

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM TYPES

Ion-Danut JUGANARU, Lecturer PhD
Mariana JUGANARU, Professor PhD
Andreea ANGHEL, Assistant Student PhD
Ovidius University of Constanta, Faculty of Economic Sciences

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Abstract: Tourism development must be based on sustainability criteria, be long term bearable economically and ethically and socially equitable for the local populations of the destinations.

Tourism forms identified by the literature as being “sustainable” are numerous: ecological tourism (ecotourism), green tourism, soft, rural tourism and agrotourism, community tourism, solidarity and responsible tourism, all these opposing to the traditional, mass tourism.

According to some specialists only tourism in natural reservations or national parks is considered to be ecological. A larger concept of ecological tourism refers to that form of responsible travel, developed in natural spaces, that contributes to environment protection and local population life conditions improvement and wellbeing.

Equitable tourism is a form of sustainable tourism aiming at applying in the tourism sector the principles of equitable commerce, respecting a series of criteria, that focus on respect of the residents and their life style, as well as sustainability of tourism progress for local communities.

Solidarity tourism is about establishing a dialog, solidarity relationship between tourists and their hosts.

The current strategy for tourism development in more and more countries aims at orientating this sector toward a tourism that brings together respect for environment and new jobs creation, and also holidays affordable by anyone (by most people).

Tourism development must be based on sustainability criteria, must be long term economically bearable and ethically and socially equitable for the local population of the tourism destinations.

Tourism must contribute to the sustainable development by integrating into the natural, cultural and human environment it must respect the fragile equilibrium that is characteristic to numerous tourism destinations [12].

Sustainable tourism

The European Commission has adopted its own definition for sustainable tourism, according to which it is „any form of development, improvement or tourism activity that respects the environment, preserves in the long term the natural and cultural resources and is socially and economically durable and equitable”.

Sustainable tourism allows the development of tourism and recreation activities in a country, region or tourist destination by taking into account the basic principles of sustainable development, showing respect for the environment, for the people and for the economy and the local culture of the tourist receiving region [4].

From an ecological point of view, sustainable tourism refers to the multiplication of responsible initiatives, to the permanent care for the preservation of the Earth as well as to the dissemination of the good practice examples in the field.

From a social point of view sustainable tourism refers to the attempt to focus as much as possible on the local human universe, in order to understand the local preoccupations, to appreciate local values and the depth of customs and traditions in the respective areas.

Sustainable development is about discovering a foreign culture, and in order to do that tourists should [1]:

- stay curious but pay attention to natural environments (to watch the plants without breaking them and to watch the animals quietly without disturbing them)
- to choose accommodation following the criteria of respect for the environment; to give preference to rural establishments and accommodation in rural houses (boarding houses)
- to respect the life style of the hosts, by showing interest in their culture and spoken language, and before leaving to such a destination one should do a research in order to know what objectives may be visited in the area
- to adapt as much as possible their nutritional behavior to local traditions.

Sustainable tourism is based on the refusal to accept „the double standard” („I do at your place, what I wouldn't do at mine”). When we travel, we should adopt the same life rules as in our own regular environment, as long as it does not contradict local life rules.

Sustainable tourism is considered to be that form of tourism that favors long term management of resources in such a manner that the economic and social needs be met, maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biodiversity and vital needs feed back systems [2]. Sustainable tourism products function at local level in harmony to the environment, the community and local cultures.

The main forms of sustainable tourism

There are many forms of sustainable tourism: the ecological tourism (ecotourism), the green tourism, the soft tourism, the rural tourism and agro tourism, community tourism, equitable tourism, solidarity and responsible tourism etc.

- Ecological tourism is the generic notion for natural exploitation (commercialization) of resources as tourism products, in a sustainable manner [9].

In the opinion of some authors only tourism in natural reservations and national parks is considered to be ecological or eco-tourism.

The notion of ecotourism was first defined in 1983 by the Mexican Hector C ballos-Lascurain (subsequently, the director of the Ecotourism Commission of the International Union for Nature Preservation). It was actually a concept created to describe a tourist travel based on knowledge and discovery motivation, in a natural protected environment, with emphasis on education and tourist awareness toward the environment.

- Ecotourism or green tourism is [13] ecological tourism, with the main objective to preserve the nature or approach to rare species. Ecotourism activity involves an important education and interpretation component, as well as support for raising awareness on the necessity of natural and cultural capital preservation. Ecotourism must have minimum consequences on the environment and must also contribute to the welfare of local populations.

