Sustainable development – a priority for the Romanian tourism strategy

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Abstract. Tourism represents a rapidly growing sector and has become one of the largest industries in the world. Its impact is extremely varied, because it plays an important and certainly positive role in the socio-economic and political development in destination countries and it contributes to a broader cultural understanding. On the other hand, as a tool to create jobs, it has not fulfilled its expectations. At the same time, complaints from tourist destinations concerning massive negative impacts upon environment, culture and residents’ ways of life have given rise to a demand for a more sustainable development in tourism. Different parties will have to be involved in the process of developing sustainable tourism. This paper focuses on what the tourism industry itself can do in order to increase its sustainability and suggests possible tourism initiatives to help solve these problems.

Keywords: tourism, sustainable development, local communities

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1. Introduction

With about 935 million international arrivals and receipts of about 900 billion dollars in 2010, tourism is one of the largest industries in the world, registering a growth of 25% over the past 10 years [1]. More and more people want to travel, so that WTO forecast for 2020 in terms of international arrivals is of 1.5 billion. Prediction for 2020 is to increase tourism in all regions of the world, but especially those in developing countries. Europe, America, East Asia and Pacific will continue to hold 80% of total international arrivals and continued to dominate the industry, but regions such as Africa and South Asia will register growth of 5.5%, 6% per year (while the global rate of growth will be 4%).

Therefore, the tourism industry is an important element of economic growth, both in the developed countries and those in developing countries. Tourism contributes to increasing exports, attracting foreign investment, GDP growth, job creation. In these conditions, many countries are becoming dependent on tourism, with all the implications that may arise (seasonality, the immediate reaction to the political instability, terrorism and crime, disasters, etc.). Currently, those countries whose economies rely on tourism industry began to pay attention to environmental issues and the socio-cultural. Preventing environmental degradation due to tourism activities, has become a priority for countries and regions taking part in tourism strong.

The tourists often retain the same habits on consumption of goods and services when they arrive at their destination, and this may be a particular problem for developing countries, countries that have not developed the program in terms of environmental protection and natural ecosystems, under pressure from mass tourism. The impact of tourism on the environment and communities is, in terms of sustainable development, a controversial issue, especially considering that tourism is growing rapidly, often unplanned and uncontrolled environment with adverse effects on natural and socio-cultural [2].
Where no plan envisages a development based on environmental protection, long-term economic benefits may be lower. Economic benefits of tourism can be easily observed by analyzing statistical data provided by the World Tourism Organization. It is thus evident that in the '90s, the period in which tourism is experiencing a strong globalization, the annual growth rate of international tourist arrivals (7.3%) exceeds that's the GWP (gross world product). In 1999, international tourist arrivals amounted to about 8% of world exports of goods and services, thus overcoming traditional exports such as cars, chemicals, office equipment and computers.

2. Sustainable development and tourism - some general aspects

Sustainable development concept is relatively new, being first mentioned in 1987 in a report published by the World Commission on Environment and Development. Subsequently, in 1992, in Summit "Rio Earth" the concept is becoming more present in the "Agenda 21" and "Rio Declaration". "Agenda 21" provides a sustainable development plan and the "Rio Declaration" its most important principles of sustainable development for the XXI century. Both represented a challenge to governments, organizations and other bodies within the meaning of working to achieve a maximum level of sustainable development, defined by the Brundtland Commission in 1987 as "development that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

Since the approval of two documents so far, world economic and social policy has developed into an extremely fast pace. Globalization, industrialization and liberalization have resulted in a new way of doing business and changed the relationship between people and the environment. At the same time, globalization has had a direct influence on job market, lifestyles, communities, industries and businesses. For those services (the default interest), the challenge is finding a balance between sustainable development, prosperity and people's desire to improve their material and financial conditions.

We can say that tourism is one of the greatest contributions to achieving sustainable development, primarily due to the dynamism and growth of the sector with direct implications on economic growth in the regions and tourist destinations, and secondly because of the fact that tourism is based on a direct link between consumers (tourists), industry, environment and local communities. This direct relationship, between tourism and sustainable development, is also created by the fact that in tourism, unlike other industries, the consumer (tourist) goes to the producer and to the product, and when this is properly planned and managed it can be a real life support for the rural and urban communities. The relation between tourism and sustainable development has three aspects:

- Interaction. Tourism by its nature, involves direct and indirect interaction between tourists, host communities and local environment;
- Awareness. Through tourism, tourists become aware of environmental problems and cultural differences, paying greater attention to sustainable aspect;
- Motivation. Most tourist activities are based on the desire of tourists visiting the region with an intact natural environment, attractive and come in contact with the local community.

