritance;
- In the form of ecotourism, sustainable tourism can become a cult for tourists;
- The tourism demand is proportional to the quality of the surrounding environment and of the tourist destination;
- Tourism leads to a growth in the population from the destination area;
- Often, tourism is considered to be the activity that protects the rural environment more than other resource consuming industries such as mining, constructions, etc.

The impact that tourism has on the environment can be: positive or negative, direct or indirect, tangible or intangible.

In order to approach and correctly understand these perspectives and the impact they have, a grouping of the involved factors is necessary:
- Ecological factors, particularly the flora, fauna and ecosystem;
- Physical factors, particularly natural resources, environment and facilities;
- Cultural factors, particularly traditions, language, religion, customs, culture;
- Social factors, seen from two points of view:
  - From the hosts’ viewpoint – encompasses all factors which correspond to their living standard;
  - From the visitors’ viewpoint – encompasses all factors which define their living standard and experience.

The advantages to promoting a sustainable tourism from the perspective of protecting the surrounding environment are obvious from the following statements:
- Sustainable tourism favors the profitable utilization of the fields with low agricultural productivity;
- Sustainable tourism favors the understanding of the effects that tourist activities have on the natural, cultural and human environment;
- Sustainable tourism directs the realization of certain leisure facilities which bring benefits for the local population and, thus, contribute with funds to the preservation of certain archeological sites, buildings and archeological vestiges;
- Sustainable tourism respects and ensures the environmental protection demands, proving, thus, just how important natural and cultural – historical resources are for the growth of economic and social welfare of the local communities.

At the Global Conference on Business and Economics (GCBE), which took place in Vancouver, Canada, in the year of 1992, a great number of specialists coming from over 60 countries asserted the major changes that took place in the tourist industry field in the past 10 years. These changes aimed at all aspects by which the tourist industry can be approached, namely:

1. In the field of communication and training
- The evaluation of the positive results from the past with the purpose of establishing some new proposals of sustainable development, with the broadcast of positive projects and experiences via national and international institutions;
- The elaboration for the tourist industry of certain codes of practice, of the standards for the environmental credit, in view of attenuating the impacts;
- The spread of an open attitude among the employees of tourist agencies and local population towards the environmental issues;
- The influence on the motivations to travel and on the tourist demand by applying the code of ethics for tourism, by better informing the tourists and augmenting the offer.

2. In the field of research and technology
- Assuring a technical and practical management of the tourist flow, so as to protect the ecological equilibrium and avoid damage to the environment;
- Realizing a data bank and a monitoring through specific indicators, considering the environmental protection, in order to support the new decisions regarding the plans and development of the industry and to stress out new opportunities;
- Identifying those cultural and natural resources with tourist valences;
- Setting the future tourist demand and comparing it to the offer’s capacity to ensure it;
- Efficient technologies are used for the projection of that tourism which is open to the problems of the surrounding environment, through the application of certain architectural solutions of construction engineering, in
accordance with the particularities of that specific area, and without affecting the environment.

3. With respect to the legislation, regulations and policies

- For the implementation of sustainable tourism it is necessary to found the institutions and a specific plan;
- Mobilizing the tourist industry sectors in view of practicing a sustainable tourism in accordance with the environmental demands;
- Ensuring the protection and conservation of basic tourist resources.

4. In the economic and financial field

- The obtaining of certain benefits out of the environmental marketing, by selling some tourist products compatible with their value;
- Including in the receipts charged for tourist activities the average cost so that the polluters will have to support a series of taxes connected to the specific forms of pollution, by which they shall indirectly contribute to the conservation of the surrounding environment;
- Utilizing the influence of the internal and international market with the purpose of identifying new tourist markets, respecting the environmental demands and realizing joint partnerships for the applying of the ecotourism concept, concept which represents the element that supports sustainable tourism.

5. Other aspects

- Realizing certain models and projects in order to support the sustainable development of the tourism, presenting at the same time the possibilities of applying them;
- Practicing an active education of environmental protection combined with the understanding of environmental issues, in all areas that benefit from the natural and cultural resources of the tourism industry;
- Establishing certain collaboration relations between all sectors of activity preoccupied with the environmental protection (regional planning, agriculture, silviculture).