Ecotourism became widely known at the beginning of the 90's in North America, as a response reaction to the growing interest for the wild nature and represents a form of responsible travel, in natural spaces, which contributes to environment preservation

and local population life conditions improvement [2]. Ecotourism products are conceived with a special attention paid to nature, in very little human disturbed regions. Ecotourism involves respect for local sites and cultures in a view of sustainable development.

In the world ecotourism reunion in May 2002 in Québec (Canada), a special attention was given to the inherent solidarity and human dimensions of this tourism form. On the same occasion the Declaration regarding ecotourism was adopted, and it contains the appreciation that this tourism form encompasses sustainable tourism principles as far as the economic, social and environmental effects are concerned and were also adopted the Principles of Ecotourism. On the other hand, the World Nature Alliance stated the finality of ecotourism: „to admire, study, appreciate the landscape, flora, wild animals and any cultural characteristic of a region”.

For some countries ecotourism [13] is not just a marginal activity, destined to finance environment preservation actions, but a sector that is the engine of the national economy, and a means to generate important revenue. For instance, in countries such as Kenya, Ecuador, Nepal, Costa Rica and Madagascar, the ecotourism is the main foreign currency generator.

There are still people that did not understand the significance of ecotourism and consider it refers to building a hotel in the middle of nature, in a spectacular landscape, ignoring that this investment damages the local ecosystem. According to such people, ecotourism should first of all raise the awareness on the beauty and frailty of nature, but are not conscious that they themselves contribute to the degradation of the natural environment, by using air conditioning installation or pools, etc. Such activities are named by the tourism sector professionals „green laundry” („lavage vert”) and it is considered that this type of activities actually conceals a mass tourism, conventional, but considered „green” tourism.

At world level, USA is the main ecotourists spring (over 5 million people per year), most of the other ecotourists come from Europe and the elites of a few Southern countries.

- Green tourism is represented by all particular forms of tourism circulation, with a development in perfect harmony with the natural and socio-cultural environment of the receiving area. It is also defined as the ensemble of tourism forms promoted with the end of improving the social, cultural and environmental impact of tourism. [10]

- Soft tourism [9]. Besides the nature preservation scope, which is a common trait for all tourism that aims at environment compatibility, as well as human health protection, this type of tourism has other purposes: on one hand, social purposes (respect for customs, traditions, social and family structures of the local population), and on the other hand, economic purposes (equitable revenue distribution, tourism offer diversification). Soft tourism sets itself away from the artificial and impersonal forms of the mass tourism.

- Rural tourism is one of the most efficient solutions for harmonization tourism demands and environment preservation and sustainable development rules [6].

In a broader sense, rural tourism refers to holidays spent in rural areas [7], but this definition has proved to be rather imprecise, generating divergent opinions regarding the content and characteristics of rural tourism, from the simple stay in rural areas, to respecting the strict criteria related to the behavior of tourist-consumers, such as: consume of agro alimentary products from the hosts household and participating in economic activities specific to the farm or household etc.

In the present context of the global economy, rural tourism is defined as [8] tourist valorization:

- Of rural spaces, natural resources, cultural patrimony, rural constructions, village traditions, earth products;
- Through brand products, illustrative to the regional identity, covering the needs of the consumers for accommodation, nutrition, entertainment and various services;
- To the end of local sustainable development and to answer adequately to the need for relaxation in modern society, in a new social solidarity city-country side.

If the sphere encompassed by rural tourism is broader, referring to all activities developed while staying in the rural environment, regardless of the accommodation unit type, the agro tourism is more rigid respecting a series of holiday rules and considering the economic effects of tourism on the households and the rural establishments. Agro tourism, therefore [6] is about staying in the household (boarding house, farm), consuming agricultural products from that household as well as participating up to an extent, in some of the specific agricultural activities.

In order to meet a growing demand for participative rural tourism forms, the accommodation offers in the rural environment have been enriched by including theme holidays, which invite the tourists to discover nature (walks or horse back rides), local or regional gastronomy classes, wine and traditional food products tasting etc.

