

## **Tourism and Sustainable Development. Implications at Local Community Level**

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**Abstract:** Tourism represents an economic activity with a special growth potential and rate that, managed in a proper way, can represent an important means for ensuring a sustainable development and to promote and sustain local communities. During the past period, the development of tourism raised awareness among policy makers, local governments, tourists, etc. about the effect of tourism on the environment, this way the development of a sustainable tourism being a necessity. The present paper aims to outline a series of implications at communities' level that the relationship between tourism and sustainable development may generate, focusing on one of the most representative and important components of sustainable tourism, respectively ecotourism and its particular forms of rural and agrotourism.

**Keywords:** tourism; sustainable development; local communities; ecotourism; rural tourism

**JEL Classification:** Q01

### **1. Introduction**

A series of changes occurred lately in terms of tourism services' consumer behaviour. Tourism market grew more segmentary and heterogeneous as a result of the diversification and fragmentation of social groups (Munster, 2008). Thus, the niche tourism becomes more and more attractive through adventure tourism (such as underwater journeys, trips to unexplored locations or around the world, etc.), luxury tourism (like cruises), or various kinds of sustainable tourism, etc. With regard to this latter case, the raising in the awareness on environmental issues the society is faced with, as well as an increase in public's responsibility for the protection of the environment and resources has determined and is prompting a lot of people to take up different forms of sustainable tourism.

The idea of sustainable tourism development is becoming more popular and refers to "achieving a kind of tourism growth that prevents environmental degradation, since such a fact could have serious consequences on the future quality of life" (Nijkamp, 1999, p. 2). In this very respect, sustainable tourism grew into an

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extremely popular area of research as of late 1980's (Liu, 2003). Buhalis and Fletcher (1992) cited in Nijkamp (1999, p. 2) point out the fact that sustainable tourism means that "the demand from a growing number of tourists is satisfied in a way which continues to attract tourists while the needs of host communities are met through the improvement of their life standard, and the environment and the cultural heritage at the destination are safeguarded".

This paper attempts to outline a series of implications at communities' level that the relationship between tourism and sustainable development may generate. In this sense, the paper is organised as presented in the following paragraph.

This way, besides the introduction and the conclusions parts, a synthesis of some of the main approaches on sustainable tourism provided by the specific scientific literature is outlined. Afterwards, a series of principles and instruments for sustainable tourism are highlighted, while the last part of the paper focuses on the main forms of sustainable tourism, with implications for local communities.

## **2. A Synthesis of Various Approaches on Sustainable Tourism**

Nistoreanu et al. (2003) consider sustainable tourism as "a development of all kinds of tourism, tourism management and marketing that respects the natural, social and economic environmental integrity, while ensuring the exploitation of natural and cultural resources for future generations". Another approach is built on the idea that "sustainable tourism meets the needs of the present tourists and tourism industry, while protecting the environment and future opportunities, attempting to address all tourism actors' demands of an economic, social, aesthetic, etc. nature, and maintaining the cultural and ecological integrity, the biological diversity and all life-supporting systems" (WTO, 1995, cited in Sava, 2006, p. 59). Following the same idea, Agnati (1999, p. 79) emphasizes the fact that sustainable tourism embodies "all forms of development that allow the meeting of its own needs and the achievement of its own objectives without compromising the possibility of future generations to meet their own needs and achieve their own objectives". Another series of approaches on the concept of sustainable tourism with an impact in the specialty literature was synthetised by Trumbic (1999, p. 53), as follows:

- "Blangy, 1997: sustainable tourism applied in a particular area is any form of development, supply of facilities or tourist activities that takes into consideration the respect for communities and long-term conservation of natural, cultural and social resources, and positively and equitably contributes to the economic development and well-being of the human communities that dwell, work and live in such areas;

- Thibal, 1997: sustainable tourism is based on the development of natural, cultural and social resources with the aim to improve the life standard and quality of local residents, while visitors' expectations and needs are met and natural habitats and cultural identity are preserved for future generations;
- Ashiotis, 1995: sustainable tourism should guarantee the integrity of all non-renewable resources while maintaining its economic viability in a highly competitive international market;
- Travis, 1994: sustainable tourism is represented by all forms of tourism development, tourism management and tourism activity that allow a long-term operation of the cultural activity which is called tourism, implying a series of tourism products that are compatible with the preservation of protected heritage resources of a natural, cultural or anthropogenic nature, all of which make possible the tourism activity;
- Middleton, 1998: sustainable tourism calls for a certain combination of numbers and types of visitors that show a cumulative effect for a given destination; such cumulative effect added by active businesses in the services sector may carry on during the foreseeable future without impairing the quality of the environment where the activities are carried out."

