

GREEN TOURISM PRINCIPLES IN ROMANIA

PRINCIPIILE TURISMULUI VERDE ÎN ROMÂNIA

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Abstract: Global trends and priorities change: more than ever the overarching challenge for the tourism sector is to remain competitive while also embracing sustainability recognizing that, in the long term, competitiveness depends on sustainability. In particular, climate change is now seen as a fundamental issue also requiring the tourism industry to reduce its contribution to greenhouse gas emissions and the destinations to adapt to changes in the pattern of demand and in the types of tourism they offer.

The dynamics, depth and scale of transformations in all sectors of economic and social life are reflected, inter alia, in the change of economic structures, the hierarchy of the branches in accordance with the requirements of scientific and technical progress, the rational exploitation of the full potential of resources and the increase in efficiency, with the requirements of the life quality improvement. At the same time, major changes are taking place in economic growth models by focusing on intensive types, towards areas of sustainable development, globalization and integration. In this context, tourism manifests itself as a social component, with significant participation in general progress and, last but not least, as a promoter of globalization and a factor of sustainable development.

Key-words: *sustainability, eco-friendly, destination, tourism, ecotourism.*

Cuvinte cheie: *sustenabilitate, nepoluant, destinație, turism, ecoturism.*

I. INTRODUCTION

“Sustainable communities develop their life patterns over time, in a permanent interaction with other living, human and non-human systems. Sustainability does not mean that things do not change. It is not a static process, but a dynamic one of common evolution.” (Capra, 2002, p. 298).

Tourism is a growing market, even more so in Romania, where it has started to take bolder wings. This means that there is room for everyone, but the best are pursued. The difference no longer lies in the hotel offered to the tourist or in the program. The tourist is more and more educated, more responsible and has more travelling experience. The tourist knows what to ask for and to appreciate the offer.

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That is why the difference lies in attitude, awareness, the ability to listen and problem solving.

Green tourism principles, actually, in Romania, have many effects on every single aspect of the hospitality industry. They do not just relate to the environment however important that may be, they also relate to the way business and marketing interact with society and culture and economic stability.

Nature conservation is becoming a part of tourist markets. For example, by promoting ecotourism as an element of the so-called green economy, which was proposed as a solution to the on-going crisis at the Rio+20 Summit. Furthermore, urban functions associated to tourism involve the commodification and privatization of natural areas, where conservation becomes only a complement.

Additionally, the relationship between tourism and the physical environment is based on the demand for energy, water, land and materials.

Tourism intensifies the use of natural resources, but how does it contribute to deepening systemic environmental contradictions? Hospitality, travel and ecotourism comprise a multitude of activities, which together form one of the world's fastest growing and mutually dependent international sectors. In recent years, tourism has become one of Romania's most important economic sectors and has significant potential to play a further role in Romania's economic revival. Hospitality, travel and ecotourism research is fundamental to ensuring that the industry has a positive influence on economies, cultures and societies.

II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

2.1. Principles of sustainable tourism

The tourism industry accepted the concept of sustainable development and adopted the notion of sustainable tourism (WTO, 1995).

The World Tourism Organization publication "Tourism in 2010" states the following: "Sustainable tourism develops the idea of meeting the needs of today's tourists and tourism industry, at the same time, protecting the environment and the opportunities for the future. The aim is to meet all economic, social, aesthetic, etc. needs of the "actors" in tourism, maintaining cultural, ecological integrity, biological diversity and all the systems that support life".

Thus, by 2050, the world's population, estimated today at over 7 billion inhabitants, will reach between 7.7 billion and 11.2 billion, judging by the latest average estimate of 9.37 billion inhabitants.

Population growth is the main environmental pressure and is unavoidable.

The tourism industry is perceived as being more environmentally related than other industries, since its size and presence have led to a major negative impact on the physical environment and the social one. As a result, the need for a new, professional tourism management has occurred, which would attract more the government and the private and public sector partners based on sustainable development principles, namely:

- ✓ the environment has an extremely intrinsic value for tourism, which future generations must also enjoy;

- ✓ tourism must be seen as a positive activity with benefits for:
 - ✓ the environment
 - ✓ the local communities
 - ✓ the visitors
- ✓ the relationship between environment and tourism can be developed in such a way that the environment could support long-term tourism activity and tourism is in turn “forced” not to cause environmental degradation;
- ✓ the development of tourism activity must respect the ecological, social, economic, cultural features of the geographical area in which it is taking place;
- ✓ the purpose of tourism development must always be balancing the needs of tourists with those of their destinations and hosts;
- ✓ the tourism industry, the governments, the authorities responsible for environmental protection and the international bodies must comply with these principles and work together to put them into practice.

