

# PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PLANNING

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This article is developing a theoretical introduction and presentation of concepts, principles and development strategies in sustainable tourism. A detailed presentation of all the theoretical concepts concerning sustainable development and its tourism dimension is included further focusing on theoretical strategic framework for and its fundamental components. Its second part is concerned with sustainable tourism in practice with a special emphasis on types of carrying capacity.

**Key words:** *tourism planning, sustainable development, alternative tourism, sustainable tourism, ecotourism*

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## Introduction

The international practice of tourism has proved in time that no matter the type of tourism undertaken (mass tourism or alternative tourism) finally this will involve sooner or later, series of impacts both at social and environmental level. Certainly the mass tourism is the main one responsible for the most visible and deep impacts at least at destination level, these impacts being mostly negative ones (there are of course exceptions determined by particularities of the destination itself). The alternative tourism, ('modern' or 'post mass' as referred to by other sources) tries to avoid the traditional mass tourist destinations focussing on the responsible attitude and ethical behaviour of its consumers when participating to the new forms of it. The majority of these new forms of tourism (but not all of them) are based on the principles of sustainable development.

The concept of sustainable development (isolated used simply as sustainability) is a complex and also an internationally contested concept.

Appeared in the early '80ies initially as economic development new point of view aiming to reduce negative impact on natural environment, lately developed and was adopted by the ecology movement for protecting and preserving the world natural environment.

In 1993, United Nations has decided after voting in 1992 to form the World Commission on Environment and Development with a main clear objective to protect the natural environment and apply the principles of sustainability. The first report this commission has produced was concerned defining sustainable development and is comprising the famous definition developed in 1987 by the notorious Bruntland<sup>1</sup> report (well known for establishing the principles and the laws of sustainable development grouping them into 5 main categories concerning: natural environment protection, biodiversity and human heritage

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<sup>1</sup>Presently along with the Bruntland Report there are the papers of two other international conferences to regulate sustainable development through natural environment protection point of view:

- Rio Earth Summit (1992) – concerning habitat protection and natural species protection, biodiversity assurance. Local Agenda 21 (Think locally, act globally).
- Kyoto Agreement (1997) – reducing air pollution.

protection, development – regeneration, future generations into the present, world economic disparities to disappear)

„Development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundland Report, 1987)

### **The Theoretical Strategic Framework for Development – Fundamental Components**

#### *Sustainable Tourism – Definitions and Principles*

The idea of adopting the sustainable development concept in the area of tourism appeared in the early '90s, which generated sustainable tourism – an area that quickly gained importance both in academia and research, and in tourism practice/activity/industry.

Sustainable tourism dissociates itself as a matter of principle from mass tourism and partially associates to alternative, contemporary (post-mass) tourism forms. In other words, sustainable tourism is primarily the opposite of mass tourism.

This is defined as „a positive approach intending to reduce tensions and frictions created by the complexity of interactions between tourism industry, tourist, natural environment and the local communities as host of tourist.” (Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 1993)

Tourism Concern 1992's *Beyond Green Horizon* defines sustainable tourism as: „...tourism and associated infrastructures that, both now and in the future: operate within natural capacities for the regeneration and future productivity of natural resources; recognise the contribution that people and

communities, customs and lifestyles, make to the tourism experience; except that these people must have and equitable share in the economic benefits of tourism; are guided by the wishes of local people and communities in the host areas. (Tourism Concern 1992)

In conclusion, sustainable tourism is a form of alternative tourism based on the following principles:

a) minimizing the impact of tourism activity on the environment in order to acquire *ecological sustainability*, by contributing to *maintaining and enhancement of conservation through the return of a part of the revenues towards the protected area*.

Practicing tourism forms that do not have an impact on the environment.

b) minimizing the negative impact of tourism activity on the local community and its members so as to obtain *social sustainability*.

Developing of those forms of tourism that do not upset and disturb the daily life of the population at the tourist destination. Avoidance of hostile situations.

c) minimizing the negative impact of tourism activity on the culture/traditions/customs of the local communities so as to obtain *cultural sustainability*.

