

COUNSELING FOR PROMOTING SUSTAINABILITY ON RURAL TOURISM

ARION Felix

*University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Cluj-Napoca
felixarion@usamvcluj.ro*

Abstract.

Rural tourism could be a chance for the community and for the area to develop a relative social and economical equal distribution among rural and urban areas. But, in the same time, it should not be neglected the effects that tourism in those area can have, because tourism is an industry with huge externalities. This paper tries to observe both the negative and the positive effects of rural tourism in Romania.

Key words: sustainability, rural tourism, environment, cultural traditions, economy

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the world's largest industries and one of its fastest growing economic sectors (the sales volume of timeshare industry increased from 490 M\$ in 1980 at no less than 9709 M\$ in 2003 and it is still having an ascending trend [6]). It has a multitude of impacts, both positive and negative, on people's lives and money and on the environment. Counselling for a sustainable tourism development guidelines and management practices should be applicable to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, including mass tourism and the various niche tourism segments, as is agrotourism. Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Agrotourism, through its effects, must be seen as a potential problem for sustainability, and for obtaining a sustainable tourism it should [5]:

1) realise the optimal use of environmental resources that constitute the key element in rural tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.

2) respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.

3) ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Nevertheless, the quality of the environment, both natural and entropic, is essential to agrotourism. However, tourism's relationship with the environment is complex, because it involves many activities that can have adverse environmental effects. Many of these impacts are linked with the construction of general infrastructure such as roads and of tourism facilities, including resorts, hotels, restaurants, shops. The negative impacts of tourism development can gradually destroy the environmental resources on which it depends. [1]

On the other hand, tourism has the potential to create beneficial effects on the environment by contributing to environmental protection and conservation [10]. It is a way to raise awareness of environmental values and it can serve as a tool to finance protection of natural areas and increase their economic importance.

Negative impacts from tourism occur when the level of visitor use is greater than the environment's ability to cope with this use within the acceptable limits of change. [4]

The socio-cultural impacts of tourism described here are the effects on host communities of direct and indirect relations with tourists, and of interaction with the tourism industry. For a variety of reasons, host communities often are the weaker party in interactions with their guests and service providers, leveraging any influence they might have.

The impacts arise when tourism brings about changes in value systems and behaviour and thereby threatens indigenous identity. Furthermore, changes often occur in community structure, family relationships, collective traditional life styles, ceremonies and morality. But tourism can also generate positive impacts as it can serve as a supportive force for peace, foster pride in cultural traditions and help avoid urban relocation by creating local jobs. As often happens when different cultures meet, socio-cultural impacts are ambiguous: the same objectively described impacts are seen as beneficial by some groups, and are perceived as negative - or as having negative aspects - by other stakeholders.

The negative socio-cultural impact from tourism includes:

a) Change or loss of indigenous identity and values. Tourism can cause change or loss of local identity and values, brought about by several closely related influences: commodification, standardization, loss of authenticity and staged authenticity and adaptation to tourist demands.

b) Culture clashes. Because tourism involves movement of people to different geographical locations, and establishment of social relations between people who would otherwise not meet, cultural clashes can take place as a result

of differences in cultures, ethnic and religious groups, values and lifestyles, languages, and levels of prosperity. The result can be an overexploitation of the social carrying capacity (limits of acceptable change in the social system inside or around the destination) and cultural carrying capacity (limits of acceptable change in the culture of the host population) of the local community. The attitude of local residents towards tourism development may unfold through the stages of euphoria, where visitors are very welcome, through apathy, irritation and potentially antagonism, when anti-tourist attitudes begin growing among local people.

c) Physical influences causing social stress. The physical influences that the increasing tourism flow, and its consequent developments, has on a destination can cause severe social stress as it impacts the local community. Socio-cultural disadvantages could evolve from resource use conflicts, cultural deterioration and with traditional land-uses.

d) Ethical issues [2]. Partly due to the above impacts, tourism can create more serious situations where ethical and even criminal issues are involved.

Tourism can contribute to positive developments, not just negative impacts. It has the potential to promote social development through employment creation, income redistribution and poverty alleviation [9]. Other potential positive impacts of tourism include: tourism as a force for peace, strengthening communities, facilities developed for tourism can benefit residents, revaluation of culture and traditions and tourism encourages civic involvement and pride.