A good conclusion of the various approaches to sustainable tourism would be that of Bâc (2012). This author points out that the concept of sustainable tourism emerged as an attempt to obtain a precise estimation of tourism's negative impact on host communities. Moreover, it can be noted that in general the definitions emphasize elements associated to sustainable development as promoted within official documents (e.g., the Brundtland Report) such as ecosystems integrity, economic development and equity within and between generations. Also, the ideas of equity, environment and development are promoted; these elements are best highlighted in the so-called "magic pentagon" of sustainable tourism, considered as a system where economic welfare, visitors' satisfaction, local communities' welfare, local resources' and culture protection are balanced. (Muller, 1994 and Nijkamp, 1999 cited in Constantin and Mitruț, 2009). However, the last two definitions, along with those identified in Nistoreanu et al. (2003) and in WTO (1995) cited in Sava (2006) are better oriented to the tourism industry and even emphasize aspects related to the management of tourism.

### **3. Principles and Instruments for Sustainable Tourism**

Tourism and more precisely the whole tourism and travel industry can act as a catalyst to sustainable development since, along with other characteristics, it also contributes a great deal and has a strong economic, social and ecological potential

in the development of all nations, especially of emerging countries (Dickinson, 1999).

Tourism's sustainable development calls for different kinds of performance: economic (for instance, an increase in the level of exploitation of tourism resources), social (for example, an increase in employment, development and preservation of traditional crafts), as well as ecological (such as recycling, avoiding environmental degradation). But in order to accomplish such performance and to develop a sustainable tourism, the specialty literature (Selke, 1999; Jamieson and Noble, 2000 cited in Nistoreanu et al., 2003; Sava, 2006; Denman et al., 2007; Pitoska, 2009; Choi and Murray, 2010; Ruhanen, 2012; Saufi, O'Brien and Wilkins, 2014) highlights a number of underlying principles, as follows:

- the adoption of a global and integrated approach that would allow - especially in the phases of tourism planning and development - the identification and highlighting of the impact of tourism at all levels and also the integration of tourism in all the activities having an impact on the society and the environment;
- the sustainable planning of tourism must be carried out on the long run and must consider the needs of current and future generations;
- the action by all parties involved, especially by the local and national administrations; the struggles for power, a superficial involvement of authorities, as well as a strong influence over the local structures from the part of the local authorities are not recommended as they practically hinder the sustainable tourism development;
- the decrease in the seasonality of tourism demand;
- the management of tourism transport's impact on the environment;
- permanent improvement of labour conditions for the tourism personnel;
- preservation and even improvement in the level of local communities' prosperity and quality of life, in spite of all changes that may appear;
- minimization in the use of resources and waste production;
- preservation and capitalization of the natural and cultural heritage;
- an appropriate development of the technical infrastructure is necessary so that an easy access to water resources, sewage and waste recycling systems is ensured;
- it is recommended that tourism activity be developed on the basis of local communities' own means;
- it is recommended that local communities maintain control over the tourism development in their regions;
- the full involvement of local communities is a key factor for a sustainable tourism in the region;

- tourism should contribute to the creation and development of new jobs for the resident inhabitants and implicitly to an increase in local communities' living standard and quality of life;
- it is necessary to have a balance between the economic activities that are already performed in the area and the tourism activities;
- based on the recognized international standards, a code of tourism practices at the national, regional and local level should be prepared, developed and complied with;
- the development of educational and training programmes aimed at improving the management in the field of natural and cultural resources' protection is recommended;
- tourism must be considered a positive activity beneficial to the environment, local communities and visitors;
- it is necessary to develop a relation between the environment and tourism so that the environment can support long-term tourism activity and such activity, on its turn, will not damage the environment;
- the performance of tourism shall respect and be circumscribed to all features of a concerned area;
- it is recommended that there is a balance between the needs of tourists and those pertaining to the destination, implicitly those of tourism personnel (the hosts, in particular);
- all tourism-involved actors must be active in the observance of the basic principles of sustainable tourism development and bear responsibility in case of non-observance;
- there is need for international cooperation in the field of tourism, including exchanges related to tourism's sustainable development, that would help, support and assist national and local administrations in the improvement of their environmental and socio-cultural performance in relation to the tourism industry;
- it is necessary to draw up financial reports to establish various environmental monitoring systems that would allow tourism administration from destination countries to more efficiently regulate the environmental performance of private tourism operators;
- it is necessary to prepare and implement a strategy in the field of tourism that would be based on three key elements, that is competitiveness, quality, and environmental sustainability;
- tourism's sustainable development can only be achieved in a collective manner, by putting together "ecological alliances" between political institutions, authorities dealing with regional/landscape planning, tourism services suppliers, NGOs and local communities.