In terms of this relationship, tourism can have a positive impact on local sustainable development, but may produce and environmental degradation.

The positive impact may result from:
- Creating opportunities for local economic development and jobs growth;
- Investment stimulation;
- Creation and development of local infrastructure;
- The establishment of inter-cultural links;
- To obtain income from the sale of natural and cultural resources that can be used for conservation activities and protect the environment.

In terms of negative impact, it may be manifested by:
- Exerting a direct pressure on fragile ecosystems;
- Exercising considerable pressure on host communities, which can lead to loss of authenticity;
- Increase local pollution.

The idea of minimizing the negative impact of tourism on environment and human communities, and to highlight its contribution to sustainable development came at the "Earth Summit +5, Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly" held in New York, in June 1997, when the Commission for Sustainable Development (Commission on Sustainable Development - CSD), was asked to development an international action plan, aimed on sustainable tourism.

In 2001 the World Tourism Organization compiles and publishes the “Global Code of Ethics for Tourism”, a reference guide on sustainable development and responsible tourism [3]. This guide is divided into nine chapters, setting directions that has to be followed by governments, tour operators, travel agents, tourism workers, host communities and even tourists, in order to practice sustainable tourism.

The Plan of Implementation adopted at World Summit on Sustainable Development (World Summit on Sustainable Development - WSSD), held in Johannesburg (South Africa) in September 2002, identify the measures that must be taken in order to develop sustainable tourism. The major objective of this plan is to increase "local communities benefit from tourism activities in ensuring the cultural integrity and protect the natural environment" [4]. Achieving this objective requires systematic actions taken both nationally and internationally.

Develop the Implementation Plan coincided with the declaration by the United Nations of 2002 as International Year of Ecotourism, representing an ideal opportunity to promote the idea of global sustainable tourism and its important role. Still, it must be emphasized the distinction between ecotourism and sustainable tourism. While ecotourism can be defined as alternative tourism based on natural environment, sustainable tourism requires membership at a series of sustainable development principles and their application in all types of tourist activities.

World Tourism Organization defines sustainable tourism as "tourism which leads to management needs to ensure economic, social and aesthetic, while maintaining cultural integrity, biological diversity and the welfare of local communities." The four dimensions of sustainable tourism are:

- Sustainable economic development in the both the short and long term by:
  - Creation of partnerships between small and medium enterprises and multinational organizations in the field of tourism;
  - Organizing training courses for workers in the tourism industry;
  - Obtaining an international certification;
  - Diversifying the tourism product;
  - Allocation of resources to promote and diversify tourism products and services;
  - Ecological sustainable development through:
    - To promote among tourists the ethical codes and rules of conduct;
    - Continuous monitoring of the impact of tourism on the environment;
    - Formulate development policies and strategies in accordance with the principles of sustainable development;
- Implementation of a sustainable management of natural protected areas visited by tourists;
  - Cultural sustainable development through:
- Maintaining cultural integrity;
- Preserving local cultural diversity;
- Ensuring the protection of natural environment and traditions;
- Encouraging local people to preserve traditional customs;
- Respect the right of ownership of local residents;
- Educating tourists to adopt an appropriate behavior;
  - Sustainable development of local communities, in order to produce economic benefits.
- The community should maintain control over tourism development;
- Through tourism have created jobs for residents;
- Encouraging small local entrepreneurs, by granting subsidies;
- Increasing the local living standards as a result of tourism activities.

3. Objectives of sustainable tourism development

The international tourism authorities aim for the last years was to establish a set the objectives for sustainable tourism. In this context, was set up a set of 12 indicators that address the challenges raised by economic, social and environmental, monitoring the priority for minimizing the negative impact of tourism on society and the environment and maximize the creative and positive contribution tourism to local economies, natural and cultural heritage conservation and quality of life of local communities and tourists [5].

