Models and Alternative Strategies in the Context of Sustainable Development. Alternative Tourism

by
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Abstract. Tourism has a special importance in society with positive and negative on environmental, community, culture and economy issues. Sustainable development is compatible with tourism and can contribute in solving general problems but also those generated by mass tourism. The purpose of this paper is to present those forms of sustainable tourism with emphasis on demonstrating their utility and their importance as alternative strategies for sustainable development worldwide and in Romania.

Key words: alternative tourism, ecotourism, sustainable development.
JEL classification: Q01, Q56, R11

1 Introduction

Tourism is an area that experiences a real success in economic and territorial development of the countries, as it is practiced at a higher level, generating significant benefits and advantages; countries like Turkey, France, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Mexico, etc., are steadily developing and launching in travel and beyond this industry. Thus, successful tourism may be associated with functional and continuously growing economy, leading to a high standard of living, to a quality of life reflected in every field of activity, in sense of that existing an increased interest of citizens of a country to travel and frequently choose to spend their holidays visiting and to enrich their personal travel experience through choosing of exotic destinations, very different from the one in which they live and work.

2 Literature review

The present theme is in society's concerns which it passes thru a transition period from a increasing consumption society to values settlement that affect the welfare of the community and the environment. The meaning of sustainable development began to be studied in the 70s as a result of awareness of ecological issues. In 1972 was published The Limits of Growth Report (Club of Rome), which supports the idea that economic development brings negative effects on environment conservation. Later, a new vision of the sustainable development it came to the attention, which completes the previous one by the emergence of Our Common Future Report. (Brundtland Report). This report supports the idea that sustainable development should meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to achieve their own requirements. This report has been associated with:

- the elimination of poverty and exploitation,
- equal distribution of global resources,
- new methods for just population control
- lifestyle changes,
- appropriate technology,
- democracy

All these are achieved through public involvement. (WCED, 1987 cited in Baker and Kousis, 1997). Compatible in this are the concepts of sustainable tourism and alternative tourism. Sustainable tourism is a form of tourism that it’s mainly aim is to involve local community in tourism initiatives with long-term benefits providing support for economic, cultural, social residents. Sustainable tourism requires a careful understanding of the
relationship between the local community and environment, and also stresses the connection between political, economic, cultural community (Hall and Richards, 2000). Alternative tourism is a representation of sustainable development thinking and provides an alternative to mass tourism, through which the compliance of environment and local community is been reached with less negative effects tourism given the importance of economic development. Although this type of tourism promises positive effects is in conflict with expectations and how tourists were educated and used to participate in tourism experience, so they actually like not having to make their own travel arrangements, not having to find accommodations when they arrive at a destination, being able to obtain goods and services without learning a foreign language, being able to stay in reasonable and sometimes considerable comfort and not having to spend time and money to achieve these goals (Butler, 1992). Therefore, we can say that the mass tourist is passive, and has the prevailing desire to benefit with minimal effort.

The idea to adopt the concept of sustainable tourism development emerged in the early ‘90s, thus sustainable tourism arose – a branch which rapidly gained importance both in the academic and research fields, and in the touristic industry/activity/practise. The sustainable tourism concept is determined by the process of population increase, desire for better living, as well as by awareness of the environmental support ability. Sustainable development is based on the following essential managerial principles:

- setting the ecological boundaries, standards and consumption norms by reducing the unjustified consumptions;
- redistributing the economic activity and reallocation of resources, satisfying life’s essential needs and at the same time, economic growth;
- maintain an optimum population level, demographics increase being in agreement with the exploitable ecosystems potential;
- preservation of the basic resources and keeping the natural habitats which support the genetic patrimony of flora and fauna;
- legal access to resources, increase of technological effort and their rational use;
- establishing a minimum exploitation rate and consumption of the so-called “inexhaustible” resources;
- community control, role of the local community on decision –making for local development
- ensuring management for all resources laying accent on quality;

Starting from the key points of sustainable development, the impact of touristic activities supposes the following:

- enhancing viability in localities with reduced natural resources;
- use of poorly productive lands from an agricultural standpoint by providing adequate touristic equipment;
- increase of inhabitants’ income under the conditions of pasturage and woodland exploitation reduction;
- enhancing the economic strength of localities by achieving new income from local taxes and duties;
- encouraging traditional activities, especially handicraft ones and small traditional industry;
- developing a specific trade based on the local and hand wrought economic persons;
- the income gained from tourism and the trade specific for this framework may contribute to supporting the modernization actions of cultural objectives, for ecological rehabilitation of valuable landscapes;
- profit and cost accounting contribution – in consequence of activities relating to welcoming, hosting, transportation and public food service – will represent an important contribution to the local development plan.

