

THE POSSIBILITIES OF TOURISM SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH WEST REGION OF ROMANIA

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Abstract

Tourism activities can, in particular, degrade the social and natural wealth of a community. The intrusion of large numbers of uninformed foreigners into local social systems can undermine pre-existing social relationships and values. Sustainable tourism development requires a partnership among the stakeholders of the local tourist destination.

Keywords: sustainable development, tourism, eco-tourism

1. Sustainable development – a short overview

Sustainable development involve ethical judgements regarding what is “right” and “fair”, about which people are different points of view. The sustainable development (Brundtland Commission definition) is the “ability to make development sustainable - to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Our Common Future, 1980). We can see here two aspects of the development: one aspect regarding the intra-generational equity and another one regarding inter-generational equity. An “honest” approach to timelines is also essential to questions of intergenerational equity: the idea that resources, whether economic, environmental or social, should be utilized and distributed fairly across generations. No single generation should bear an undue burden. This is not only a problem of leaving a clean, healthy planet for future generations, but also concerns pressing problems like meeting the medical, financial and social needs of an ageing population. (Strange, Bayley, 2008) In nowadays, in this complex world with limited resources the main issue from the integrated view is to reconcile present and future needs.

The sustainable development is about integration: developing in a way that benefits the widest possible range of sectors, across borders and even between generations. Our decisions should take into consideration potential impact on society, the environment and the economy, while keeping in mind that our actions will have impacts elsewhere and our actions will have an impact in the future.

We see that the economic growth alone is not enough. The economic, social and environmental aspects of any action are interconnected.

Sustainable development can be: spreading the benefits of economic growth to all citizens; turning brownfields into ecologically sound urban housing projects; increasing

educational opportunities for both girls and boys; innovating industrial processes to be more energy-efficient and less polluting; including citizens and stakeholders in policy-making processes. (Strange, Bayley, 2008)

When we talk about sustainable development we need to follow “three pillars” together: society, the economy and the environment. No matter which is the context, the basic idea is the same: people, habitants and economic systems are inter-related. We may be able to ignore that interdependence for a few years or decades, but history has show that before long we are reminded of it by some type of alarm crisis. Understanding the complex connections and interdependence of the three pillars requires some effort and the effort has to be constant.

Environment-economy interactions

The effects of economic activity on environmental dimension have long been analysed. The conclusion is that economic activities and related policies have positive and negatives effects on environmental issues and performance. Economic growth implies use of energy, of natural resources, as well as pollutant discharges and waste production. The effects on environment depend on production and consumption patterns and are influenced by the behavior of companies and the public, and not last, by government interventions. The technologies, also plays an important role in the interaction between economy and environment. Economic growth provides opportunities to finance environmental protection expenditure with potential benefits in the form of cleaner and less resource – intensive technologies and the production of environmentally friendly goods.

On the other side, the environment provides a number of productive and other services, including natural resources, while environmental policies and related instruments may have economic implications. Changes in environmental conditions affect the economy through changes in the quality and quantity of available natural resources. This is relevant for the sensitive sectors such as agriculture, forestry and tourism, but also for sectors relying on the use of natural resources (mining sector).

Environment-social interactions

The interaction between the environment and social dimensions are complex, many of the links are obvious and have long been recognized, while other are more difficult to observe directly and need to be further explored.

Degradation of environment causes many negative social effects, including the effects on health that impose high costs on society. The provision of equitable access to the natural resources and to the environmental goods and services is an issue in the counties where are facing with problems of rural and urban poverty. The environmental policies and the related economic instruments, like taxes, prices, may have side effects that are unevenly distributed among population and income groups, including direct or indirect effects on employment.

Contrary, the social conditions and behaviors shape environmental conditions and policies. The moving of population, the changes in demographic structure (ageing, migration between and within countries), the population growth or decreases, may have major environmental consequences. Education and training, awareness and consumer habits are important elements, as are features of social organizations, institutional

arrangements and legal frameworks. The availability and access to environmental information, opportunities for participation and partnerships of individuals, companies, and the capacity to have access to courts are important preconditions for triggering integrated, proactive approaches to environmental management and sustainable development.