Principles of sustainable tourism

The major principles for the sustainable development of tourism are:

- The environment has a sustainable value, which is of great importance for tourism; future generations should, in their turn, be able to enjoy the environment;
- Tourism should be regarded as a positive activity that the surrounding environment, local communities and visitors should benefit from;
- The relation between environment and tourism can be developed so that the environment sustains long-term tourist activity; in its turn, the development of tourism should not lead to the degradation of the environment;
- The development of tourist activity should respect the characteristics of the area where it takes place (ecological, social, economic and cultural);
- The purpose of tourism development should always be that of balancing the tourists’ needs with the needs of their destinations and hosts;
- The tourism industry, the governments, and the authorities responsible with the environmental protection must respect these principles and work together to apply them.

In the specialized literature we meet with three major principles of the sustainable development:

- Ecologic sustainability ensures an endurable development with the maintenance of all essential ecologic processes, and especially of the diversity of biological resources;
- Social and cultural sustainability guarantees an economic development favorable to the members of society, consistent with the culture, the existent values of culture and civilization, and with the keeping of the community’s identity;
- Economic sustainability has an important role in the insurance of an efficient economic development, the resources being administrated so as to also be available in the future.

The economic sustainability of tourism is defined as a model of development which ensures:

- The improvement of the quality of life within the human settlements open for tourists;
- The possibility to offer visitors top quality experiences;
- The maintenance of the surrounding environment’s quality, an essential element for hosts and visitors as well.
Ecotourism and the sustainable development in the field of agritourism

The notion of „ecotourism“ emerged in the countries with a strongly developed tourist industry. Also known as „green tourism“, „low impact tourism“, „bio-tourism“, ecotourism developed following the consumers’ desire to vacation in a cleaner environment, unaltered by the modern interventions of the contemporary society.

In fact, ecotourism represents the most valuable manifestation form of sustainable tourism. In time, due to the growth of the interest in the environmental protection issues, ecotourism was given a growing importance, until the relation pictured below was reached (Bran et al., 2000):

Sustainable development should take into consideration, on the one hand, the modality of arrival, and, on the other hand, the specific interests of hosts and visitors from a certain region, the tourist resources and the way in which these are decisive when it comes to ecotourism activity.

The tourism – environment relationship is indestructible and, consequently, the development of the ecotourism sector can ensure a good management of these resources. The development of a tourist area is realized concomitantly with the maintenance of its ecological integrity.

Tourist resources were classified according to several criteria: the employment value (fundamental and auxiliary), the possibility of renewal (exhaustible and inexhaustible), the degree at which they are known and used (identified, identified but unexploited, unidentified). But the criterion that is mostly used is the one which divides resources into natural and cultural resources.

The most important natural resources are the following:

- Mountainous areas, with altitudes higher than 1200 m, are the most wanted by tourists, all year round, regardless of the season
- Hilly areas;
- Depression and valley areas of the mountain and hill regions, in the form of gorges, canyons, highly appreciated by tourists
- Meadow and delta areas, where the aquatic elements dominate;
- Plain areas, which generally have little tourist appeal;
- Coastline areas, which can vary: wide beaches, with fine sand or high cliffs;
- Climate types: there are several bioclimatic types that may or may not be favorable to the specific tourist activities;
- Hydrographic net in all its forms of representation: rivers, lakes, seas, oceans, underground waters;
- Vegetation storeys;
- Fauna, represented by the species which arouse cynegetic or piscicultural interest;
- Protected areas, which can be of various types: national parks, natural parks, reservations, etc.

This new form of tourism supposes the succeeding of all tourist activities within an unadulterated environment. Ecotourism takes into account three main directions:

- Preserving the quality of the surrounding environment
- Economic and technological reorganization, based on the reshaping of resource management
- Practicing certain types of individual or group tourism meant for the awareness of the pollution problems and their manifestation forms.

CONCLUSIONS

The concept of sustainable development has reached all economic and social domains, tourism included.

Any form of tourism – ranging from ecotourism, rural tourism, cultural tourism to business tourism and conventions or motor tourism - should respect the principles of sustainable development.

The impact that tourist activities have on a certain area depends on the natural setting and the diversity of the tourist potential, on the existence of a general infrastructure and on that of tourism structures, namely accommodation, restaurants and leisure. These particular elements of tourism determine several types
of impact (political, social, economical, cultural, etc.), which can have both positive and negative aspects.

The goals, principles, and demands of tourism development are to be found in ecotourism, rural tourism, cultural tourism etc., all of these forms representing the desire for tourism to be a positive and dynamic factor of the economic development and a practical solution for the unaltered maintenance of the environment.

REFERENCES