Polyvalence is especially necessary for environmental and tourism experts, especially those in ecotourism, given that futurists have been using the following phrase lately: “Too much tourism kills tourism”, underlining that there are “limits” to tourism.

In order for tourism not to turn from a chance for economy into a risk to the whole community, everything should be carried out/developed “within bounds”.

2.2. Speciality literature

The tourism industry is among the largest industries in the world. However, the detrimental effects of tourism have become a major concern that needs to be addressed quickly. Thus, the concepts of sustainable development and sustainable tourism have emerged in order to reduce the negative effects of tourism activities, which have become almost universally accepted as a desirable and politically appropriate approach to tourism development.

Sustainable development has been defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) as “a development that responds to current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987), but many authors have developed their own definitions and adopted different positions regarding “sustainability”. According to the majority of scientists (Butler, 1991, 1993; Neacșu, 2000; Theobald, 2005; Rogers et al., 2008; Mazilu, 2011; Mazilu 2012a; Mazilu 2012b), the “sustainable development of tourism” refers to the development of the economic, social and environmental tourism, aiming at the continuous improvement of tourists' experiences.

Sustainable development of tourism attracted significant attention in numerous scientific studies, particularly in the field of tourism, and was one of the highly developed fields of tourism research in the late 1980s. Multiple issues related to the debate on sustainable development/sustainability are inevitably translated into the concept of sustainable tourism. Again, the lack of any universal definition has led to a multitude of customized meanings and applications. As with

sustainable development, there is the freedom to adopt different “green hues” in addressing sustainable tourism. There is a large number of definitions of sustainable tourism, the best known being the one given by the World Tourism Organization: “Sustainable development of tourism responds to the needs of today's tourists and host regions, while protecting and enhancing the opportunity for the future. It is expected to lead to the management of all resources so that economic, social and aesthetic needs could be met, while maintaining the cultural integrity of essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems”.

Other definitions were given by authors such as Mirela Mazilu (2011), who argued that “sustainable tourism is considered to be that form of tourism that privileges the long-term management of all resources in such a way that economic and social needs could be met, preserving the integrity of culture, essential ecological processes, biodiversity and vital needs response systems. Sustainable tourism products work locally in harmony with the environment, the community and the local cultures”; or Butler (1993), who defined sustainable tourism as “the type of tourism that is shaped so that it could maintain its viability in an area for an infinite amount of time”.

Throughout the world, several forms of sustainable tourism have been identified, but only one has been considered the best practice for tourism in protected areas, namely ecotourism. This has been considered by the World Tourism Organization as one of the fastest growing sectors in the tourism industry around the world (WTO, 2003).

Ecotourism is often seen as a type of tourism based on nature and has attracted the attention of tourists as an alternative type of tourism, tourism that takes place within protected natural areas, meaning destinations that have as their main attractions the flora, the fauna and the cultural heritage (natural reservations, national parks) (Wearing&Neil, 1999; Bran et al., 2000; Drumm&Moore, 2005; Băltărețu, 2007).

Martha Honey (1999, 2002) defines ecotourism as a “responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people”. She also claims that “ecotourism moves into fragile, clean and usually protected areas that strive to have a low impact at a small scale (usually). It helps educate the traveller, it provides funds for conservation, it directly contributes to the economic development and the political empowerment of local communities, and it encourages respect for different cultures and for human rights”.

It is therefore logical to highlight the increase of sustainability as it contributes to the development of environmentally-friendly tourism and the protection of natural resources from the negative impact of tourism on the environment.

2.3. Mandatory stages in the success of sustainable tourism

We can distinguish the following stages in the development of sustainable tourism (WTO, 1998):

- ✓ The first stage consists of the decision to include a certain area and the construction of the touristic equipment necessary for the respective tourism facilities in the touristic circuit.
- ✓ The second stage consists of the progressive development of tourism activity (in parallel with the responsibility of protecting the environment and complying with the sustainable tourism).

If tourism activities are carefully planned and carried out in the first stage, the environmental problems can be solved in the same stage. Thus, the choice of the area (for ecotourism planning) is decisive in order to avoid further environmental conflicts such as:

- Limiting damage to the landscape through:
 - the location of the resort;
 - transport arrangement;
 - architecture;
 - methods used in building the equipment, etc.
- Complying with responsibilities assigned to:
 - the local authorities;
 - the economic agents;
 - the local population (which should be consulted for the opportunity of the tourism project, being even able to oppose it if it considers that its interests have been breached);
- Environmental impact assessment (according to the EU directives):
 - each member state being bound to include in the national legislation provisions regarding the impact of major tourism (and other) projects on the environment.