- The economic viability depends on maintaining the quality of the natural environment intact.
- Local prosperity seeks to maximize the contribution of tourism to local economic prosperity of the host destination, including the proportion of expenditure, which is kept locally.
- Social equity requires widespread and equitable distribution of economic and social benefits resulting from the development of tourism activities, including improving opportunities, income and services available to the poor.
- Satisfying the tourists needs means also informing them about the importance of preserving and protecting the natural environment.
- The welfare of local communities (a social objective), it is closely related to environmental resource management and it may depends on the quality of jobs, so the uniform distribution of employment without discrimination made by race, religion or gender is an important point.
- Local control and authorization involves training local communities in planning and decision making on the management and future development of tourism in the region, and in terms of their consultation with third parties.
- Another objective relates to biological diversity. This is essential in human development due to the products and services they provide. Unfortunately, humanity has not given the proper respect to the biodiversity, destroying it by climate change, pollution, introduction of invasive species, etc.. Tourism has contributed and contributes to the protection and conservation of biodiversity through a series of projects and providing financial resources to local communities in some tourist destinations. However, tourism-biodiversity relationship is not always positive; there are particular situations where tourism development is carried out without compliance with environmental standards.
- Resource efficiency - to minimize the use of non-renewable and limited resources in the development and operation of tourist facilities and partner services.
- For tourism, cultural heritage has an important role, due to the fact that a large number of forms of tourism are based on specific local cultural resources. In this context it is important to respect the historical and cultural heritage, enhancing it where possible and preserves authentic traditions specific host communities.

- Physical integrity of environmental resources is an extremely important goal. It seeks to maintain and enhance the quality of landscapes, both urban and rural, and avoid physical and visual degradation of the environment.

4. Proposals for developing a strategy for sustainable development of Romanian tourism

From the multitude of needs which man must face, the travel is higher order, after their basic needs, physiological. As a tourist destination, Romania has the necessary resources (geographical, human, cultural, spa etc.) to attract customers from all countries. Barriers that hinder the full achievement of this strategy are especially related to the lack of professionalism of the staff of businesses and organizations, and lack of marketing optics.

The national development strategy of Romanian tourism must establish the priority areas that has to be considered in the next period, taking into account both the potential supply and demand categories of interest that could be satisfied by exploiting existing supply. Sustainable tourism development strategy in Romania should identify the main aims and the means to achieve them, and evaluating their impact on the natural environment, economic and socio-cultural communities. To be effective, the strategy must maximize the effects of tourism on maintaining balance economic, social and environmental problems, and to trace the development of mountain tourism directions for it to feed the growth of local communities, with minimal negative impact.

The strategy for sustainable tourism development should be done around some components, such as:

1. Reassessment Romanian tourist system in accordance with the principles of sustainability - in this case can be targeted objectives such as: increasing the quality of tourism products and tourism services, the development by the responsible authorities of a set of sustainability indicators (this requires a sustained effort and involvement of both theorists and especially the practitioners in the field of tourism), development of sustainable levels of growth of the tourism market (in particular taking account of the experience of countries with a tradition of European tourism - France, Italy, Germany etc.); greater attention to actions aimed at protecting and preserving the environment.

2. Increasing the value of sums from the EU structural funds - can be achieved by meeting certain objectives such as promotion of these funds fierce population (a majority of the population, especially in rural areas is not aware of the existence of such funds), in support of the state population and facilitating access to information on obtaining these funds, but mostly facilitation of the files necessary to obtain such funds (helping their preparation).

3. Supporting the local communities involved in the development of tourism activities and local culture - as objectives: to encourage the involvement of the local workforce (in recent years has been a massive exodus of population from rural communities to developed countries in Western Europe to conduct a wide range of activities and the development of tourism activities could attract a large proportion of them back), promoting cultural events and local events to national and
international level (part of the growing population in Europe are moving towards sustainable tourism activities and I think that Romania has enough potential to attract a large number of tourists, practitioners of these activities, organizing training courses in tourism (absolutely required for tourist activities to be carried out not only "legal" but also qualitative higher).

4. Sustainable land development and tourism areas - can be achieved by establishing the objectives as respect the carrying capacity (a first step was taken in 2008 when in villages such as Moeciu, Bran, Voineasa and Costinesti was forbidden to establish new tourist guesthouses, because of exceeded carrying capacity), reducing the negative impacts of construction (a chapter that our country is again backward) flow diversion from the most overcrowded tourist destinations to those less populated (this is still extremely difficult because the infrastructure - of any kind - has been mostly directed to certain destinations

5. Promoting sustainable forms of tourism, both among the tourists (a sustained increase in demand for such products will require an intensification of competition) and providers of tourism services - is particularly important from my point of view. Forms of sustainable tourism in our country are underused, even though the potential is extremely high. A first step could be the support of travel agencies in creating a variety of tour packages that include such activities. Most of these agencies do not include in their offer such activities, while others make them available to tourists only for celebrations (Christmas, Easter).

It is extremely hard to apply such a strategy because of the lack of interest from the legal authorities, tourism entrepreneurs, but also because the Romanian tourist does not have a “touristic culture” in the background.

5. References