In principle, sustainable tourism is dissociated from the mass tourism and is partially associated with alternative, contemporary (post masses) tourism forms. Alternative tourism is based on projects which stand out, that are an alternative to “all
inclusive”. I would say it aims to diversify touristic destinations and products on a young touristic market and preponderantly uneducated, subjected to identical products and “me too” consumption.

Alternative tourism comes into play when people visit places and things other than the usual touristic objectives. There are three large categories of this type of tourism: ecotourism, cultural tourism and adventure tourism.

3 Sustainable tourism and ecotourism in the world

Ecotourism involves travel, most of the times to developing countries, to relatively undisturbed natural areas for study, enjoyment or volunteer assistance (volunteering). It concerns itself with flora, fauna, geology and ecosystems of an area, as well as the people who live nearby, their needs, their culture and their relationship to the land (Swanson, 1992).

Ecotourism as a form of tourism appeared along with people’s need to withdraw to nature and to visit and get familiar with the natural area which enjoy or not a national or international status of protection.

The attention this form of tourism enjoys from the United Nations comes from the recognition of ecotourism’s potential as a sustainable development instrument which may lead to achieving the 3 important objectives of the Rio Convention, i.e.:

- preserving the biological and ecological diversity;
- promoting the sustainable use of biodiversity by generating income, workplaces and business opportunities in ecotourism;
- fair distribution of benefits yielded by ecotourism to the local communities and population.

Sustainable tourism includes cultural tourism, ecotourism and adventure tourism, but some aspects of alternative tourism can be included in mass tourism (Figure 1), so it is difficult to make a clear delimitation between sustainable tourism and mass tourism, it is still a transition period for implementation of sustainable tourism as the sustainable development methodology is a new chapter now, which is seeking options to resolve.

The legal and political frame, but also awareness and understanding of people (local community or international decision makers) are poorly represented.

4 The impact of sustainable tourism

In the context of a changing society, contemporary tourism is actually the effect of globalization, modernity and interest in ecology (Eriksson, 2003), exotic destinations have become more popular and more available for most tourists.

The rapidity with which change is reflected contemporary life and tourism; present requirements relate more with rapid consumption tour by visiting several destinations in a short period and less with tourist experience thru which tourists can be a part of the real destination atmosphere, which is beyond the commercial aspect. Globalization also has negative effects like destinations pollution, alteration of cultural values, development of unfair business, exploitation of the local workforce, western principles adopted by the community, etc. The common point
between globalization, modernity and ecology is sustainable tourism. Beyond the context when sustainable tourism emerged, this is important thru the produced effects in economic, social, cultural and environmental aspects. On the other hand is a young branch of tourism, with high cost support although it utilizes natural values (eg. Building green holiday houses in higher expenses than in ordinary houses). High costs are the lack of a strong sustainable tourism demand able to compete with mass tourism. But encouraging sustainable tourism initiatives can come from statistical estimates until 2050 (UNEP):
- tourism growth will imply increases in energy consumption (154%), greenhouse gas emissions (131%), water consumption (152%), and solid waste disposal (251%). On the other hand, under alternative greener investment scenarios (in energy and water efficiency, emissions mitigation and solid waste management) within a range of US$ 118 to US$ 248 billion, the tourism sector can grow steadily in the next decades while saving significant amounts of resources and enhancing its sustainability.
- Additional tourism GDP growth will be in the range of 3 to 7% above the BAU scenario, with a significant reduction in the expected growth of negative environmental impacts.

It is better to take into account the potential risks of sustainable tourism, which can be (Watkin, 2003 and Kiper et. al., 2011 cited in Kiper):
- Environmental degradation
- Environmental pollution rises
- The decays of natural resource happen
- Failure to meet the community’s perception of development
- Advantages open to abuse by community members
- Controversy about the motivation of such programmes
- Hotel, motel or other usages cause environmental decays.
- Transportation density rises.
- Disturbance to habitats and species
- Threats posed by dangerous animals
- Misre presentation and degradation of cultures
- Visual and noise pollution happen
- Feasible population rise effects local peoples’ daily life in a negative way.
- Conventional life style changes.
- Erosion of traditional values and for the guests
- Uneven benefit sharing between partners
- Low percentage of community employment
- Risk of failure in small businesses

5 Ecotourism in Romania

The application of the current principles for developing sustainable tourism in the natural habitats has led to the emergence of ecotourism as a distinct form of tourism, intended to observe the natural landscapes’ integrity, ecological biodiversity in agreement with the requirements of certain tourist segments wishing to spend their vacation in nature.