- Community tourism is focused on involving local populations in a tourism development localized and developed to their benefit: they build and manage the accommodation structures, as well as the local services offered to tourists. Local populations have complete control over tourism generated revenue, a great part of the revenue being destined to improve life conditions of the community, giving special attention to the respect for nature and local population traditions. This tourism development form is often combined with production activities development, such as agricultural products transformation or handcraft workshops, whose products are primarily sold to tourists.

- Equitable tourism. It represents [13] a concept that involves applying within the sector the principals of equitable commerce. Although still less developed than the equitable commerce, equitable tourism is put in practice by a growing number of tourism associations and enterprises, whose ambition is to ensure the communities in tourism destinations an equitable part of the tourism generated revenue, as well as tourism reconciliation with community sustainable development.

Equitable tourism is about [3], for instance:

- Tourist holidays, realized by consultation with local associations consortia and local population, collaboration and joined effort for holidays elaboration;
- A fair remuneration of local partners, by total transparency of the tourism products price mechanism;
- Commitment to a durable relationship with local populations, to a sole end: the improvement of social and economic conditions at tourism destinations. Tourists must also be trained to be responsible by informative campaigns about the consequences of their holidays.

Mainly, equitable tourism refers to a series of criteria that focuses on residents and environment respect, meetings between tourists and locals as well as sustainability of tourism progress for the local communities.

In this way, tourism projects are elaborated by the communities or at least in a partnership with them. The communities effectively participate in the evolution of

activities developed by visitors within tourism destinations, with the possibility to modify, re-orientate or even stop them.

- Solidarity and responsible tourism. According to the definition of the International Forum for solidarity tourism in Marseille, France in 2003, solidarity and responsible tourism is a social movement that aims at keeping under control and valorize tourism economy, to the benefit of local communities at destinations, in a territory development intercession. This intercession is built entirely starting with the human, cultural, economic and environmental resources of the society, that form the life framework of the local communities [5].

This tourism form engages the responsibility of all the actors involved: host population, intermediaries and tourists, the responsibility being based on the local customs and values respect and their environment, as well as a certain equitable redistribution of the generated revenues.

Therefore equitable tourism emphasizes the correct remuneration for various entities that intervene in production and commercialization of tourism products, especially for local population. One may assume that the tourists will agree to pay more for services, knowing that the difference will allow a better remuneration for basic service providers. As with consumer goods, sustainable tourism services tend to be based on brands that certify their quality.

Solidarity tourism establishes more precisely a dialog, solidarity, mutual help relationship among tourists (mostly residents of developed countries), on one hand and their hosts, from developing countries, on the other. With solidarity tourism, nongovernmental organizations from developed countries get involved in partnerships with other NGOs from developing countries, which in turn, relate to local communities. This form of tourism remains still too little known to the greater audience and suffers from a lack of control, quality and partnership.

Equitable and social tourism undertakings are based on two strategic elements:

- 1) the populations of the South are the weak link of the tourism chain, when confronted with greater players that aim at maximizing profits, while the competition diminishes dramatically their benefits.

- 2) a growing part of the tourists from the North, but also many NGOs as well as other citizen associations are ready to support this consolidation process of local societies and to maximize the economic results to the direct benefit of these populations, favoring discovery, in the respect of identity and values.

Responsible tourism proves that although based on market, commercial principals, an alternative to mass tourism product consumption is possible. Being an experimental field for the tourism of the future, responsible tourism valorizes the specificity of places, patrimony and local culture and tests cross-border good practices, such as benefit distribution within local populations at destination.

Responsible tourism covers the forms of alternative or advances tourism, integrated, mainly: ecotourism, solidarity tourism, community tourism and tourism “in favor of the poor”.

Integrated tourism is considered to be local tourism, developed in rural area, inbound tourism wanted and developed by the residents, a tourism for meeting and interrelationship. The confuse character corresponds to a relationship that it established among different local players in order to provide the service. [3].

A common trait of these tourism forms is their contribution to local population development. The others refer to strategy, operation modes, efficiency, market niches, human and financial means aimed at development actions [5].

Conventional tourism (classic) makes the object of much criticism. For instance, developing countries cannot “master” tourism flows, controlled generally by international groups from industrialized countries, and external balance of payments is often negative in developing countries, since foreign currency incomes are outgrown by the import products need.

From a social point of view, tourism jobs are usually poorly paid and are mostly seasonal and with few possibilities of attaining real qualifications. It is said that tourism frails the social tissue [5], shakes cultural bases and depths social disparities, by introducing unsustainable consume patterns. By transports, the gas emissions have green house effects, contributing to planetary disequilibrium, and by its impacts on Earth, pollution, overexploitation, landscape degradation occurs.