2.4. Sustainable strategies in the field of tourism have all these attributes, as well as some other very important ones, namely:

- ✚ encouraging dialogue between the involved partners, forming multidisciplinary teams (government, entrepreneurs, local communities, other stakeholders in the region's future and the role of tourism);
- ✚ guiding and encouraging investors;
- ✚ contributing to the improvement of the local transport and communications infrastructure, with great benefits for the population of the area;
- ✚ ensuring long-term security of investment in tourism;
- ✚ including the idea of preserving the nature and the cultural heritage of the region in the tourism development strategy;
- ✚ protecting through the selected strategy the vestiges, the monuments, the reservations in the target area;
- ✚ ecological education of tourists;
- ✚ encouraging new participants in the field of tourism;
- ✚ clearly setting the protection objectives for each natural area with the participation of specialists and of all those interested in their touristic capitalisation;

- ✚ taking stock of all specific natural and cultural features that can form the basis of tourism potential and analysing all the information obtained;
- ✚ identifying the values that can form the basis of sustainable tourism;
- ✚ assessing the capacity to support different areas, which are parts of the approved touristic areas;
- ✚ stimulating rural economies through an additional demand for agricultural products and financial capital input;
- ✚ fostering the improvement and use in agriculture of low-productive lands, which allows the complete conservation of the areas covered with natural vegetation;
- ✚ applying a specific destination management.

Although the road to developing a sustainable tourism strategy is cumbersome, long and with many obstacles, we believe that it is worthwhile to try to find the way to meet both people's needs and those of protecting the environment and, implicitly, the rural one, which is so fragile. Assessing the local or regional tourism potential of a tourist destination as a prerequisite and a condition for sustainable development involves two initial phases:

- **the analysis of the current tourism situation**, in which supply, demand, competition and market trends are assessed;
- **diagnosis** that, taking into account the results of the analysis of the situation, will allow to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the territory, to determine the opportunities and the risks, and finally to decide the possible development of tourism in the area.

Only a rigorous assessment, taking into account supply, demand, competition, market trends, will make it possible to determine whether a territory really has a tourism potential to justify investments in the field and to draw up tourism development projects.

The sustainable development of tourism directly or indirectly depends on the sustainable development of other fields (McKercher, 1993). Overall improvement of infrastructure, diminishing corruption, economic growth, raising living standards, etc. will create the necessary conditions for the sustainable development of Romanian tourism.

2.5. Sustainable tourism

Motto: *“Sustainable development, recognizing the interdependencies between the three systems and taking into account the need for scientific understanding of the functioning of ecosystems, implies a profound change of mentality in the social system”* (Popescu, 2005).

Concerns about sustainable development at country level and globally are the result of a complex of issues that worry: poverty in the middle of wealth; environmental degradation; loss of confidence in appropriate institutions; the uncontrolled expansion of urbanization; lack of a secure job; youth marginalization; the removal of traditional values; unemployment and other economic-financial or geopolitical crises, etc.

Complex concept, sustainable development is defined by a natural side - meaning that it exists only as long as the environment created by man is balanced with the natural environment, an economic side, which works on the principle of competitiveness, a social-human side - concretely, the benefits of man-made elements in the environment must respond directly to the present and future needs and interests of generations that coexist and follow; a national, regional and global side - in terms of the compatibility of optimization criteria, both at a national level and at a regional or global one. Therefore, the concept of sustainable development, as well as its implementation strategy raise the issue of man and, in general, of human community from the perspectives of time and space. Thus, sustainable development, through the interdependent approach of the five problems faced by current development strategies, attempts to conceive scenarios to be followed, in which the future finds a better and safer place in the present we live. In fact, the humanly sustainable nature of sustainable development, resulting from the combination of its four sides, is the model towards which sustainable development is heading in the light of the 2020s.

By trying to tackle as quickly as possible and positively the current trends - rapid population growth, accelerated industrialization, widespread malnutrition, the disappearance of non-renewable resources and a deteriorating natural environment, humanly sustainable development aims to create, in time and space, the conditions of overcoming the limits of progress, through the progress of the limits, both quantitatively and qualitatively, from the perspective of man, the compatibility of the environment created by man with the natural environment, the interests of the generations in time and space.