The more these resources are more varied and complex, but especially unaltered by anthropogenic activities, the more the touristic interest in them is higher, and the touristic activities they generate are more valuable and more attractive, responding to many touristic motivations.

Despite the fact that our country holds a special ecotouristic patrimony having high exploitation potential, ecotourism is still a quite narrow segment of the touristic market, confronted with numerous challenges, such as: poor cooperation locally, modest promotion nationally and internationally, existence of a limited, poorly diversified offer, poor development of the infrastructure specific to ecotourism at the level of the protected areas, migration of workforce, low level of training of those employed in the field etc.

By ecotourism the spectrum of traditional economic activities can be enlarged, without marginalizing or replacing them so that the local economy isn’t subordinated to external and internal influences and changes. The touristic activities carried out under the emblem of ecotourism give specific opportunities, local population and touristic industry having to use natural resources in a sustainable manner and appreciate natural and cultural valuable
objectives. According to the Ecotourism Association in Romania (AER), the economic impact yielded by ecotourism programs carried out by touristic operators members of AER in our country is in obvious growth from 0.95 million euros in 2004 to approximately 1.6 million euros in 2008. But what is remarkable is that the local impact is above average as related to classical tourism. In the AER members, approximately 80-90% of the expenses made by tourists remain in the area of carry out of the touristic programme, preponderantly in the rural area. Having regard to the fact that the data above concerns only a number of 16 economic operators, members of AER, quite focused from a territorial point of view, the huge potential that Romania has in developing this form of tourism may be deduced.

Under the context where ecotourism is a form of niche tourism, but still very dynamic, taking account of the regulations on environmental protection adopted in our country, the economic, social and cultural benefits that tourism can bring to the local communities, but also the negative effects a chaotic, uncontrolled development of tourism may generate, more and more often is raised the problem of achieving an ecotourism development strategy, strategy which should be in a close correlation with the development strategy of the tourism nationally (Master Plan for National Tourism Development), with the strategies for developing tourism locally (strategies to develop tourism in the protected areas) and with the National Strategy for Sustainable Development.

6 Cultural tourism

Cultural tourism is, basically, a form of economic development based on cultural resources. It is also a form of development that, apart from the role of participant in the economic reality, is a way of knowledge and understanding for people and companies of their environment and past. As a clarifying and rewarding experience, tourism can be a permanent instrument of cultural, intellectual, emotional and spiritual enrichment. The flows and exchanges between people differentiate tourism from the other mechanistic forms of commerce and economic development worldwide. Whether it is an artistic expressing form or a “modus vivendi”, culture is constantly a “representation form”. Tourism, trips and the various media means have created a universal awareness concerning the wealth and diversity of world’s cultures. Meanwhile, it is more and more clear that the participation in the cultural life cannot be considered a marginal activity as compared with other social, economic and political aspects. More than ever, we are aware of the value of culture, which may represent an especially important support for economic planning and developing. Tourism is an important component of the new “cultural economy” which exceeds the boundaries to the extent that it mobilizes and connects new categories of public and creates new pressures and opportunities.

One of the most remarkable development ways for over half a century is represented by tourism mobilization as a major instrument of economic development at a local, regional and national level.

The international tourism keeps expanding and its products are becoming sophisticated, but from a geographical point of view and under economic and social profitableness, as well as from the perspective of investments and environment, there are still large disparities from one country to the other and even within the same country. For developing countries, tourism is an export product, weighing heavier in the trade balance, having an increase rate of touristic arrivals from one year to the year over the world average. For a group of 49 developed countries (LDC), tourism is the main exchange rate source, except for the oil industry which refers only to three countries in this group (UNCTAD, 2008). It should be mentioned that in 2008, poorly developed countries received less than 1% out of the total of the world revenue from tourism. For developing countries, the mass tourism’s increase can be an attractive solution, precisely
because it allows the rapid acquisition of foreign currency especially if main operators are involved who have a direct access to international markets. However, numerous studies have shown that this option has serious disadvantages. First, it tends to dispossess the government and communities of the receiving countries of the decision-making power in terms of development of tourism operators and countries receiving tourists.