Economic-social interactions

The interactions between economic and social dimensions have long been recognized. Many social factors (consumer behavior and household consumption patterns, number of households, time for leisure pursuits, disposable income levels) act as driving forces behind economic growth and related sectorial trends and patterns. The provision of human inputs to economic activities is an essential element of a country's economy. The social rules, attitudes and institutions affect the market, too. Social policies and related instruments are closely interwoven with economic processes and markets.

The economic processes affect society, also, at large, providing the foundation for greater prosperity but also affecting the distribution of economic benefits between the members of the society, individuals, and hence social conditions (cohesion, equity, well-being).

The way we live now puts pressure on resources and environmental systems, so the sustainable development has become an issue of fundamental importance and urgency that requires action.

2. Sustainable tourism of South West Region of Romania

Sustainable tourism of South West Region is attempting to make as low an impact on the environment and local culture as possible, while helping to generate future employment for local people. The aim of sustainable tourism is to ensure that development brings a positive experience for local people, tourism companies and the tourists themselves. Sustainable tourism is an adopted practice in successful ecotourism.

Global economists forecast continuing international tourism growth, the amount depending on the location. As one of the world's largest and fastest growing industries, this continuous growth will place great stress on remaining biologically diverse habitats and indigenous cultures, which are often used to support mass tourism. Tourists who promote sustainable tourism are sensitive to these dangers and seek to protect tourist destinations, and to protect tourism as an industry. Sustainable tourists can reduce the impact of tourism in many ways:

- informing themselves of the culture, politics, and economy of the communities visited
- anticipating and respecting local cultures, expectations and assumptions
- contributing to intercultural understanding and tolerance
- supporting the integrity of local cultures by favoring businesses which conserve cultural heritage and traditional values
- supporting local economies by purchasing local goods and participating with small, local businesses
- conserving resources by seeking out businesses that are environmentally conscious, and by using the least possible amount of non-renewable resources.

Increasingly, destinations and tourism operations are endorsing and following "responsible tourism" as a pathway towards sustainable tourism. Responsible tourism and sustainable tourism have an identical goal, that of sustainable development.

The pillars of responsible tourism are therefore the same as those of sustainable tourism – environmental integrity, social justice and economic development. The major difference between the two is that, in responsible tourism, individuals, organizations and businesses are asked to take responsibility for their actions and the impacts of their actions. This is partly because everyone has been expecting others to behave in a sustainable manner. The emphasis on responsibility in responsible tourism means that everyone involved in tourism – government, product owners and operators, transport operators, community services, NGOs and Community / based organization CBOs tourists, local communities, industry associations – are responsible for achieving the goals of responsible tourism.

3. Conclusions

Tourism is a recognised global industry - one of the largest industries in the world. Like any global industry, tourist business activities can have considerable impact on local development trends. The local impacts of the tourism industry are diverse and are often unique to the tourism sector.

Tourist activities, as traditionally defined by the tourism industry, fundamentally involve the transportation and hosting of the tourism consumer in a local community, i.e., "tourist destination," where the tourist product is consumed. No other global industry structures itself in such a way that the consumer is brought to the product, rather than the product being delivered to the consumer in his or her own community. This structural difference produces unique social impacts upon the local tourist community, including the interruption of local customs and lifestyles, the spread of infectious diseases, changes in local demographics, and changes in local housing and labor markets.

The primary product of tourism is not something produced by the industry. The product is often the heritage, wealth, and expected legacy of the community that serves as the tourist destination. The business activity of the tourism industry is to promote the "salable" or appealing aspects of the community, transport non-residents into the community, manage the hospitality for and guide the activities of these visitors, and provide them with goods and services to purchase during their stay. If these business activities degrade the community's heritage and wealth, then the community suffers more directly than the consumer, who can return to his or her own community without responsibility for or awareness of the impacts of his tourist activities.