Developing a tourism capable of determining the authenticity and individuality of local cultures to be preserved, and avoid their saturation with 'external' cultural influences.

d) maximizing the economic benefits of the local population as a result of developing tourism, so as to obtain *economic sustainability*.

One of the most important principles of sustainable tourism meant to serve the protection and economic development of local communities and protected areas.

e) education, preparation, information.

Educating the tourist through a superior awareness and consideration of the impact generated by him, so as to improve personal attitude towards the environment and reducing the impact.

This includes an ecological education component (for visitors, locals, local administration, rural and urban population, e.a.) that is crucial besides the interpretation component, at the eco-tourism level, both from the point of view of the product and of the local administrations.

f) local control – a basic principle in sustainable tourism.

Local community participates and is consulted regarding everything involving sustainable tourism development, and it is an active decision factor. The key element here is local propriety on tourism infrastructure elements (e.g., accommodation structures) and others. Local community and local administrations are involved and they have the control, in particular through its financial levers.

### Sustainable Tourism in Practice

Guaranteeing the meeting of needs of both alternative tourism (and implicitly of the sustainable tourism) and of local communities in general is realised through a series of practical, applicative measures, such as:

a) establishing protected areas involves the designation of national natural parks, natural reservations, biosphere reservations, highly important areas, e.a. within which access, duration, activity, attitude, behaviour are normatively controlled.

b) management of the visit/visitor - techniques.

- the capacity of areas and sub-areas to face various levels and various amounts of

visitors is considered according to the tourism zoning of protected areas;

- the capacity of areas and sub-areas to face various levels and various amounts of visitors is considered according to the internal zoning of protected areas;
- clustering;
- dispersion;
- restrictive and/or selective access (price policy);
- access interdiction for tourists in scientific reservations;
- strictly restricted access of transport means;
- development of an interpretative system/method/technique with an *educational character* according to local, individual, personalized;
- specific objectives;

c) Carrying Capacity.

It represents the intensity of the use a certain environment can stand over a determined period of time without damaging its sustainable potential for the respective use. Actually it is a method to establish critical or maximum values acceptable to use which, once exceeded, have a negative influence and damage normal development.

#### *Types of Carrying Capacity:*

► *Ecological carrying capacity* – the use level beyond which ecological risk and negative ecological impact appear.

► *Economic carrying capacity* – the use level beyond which local economy is largely based on tourism or becomes dependent from it.

► *Social carrying capacity* – the use level beyond which tourists become irritating to locals or they damage local culture.

► *Psychological carrying capacity* – the use level beyond which tourists are confronted with discomfort and lack of satisfaction due to overcrowding.

To the same extent, *change risk limits* are often established, in particular for special and delicate areas, which basically define the tourist impact level that may be tolerated in an area:

d) Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), a technique of evaluating the consequences of developing tourism activity is, besides carrying capacity, an essential objective in any eco-tourism development strategy. They both generate identification and dimensioning of impacts, their classification and implementation of impact management measures.

e) Local community wide involvement.

f) Codes of ethics for both tourists and tour operators.

g) Laws, rules, authorisations and licensing tourist activities.

Generally the tourism activity/tourism industry especially into private sector of it tends to militate for total freedom of action preferring general and superficial legislation concerning authorisations and licensing. This is exactly the type of regulations which will put sustainable tourism in a shade. Thus sometimes appears the paradox where the state institutions on one hand has to keep as less as possible involved into regulating to make room to the local authorities and local communities plus private sector and on the other has to interfere firmly to make sure the trends of tourism development do keep on the track of sustainability. A correct attitude, firm position and especially the legislation and regulations are the most efficient tool assuring and imposing the rules of sustainable development into tourism.

As a result the sustainable development though a highly theoretical concept and on some extent contested due to its difficulties in being successfully implemented into practice proved to be at least useful into planning for tourism activities

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