From the perspective of local and international constraints, of its dependence on public opinion, fashion trends, consumer patterns etc., the present tourism offer has a series of weak points. Therefore one of the dangers for responsible tourism is the saturation of sites, places, communities and persons responsible with tourist reception, by a mechanic effect of high growth of frequency. Another danger is the temptation to crate niches, very narrow client segments, as well as practicing a destination, products, territory or client elitism.

Some tourism associations and some tour-operators have engaged publicly to change their practices and support local project from destinations, in order to help the residents develop. Such attitude is considered to be normal when it comes from the associations sector, but is more surprising when it comes from tourism market operators.

In order to step out of the offer ambiguity (solider or responsible) it is necessary to reach the client, because this offer corresponds to a real demand, although still reduced as volume, both in Europe and North America, and brings benefits to those that organize this type of actions[11].

In the manner rural tourism began as a local development source and became indirectly an offer for a more and more numerous clientele, solidarity and responsible tourism will be able to “enrich” its promoters and organizers.

Sustainable tourism development

Tourism is an activity that may contribute to attaining a high level of economic and social development, as obvious in the example of some countries from Southern Europe. And yet, in order to attain this purpose, tourism development must be based on correct planning and be well run so as the benefic effects may transform in unpleasant consequences for people and the environment. An anarchic and speculative development of tourism may cause important prejudice to protection actions and good utilization of natural and cultural patrimony.

Under these circumstances sustainable tourism may be considered at the moment, as one of the major stakes of tourism policy. In fact, next to benefic economic aspects, tourism development causes quite frequently unfavorable consequences, first of all the risk of a powerful degradation of the natural environment, of the life style and cultural and social patrimony at destination. This risk is tight to the overexploitation phenomenon and to high density of tourism flows towards certain destinations.

Geographic concentration of international tourism flows risks to affect tourism development up to the extent where even the basis of tourism sector may be at risk. It is already widely known the case of certain areas with a high tourist concentration, where restructuring issues must be solved: unfit quality habitats, circulation difficulties, devastated environment (especially beaches and sea sides), phonic pollution and general natural environment pollution.

Developing countries even if receiving only a small number of foreign tourists are not exempt from unpleasant consequences and the risk to experience tourist rejection, even before tourism becomes one of the economic development factors for these countries.

Because of these reasons, sustainable tourism management is an important component of success in integrating tourism within the objectives of development. An inadequate tourism growth may be the cause of serious environment and social equilibrium damage. In such situations, tourism may determine the degradation of natural and cultural patrimony and may lead to the alteration of traditions and life style of the local population, up to the point where tourism is not accepted in certain area, due to the competition between local population and tourists for access to infrastructure and public equipment.

A concentrated sustainable tourism will have an essential role in the tourism sustainable development success. In fact, tourism has a number of economic traits that distinguished from other sectors.

For most of the developing countries one may see that available resources for tourism development are often insufficient and cannot be mobilized everywhere, at the same time. This involves options, especially regarding tourism improvements and general and specific infrastructure and especially road access, drinkable water, and electricity access and telecommunications. The options cannot be decided upon but within a good tourism development planning.

In this respect the main problem is adapting tourism management to sustainable development objectives. Traditional planning doesn't seem able to answer to the objectives of tourism development anymore, as long as this is often about choosing one or more areas that in the case of a success will become extremely concentrated tourist areas that is a situation contrary to the objectives of tourism sustainable development. Tourism development management should be able to play under these conditions a new role, of sustainable tourism development without reaching a too high concentration of tourism flows and the unpleasant effects of this concentration, situation which may cause eventually a rejection of tourism by the local population.

This is the scope of the actual challenge – the revision of the objectives and especially the practices of tourism resources management which should be able to allow solving the specific problems of financing the tourism sector, bearing in mind the growing competition among destinations, on the international tourism market.

To sum up, there are numerous sustainable tourism forms, some of which to little known by the majority of tourists, but unfortunately, also by many of the tourism organizers or service providers. Experienced tourism products consumers have become more sensitive to environmental issues, to the sustainable character of tourism activity. They expect new offers to respond to these requests. It is the role of tour-operators, first of all, to respond adequately to these requests, through their new offers.

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