Tourism activities can, in particular, degrade the social and natural wealth of a community. The intrusion of large numbers of uninformed foreigners into local social systems can undermine pre-existing social relationships and values. This is particularly a problem where tourism business is centered in traditional social systems, such as isolated communities or indigenous peoples.

Tourism in natural areas, euphemistically called "eco-tourism," can be a major source of degradation of local ecological, economic and social systems. The intrusion of large numbers of foreigners with high-consumption and high-waste habits into natural

areas, or into towns with inadequate waste management infrastructure, can produce changes to those natural areas at a rate that is far greater than imposed by local residents. These tourism-related changes are particularly deleterious when local residents rely on those natural areas for their sustenance.

Resulting economic losses can encourage socially deleterious economic activities such as prostitution, crime, and migrant and child labour.

The necessary measures for sustainable tourism development in Northern Oltenia can orient on the following¹:

- Solutions to adverse tourism impacts are to be found in the shared interest of local communities, tourism businesses, and tourism consumers to maintain the natural wealth and social heritage of the tourist destination. In the first instance, therefore, an institutional mechanism must be established, relative to each destination, to articulate and develop this sense of shared interest. To secure the legitimacy of these mechanisms, the participation of all interested local groups or interests must be guaranteed. Dialogue must take place in an open and transparent way.

- Experience demonstrates that if dialogue among interested parties is to have a real impact on development, it must generate accountability among these parties with regards to future investments, practices and policies. Consensus or decisions arising from dialogue must be reflected in institutional action. Only through such accountability can interests maintain a commitment to continued dialogue and a common agenda for local tourism development.

Experience demonstrates that this accountability should be reciprocal between individual or private interests and societal or public interests. Without such reciprocal accountability, local communities are typically forced to choose, in conflict, between private and public benefits, even if ample “win-win” development choices exist. On the one hand, accountability requires that property owners are provided with opportunity to retain the economic value of their property, either through sale or income generating activity. On the other hand, private market relationships, including property ownership, do not provide sufficient basis for social accountability related to “public goods,” including ecological integrity and social heritage. Private property titles do not recognise the concepts of ecological integrity or social heritage. Excessive reliance upon private property ownership as a guide in development has in fact contributed to the deterioration of public goods.

Within such a framework of accountability, numerous instruments are available to guide local tourist development on a sustainable path. These instruments include:

- heritage preservation requirements for site developments and building designs;
- programs to exchange land and development rights from non-suitable to suitable development areas;
- private heritage and green space stewardship programs;
- tax benefits accruing to property owners exercising sustainable development practices;

¹ Sustainable Tourism: A Local Authority Perspective prepared by the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Commission on Sustainable Development, Seventh Session, 19-30 April 1999, New York

- tourism taxes and development fees to support construction and maintenance of required infrastructure.

However, without true commitment to the sustainable tourism agenda, these instruments are not themselves sufficient to prevent the steady erosion, by legally sanctioned private actions, of local natural wealth and social heritage. Therefore, support from the international, national, provincial and local levels of industry and government,

Sustainable tourism development requires a partnership among the stakeholders of the local tourist destination. This partnership must use both market and non-market instruments to

implement a shared sustainable development vision. Without such a partnership, advocacy for

sustainable development becomes a conflictive struggle between an industry which seeks to respond only to market forces and a public sector which, when accountable, acts to protect public goods and wealth for future generations.

Therefore, the key problem at this stage of the "sustainable tourism" debate is the creation of tangible, working local partnerships. These local partnerships must be encouraged and supported by national governments and industry, and not undermined by "higher level" agreements. To succeed, local residents and their local authorities need to more fully recognise the significant adverse impacts of tourism development and must be informed about opportunities for reduced impact tourism development. Tourism businesses need to recognise and support the social conditions (e.g., security, public health) and the cultural and environmental wealth that make a community an attractive tourist destination.

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