These are some positive consequences of tourism that can arise only when tourism is practiced and developed in a sustainable and appropriate way. Involving the local population is essential. A community involved in planning and implementation of tourism has a more positive attitude, is more supportive and has a better chance to make a profit from tourism than a population passively ruled - or overrun - by tourism. One of the core elements of sustainable tourism development is community development, which is a process and a capacity to make decisions that consider the long-term economy, ecology and equity of all communities.

The tourism industry generates substantial economic benefits to both host countries and tourists' home countries. Especially in developing countries, one of the primary motivations for a region to promote itself as a tourism destination is the expected economic improvement. As with other impacts, this massive economic development brings along both positive and negative consequences.

There are many hidden costs to tourism, which can have unfavourable economic effects on the host community. Often rich countries are better able to profit from tourism than poor ones. Whereas the least developed countries have the most urgent need for income, employment and general rise of the standard of living by means of tourism, they are least able to realize these benefits. Among the reasons for this are large-scale transfer of tourism revenues out of the host country and exclusion of local businesses and products.

a) Leakage [3]. The direct income for an area is the amount of tourist expenditure that remains locally after taxes, profits, and wages are paid outside the area and after imports are purchased; these subtracted amounts are called leakage. There are two main ways that leakage occurs: import leakage and export leakage.

b) Enclave tourism. Local businesses often see their chances to earn income from tourists severely reduced by the creation of "all-inclusive" vacation packages. When tourists remain for their entire stay at the same cruise ship or resort, which provides everything they need and where they will make all their expenditures, not much opportunity is left for local people to profit from tourism.

c) Other negative impacts including infrastructure, increase in prices, economic dependence of the local community on tourism and seasonal character of jobs.

The main positive economic impacts of tourism relate to foreign exchange earnings, contributions to government revenues, and generation of employment and business opportunities.

a) Foreign exchange earnings Tourism expenditures and the export and import of related goods and services generate income to the host economy and can stimulate the investment necessary to finance growth in other economic sectors. Some countries seek to accelerate this growth by requiring visitors to bring in a certain amount of foreign currency for each day of their stay and do not allow them to take it out of the country again at the end of the trip.

b) Contribution to government revenues. Government revenues from the tourism sector can be categorized as direct and indirect contributions. Direct contributions are generated by taxes on incomes from tourism employment and tourism businesses, and by direct levies on tourists such as departure taxes. Indirect contributions are those originated from taxes and duties levied on goods and services supplied to tourists.

c) Employment generation. The rapid expansion of international tourism has led to significant employment creation.

d) Stimulation of infrastructure investment. Tourism can induce the local government to make infrastructure improvements such as better water and sewage systems, roads, electricity, telephone and public transport networks, all of which can improve the quality of life for residents as well as facilitate tourism.

e) Contribution to local economies. Tourism can be a significant, even essential, part of the local economy. As the environment is a basic component of the tourism industry's assets, tourism revenues are often used to measure the economic value of protected areas. [7]

CONCLUSIONS

Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant factors involved in, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary. [8]

Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. <http://www.american.edu/projects/mandala/TED/yosemite.htm#r5>, last accessed 17.03.2007
2. <http://www.tourismconcern.org.uk/>, last accessed 17.03.2007
3. <http://www.unctad.org/Templates/StartPage.asp?intItemID=2068>, last accessed 17.03.2007
4. <http://www.uneptie.org/ozonaction/>, last accessed 17.03.2007
5. <http://www.uneptie.org/pc/tourism/sust-tourism/home.htm>, last accessed 17.03.2007
6. <http://www.unwto.org/statistics/tsa/project/comments.pdf>, last accessed 17.03.2007
7. <http://www.traveltax.msu.edu/>, last accessed 17.03.2007
8. http://www.world-tourism.org/frameset/frame_sustainable.html, last accessed 17.03.2007
9. <http://www.wttc.org/>, last accessed 17.03.2007
10. http://www.wwf.org.uk/News/n_0000000309.asp/, last accessed 17.03.2007