Relatively not long ago, the concept of sustainable development was only related to ecology and ecological issues. However, in recent years there has been a concept broadening and its extrapolation to other fields (Mazilu, 2009a), including tourism, which should also be sustainable.

Thus, sustainable tourism is a form of tourism that:

- *is economically sustainable*, well planned and well-managed in order to preserve the quality of the environment, offering tourists first-rate experiences and improving the quality of life in the receiving areas;
- *protects the environment* considering the capacity of natural areas and the protected air by maintaining biological diversity;
- *is diversified*, due to the possibility to adapt to the quite varied features of the environment;
- *favours the local population participation in various activities* related to consumption and can contribute with funds to the conservation of ecological sites, buildings and touristic vestiges.

Carrying out the sustainable tourism activity, the second phase of sustainable tourism, means the active involvement of all the parties (local tourism service providers and local authorities, along with the local population) in actions to tackle environmental problems using economic or legal leverage to bind economic agents to use environmental protection equipment.

On the other hand, tourists are also bound to limit the pollution of the environment during holidays, by being better informed and instructed by travel agents (tour operators, providers, tourism organizations, etc.) with the joint purpose to support the development of sustainable tourism.

The continuation of the ecotourism education work must be achieved by developing the ecological awareness of the population, twinned with feelings of love and respect for nature, historical places, art monuments and architecture over time. This is necessary to be supported by actions related to the “inestimable value of the environment” and the tourism potential in developing and becoming communities aware of the beneficial evolution in the spirit of ecotourism.

Convinced that sustainable tourism is closely linked to the notion of sustainable development, that is, to the type of development that does not jeopardize the sustainability of the environment in the study area: the South-West Oltenia region, relying on the arguments:

- Sustainable tourism allows for the development of tourism and leisure activities in a country, region or tourism destination, taking into account the basic principles of sustainable development, showing respect for the environment, for the people and for the local economy and culture of the local touristic region.

- From an ecologic point of view, practising sustainable tourism means multiplying responsible initiatives, a constant care for preserving the planet we live in, and disseminating (spreading) examples of good practice in the field.

- From a social point of view, sustainable tourism involves trying to focus, as much as possible, on the local human universe, to understand the local people's concerns, the appreciation of local values and the depth of habits and traditions in those areas.

- Sustainable development also means the discovery of a foreign culture, and for this, tourists should:

- be curious but careful with the natural environments (look at the plants without breaking them and watch the animals quietly, without disturbing them);
- choose hotels according to the criteria of respect for the environment; pay special attention to rural settlements and accommodation in rural houses (guest houses);
- respect the hosts' lifestyle, being interested in their culture and language, and before going to such a destination, they should document themselves to know something about the objectives that can be visited in the area;
- adapt as much as possible their eating habits to local traditions;
- appreciate the local values and the depth of customs and traditions in those areas.

- The foundations of sustainable tourism start from refusal to accept the “double standard” (“I do to you what I would not do at home”). When we go somewhere, we should adopt there the same rules of life as in our usual environment, provided that this way of life does not breach the local rules of life.

• ***Sustainable tourism*** is considered to be the type of tourism that favours the long-term management of all resources in such a way that economic and social needs could be met while maintaining the integrity of culture, essential ecological processes, biodiversity and response systems to vital needs. Sustainable tourism products operate at local level, in harmony with the environment, the community and the local cultures.

At the beginning of this century and this millennium, the tourism and travel industry represent, worldwide, the most dynamic sector of activity and, at the same time, the most important generator of jobs. From an economic point of view, tourism is at the same time a main source of recovery of the national economies of those countries that have important tourism resources and exploit them properly.

In this context, the main arguments that determine the need to develop the sustainable tourism result from the following (Mazilu, 2007):

a) tourist resources are virtually inexhaustible and tourism is one of the economic sectors with real long-term development perspectives;

b) exploitation and complex capitalization of tourism resources, accompanied by an efficient promotion on the foreign market, can be a source of increase of the foreign currency revenues of the state, thus contributing to the balance of external payments;

c) tourism represents a safe labour market and redistribution of the redundancies from other highly restructured economic sectors;

d) tourism represents a means of promoting the image of a country, thus participating in the promotion of exports of goods and services on the global market, both implicitly and explicitly;

e) tourism, through its multiplying effect, acts as a dynamic element of the global economic system, generating a specific demand for goods and services that leads to an increase in their production, thus contributing to the diversification of the structure of the national economy sectors.