The development of sustainable tourism policies may be a very efficient way to stimulate the emergence of new businesses and jobs and to promote environmental conservation and protection (Castellani and Sala, 2010). Thus, along with the aforementioned principles, one can emphasize a number of policies-related instruments that may be used in order to support the implementation of sustainable tourism, as presented in Nijkamp (1999):

- the information, education and increase in the level of citizens', tourists' and companies' awareness with regard to environmental issues and their role in the society;
- the involvement of governments in the stimulation of companies for the development of an environmentally friendly behaviour, by resorting to various instruments such as subsidies or taxes;
- the development of different legal instruments aimed at developing and stimulating population's accountability for environmental issues;
- provision of an infrastructure necessary for facilitating the development of an environmentally responsible behaviour from the part of individuals and companies (for instance, waste treatment facilities); such infrastructure can be provided by public authorities, by private actors, or even by both parties, through various ways of collaboration, such as public-private partnerships, agreements, etc.;
- implementation of quotas associated to the maximum pollution quantity admissible for a company.

Moreover, according to Blaganje (1999), there are a number of elements and instruments that are highly important for *ensuring the balance between tourism and sustainable territorial development*, such as:

- tourism activities must be planned so as to allow the integration of different socio-economic, cultural and environmental elements, at all levels;
- the ecological, social and cultural value and capacity of each region must be respected;
- tourism activities must be submitted to compulsory environmental assessments;
- in the case of coastal areas, an integrated areas management is needed; such management shall form the basis of a sustainable development that would mitigate or even eliminate pollution or other types of negative impact of activities against the environment, and that would prevent their future occurrence;
- tourism should be restricted in ecologically and/or culturally "sensitive" areas;
- tourism activities promoting and encouraging the use of public transportation and/or non-motorized transportation means should be supported.

The concept of sustainable tourism developed pursuant to the framework documents Bruntland Report and Rio Conference and clearly materialized through "Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Sector" adopted in 1996 by the World

Travel and Tourism Council. However, there are a number of other documents having an impact on the idea of sustainable tourism development, such as the “Charter for Sustainable Tourism” (Lanzarote, 1995), “Manilla Declaration on the Social Impact of Tourism” (1997), “Berlin Declaration on Biological Diversity and Sustainable Tourism” (1997), or the “Global Code of Ethics for Tourism” adopted by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in 1999 and by the United Nations Organization (UN) in 2001; the latter document highlights the most important elements from the previous documents and promotes the establishment “of a new world tourism order in a free and open international economy” (Pascariu, 2006, p. 189). Also, in the European Union, the “Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion” mentions the concentration of policies related to the insurance of territorial cohesion through the sustainable use of the specific features of the different territories having a potential for mitigating disparities and increasing competitiveness (European Commission, 2008), with the tourism potential being par excellence such an advantage. The environmental regional and sectoral operational programmes of Member States also reflect this target in a correlated manner.

#### **4. Variants of Sustainable Tourism. Implications for Local Communities**

The most important component in the field of sustainable tourism is ecotourism, deemed as a means for a sustainable “use” of wild lands and for protecting communities (Campbell, 2002) and for promoting environmental responsibility and sensitivity (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2010).

Ecotourism, often defined in the specialty literature as ecological tourism, has different meanings and a synthesis of such meanings was identified in Dinu (2002, p. 268):

- “Ceballos-Lascurain (1983) - travel in a pristine and uncontaminated environment aiming to study, admire and enjoy watching landscapes, wild plants and animals, as well as cultural manifestations (past and present) of such areas;
- Hetzer (1965) - a form of tourism that explains the relations that occur between tourists, environment and culture and that is based on a number of principles such as minimum environmental impact, minimum impact on the local culture, maximum respect for the local culture, maximum economic benefits for the local hosts and maximum recreational satisfaction for tourists;
- Fennell (2001) - a form of sustainable tourism, based on natural resources, concentrated mainly on the direct contact with nature and on learning various knowledge about the nature, and that should have a low impact on the

environment, with no consumption, targeted towards the welfare of local communities (control capability, benefits, dimensions). Also, it is a sort of tourism that is carried out in natural areas and must contribute to their conservation and protection.”