7 Adventure tourism

Having a rich touristic potential, Romania has a generous offer of touristic proposals of general or thematic interest. Tourism is for Romanians the “escape” to nature, where they can hike and practice both summer sports (mountaineering, cycling, mountain-biking), and winter sports (skiing, snowboard), as well as nautical sports (surfing, nautical skiing and diving, kayaking on rivers and lakes). The adventure tourism market has an ascending trend in Romania, areas especially picturesque being highly likely to be drawn to the international circuit of these activities:

Mountaineering. The Bucegi Mountains are the most important massifs in Romania for practising mountaineering, comprising the most numerous, long and difficult alpine routes (Costila, Caraiman and Jepi Mici, Morarul and Bucsoiul Mountains etc). There is also the Bicaz Canyon (Romanian: Cheile Bicazului). Paragliding. Thanks to the surrounding landscapes, but especially due to the strong air currents, over 30 locations in the country can be used for developing this sport (The Bucegi Mountains, Hașmaș Mountains and Bicaz Canyon, Apuseni Mountains, but also Vatra Dornei etc.).

Bungee-Jumping. It is an extreme sport, which requires bravery by which gravity is defied; it is said to have appeared for the first time in New Zealand. In Romania, there is one of the highest bungee systems in Europe in place at Rasnoavei Canyon (near Brasov). The adventurers can jump, and free fall, connected to a large elastic cord from cables suspended to rocky walls at 160 meter high.

Rafting & canyoning. Navigating pool-drop rivers on an inflatable raft (Valea Mureșului and Valea Oltului, Nera (West) or Bistrita (East), Jiu). The routes have varying degrees of difficulty and good length, and they can be covered in one day (Valea Dambovitei) or several days (Olt or Mureș). Bistrita River is considered as one of the best pool-drop mountain river for practising river rafting, seeing as it has difficulty degrees which allow practising this sport both for recreational purposes for beginners, and for professionals.

Trips on the mountain (tours). The mountains in the area are full of wild and beautiful places at the same time, which are excellent premises for organizing complex routes such as Eco Challenge for several days. This kind of activity is more and more appreciated both by adventure lovers, and by the Team Building-like enterprises. They follow the way in which a group deals with limited reserves under certain conditions, how they communicate with the group’s members to ensure survival with the final goal to develop group’s cohesion.

ATV and Quad. Small off-road vehicles for 1-2 persons with 4-6 wheels or caterpillar tracks. By these vehicles, very steep flanks can be climbed and especially rough portions of terrain can be passed through. The ATV is one of the most enjoyable ways to get familiar with an area. Any mountain plateau is a destination for ATV. There are special routes in the Caliman Mountains, Rarau-Giumalau or Suhard. Off Road. This a particular category of off-road car racing. As the mountains in the area are very wild and full of such a place, many routes can be made (Gura Humorului and Sucevita, Bistriței Mountains, Câlimani).

8 Fundamental forms of tourism

Currently, tourism is divided by the tourists’ place of origin into two general forms:

- national tourism (domestic) – involves residents of one country travelling only within that country.
- international tourism (external) – distinguished by the first one by the visits
from foreign citizens in a country and by the departures of autochthonous citizens for touristic purposes beyond their country’s borders.

Both tourism forms shown above have a number of particularities, and there is an interdependency whose purpose is to promote touristic activity as a whole, a fact which is very common, since the same material base is offered both to internal tourists and the external ones, seen and treated as simultaneous petitioners for touristic services.

Thus, depending on the place of origin or tourists’ origin, two major forms distinguish:
- **domestic tourism**, involving the population of a country within its national borders.
- **international tourism** which appears as a result of people’s travelling outside the borders of their resident country.

Domestic and international tourism are two forms of expression of the same phenomena, the relation between them clearly favoring the domestic one with different values from one country to the other. In wealthy countries from a touristic patrimony point of view, such as France, Italy, Spain, domestic tourism holds 60-70% of the total holidays, and in terms of the less wealthy ones like Germany, Holland, the domestic tourism ratio is a little more reduced, approximately 60% (in Romania the ratio was of 50%).

Following the international touristic trends occurring in a limited area in terms of surface, international tourism may be classified as:
- **inbound tourism** (receiving or passive) registering the non-residents arrivals in a given country, their permanent address being in the issuing country. Inbound tourism is, for the receiving country, a really important foreign exchange cashing in.
- **outbound tourism** (sending or active) is that part of international tourism registering the residents departures to another country.

The relation between tourists’ departures and arrivals to and from abroad determines a country’s registering into one category or the other, and from an economic point of view, it impacts the currency contribution of the touristic activity and implicitly, the balance of payments equilibrium.

### 9 Conclusions

Sustainable tourism has demonstrated the ability to solve society problems and worth seeing as an alternative to mass tourism which means equivalent level of satisfaction as travel requirements or even greater benefits per tourist. Sustainable tourism forms are adaptable to community needs and creates a vital balance between the desires of residents and what tourists want. Sustainability in tourism is not without controversy, rules of the game are yet to be determined with benefits for all stakeholders involved.

### References