One possible response to these challenges would be to apply the concept of **mosaic eco-development** (Mazilu, 2009b), which proposes to implement the principles of sustainable development in smaller areas, as these are to be extended gradually, so as to cover the entire national territory in the long term. Considering this vision, ecological space should look, in its ideal form, as a chessboard, where large agricultural areas should combine with smaller areas allocated to industry, infrastructure on various categories and parks and natural reserve. This complex alternation stems from the uneven spatial distribution of natural resources, as well as the application of economic, social, environmental criteria. In this context, ecology and bio-economy can offer original spatial planning solutions so that appropriate environmental areas should be allocated to each branch, resulting in a territorial sectoral complementarity.

The resulted complementarity should be approached not only functionally, but also according to the rational use of land, the growth of the employment level of the workforce and the income, the effective participation in the inter-regional

exchanges and the integration in the European structures and flows, the complementarity with environmental restrictions (Constantin, 2000).

The implementation of sustainable tourism development projects starts from the stages of designing and building the technical-material basis for the purpose of harmonizing with the environment, with the local community or other sectors of the economy, continuing at the stage of developing tourism activities.

Wanting a model of own sustainable development of each territory, of each tourism destination, not at all universally valid and enforceable on any territory, we notice, by analyzing the “etymological” game, but with more meaning: **Tourism + Sustainable development = Sustainable Tourism**, the insertion of constraints, similarities, differences, which call for an even closer analysis. It is known that each territory has its history, its identity, its resources, by which it can develop a form of tourism or another, complying with its economic, social and environmental special features.

In this perspective, different actors “involved” in such an approach are called to lay down in a first step a careful diagnosis of the territory aiming even at decoding influences of sustainable development based on the opportunities and threats specific to each territory. A second step is the development of a sustainable tourism development project of that territory, permanently adapted to the local context, the project being “embraced” by as many people who live in that territory as possible. Not least, certain “terms” of territorial development will have to be met, by progressively performing actions aimed at improving the public offer, the local tourism, by removing the contamination of sustainable actions with other illogical ones (power games, interest games among stakeholders, etc.). This chapter, open to major scientific reflections itself, has tried to explain the role and importance of the analytical approach of sustainable development in tourism, in the territory, with the role of restructuring, rebuilding and even redeveloping it towards a better direction as sustainable development itself complies with the direction of history, contemplating the future. There is no universally applicable unique model to the sustainable development of a tourist destination (Mazilu, 2010a). In this perspective, different actors involved in this inseparable binomial: Sustainable development - Tourism, are bound to build in these territories, a specific tourism offer answering, on the one hand, individual or multiple demands, and, on the other hand, to local crises (economic, political, social, etc.).

Tourism can contribute to the sustainable development of territories because the territories themselves are comprised in an interactive, integrated and environmentally responsible relationship with the economic, social and natural environment on which they depend.

Of course, more needs to be done, as the imbalanced, destabilizing effects and the resistance to change, unfortunately persist despite a massive involvement of the local community towards sustainable development.

In sustainable development, tourism plays a key role, contributing with a high share to the revival and economic recovery of Romania. The elevation of the tourism product from the known values to the standards and quality preferences

(Mazilu, 2010 b) of foreign tourists requires the initiation and promotion of actions that include, on the one hand, the development of the education processes and the formation of an adequate mentality for the current type of development and, on the other hand, the enhancement of the sustainable development in the tourist reception regions.

III. CONCLUSIONS

The tourism and the tourism industry have outpaced the global economy for the sixth consecutive year in 2016, accounting for 10.2% of world GDP. It employs 292 million people - representing 1 in 10 jobs on the planet (WTTC, 2017). Although its economic impact is widely recognized as it provides many positive contributions to host destinations, the industry is facing a lot of criticism and debate about the negative impact of host-host conflicts (Smith&Brent, 2001), environmental impact such as pollution, overcrowding (Hudson&Gilbert, 2000; Budeanu, 2007), as well as threats to the cultural identity and social reality of host communities (Garcia et al., 2015). These issues can have an impact on the destination of tourism itself, but, more importantly, on its inhabitants, often leading to destruction or anxiety about the well-being of a community. The industry has made many attempts to be more responsible by addressing sustainability issues in order to promote more positive long-term benefits, and the core of these efforts often focuses on increased community involvement (Papaoikonomou&Alarcón 2017; Fraser et al., 2006). However, we still do not know much about the impact of sustainable activities on their contribution to a long-term community, i.e. community welfare (for example, Lee, 2013).

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