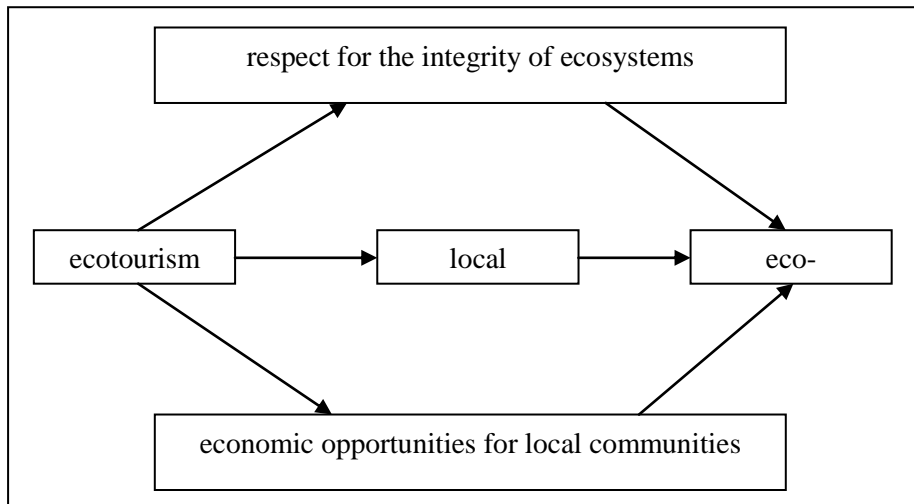
The latter definition is considered by Dinu (2002, p. 267) as one of the most complete, the author having her own definition of ecotourism: “travelling in natural areas so as to learn about the host communities, thus generating economic opportunities for the support of ecosystems’ conservation and protection”. Also, another definition of ecotourism identified in Cocean, Vlăsceanu and Negoescu (2002, p. 223) emphasizes that this is “a particular form [of tourism] practiced in pristine and culturally traditional areas that tend to become areas for the protection of nature and perennial human values that substantially contribute to the evolution of local communities”. Following the same idea, Nistoreanu et al. (2003) consider ecotourism as “a form of tourism performed in natural areas with the aim to learn about and treasure the local nature and culture, that implies conservation measures and ensures an active involvement, and that generates benefits for the local population”.

On analyzing the previously presented definitions one can note that most of them emphasize the fact that ecotourism takes place in natural and cultural areas, has a minor impact on the environment, is based on conservation principles and even on principles related to the improvement of natural, cultural and in general environmental resources, promotes the involvement of local communities, contributes to the increase in local communities’ welfare, involves the obtaining of high levels of tourist satisfaction through the direct contact tourists have with the environment and local communities.

Ecotourism must preserve, protect and even develop the natural environment. In this respect, a strategy for this kind of tourism is needed. Such strategy should be based on various principles, such as: the areas where ecotourism is practiced must be considered of continental or global interest, must be a part of the Earth’s tourist heritage; the negative effects on the natural environment and local communities must be mitigated through ecotourism; ecotourism must contribute to the management of protected areas; ecotourism must generate economic and social benefits to local communities; ecotourism must facilitate and favour an authentic interaction between tourists and the local population; ecotourism must create different opportunities for the local community in order to obtain a sustainable development as well as the conservation and capitalization of special cultural and natural objectives; etc. (Bran, Simon and Nistoreanu, 2000 cited in Cocean, Vlăsceanu and Negoescu, 2002).



Thus it follows that ecotourism is considered a significant factor for local development. In this respect, there are many links between ecotourism and ecosystems, the involvement of the local population, the economic opportunities for the local community and the eco-development as shown in Figure no. 1. The respect of ecosystems' integrity is an important point in most sustainable development projects and emphasizes the importance of natural environment in obtaining tourism benefits. On one hand such benefits cannot be obtained without the involvement by the local population. On the other hand, the economic opportunities for the local communities are varied; important parts of the revenues obtained from tourism activities may be used for the continuation and support of projects already started, as well as for performing new projects that are beneficial to the local community.



**Figure 1. Links between ecosystems, local involvement and local community development**

*Source: Howkins and Maryam, 1998 cited in Dinu, 2002, p. 270*

Within ecotourism diverse forms of sustainable tourism are practiced such as rural tourism, religious tourism, pilgrimage tours, etc.; of these, rural tourism is probably the most practiced form. Last year's socio-economic evolution and the rural environment's outstanding cultural attractiveness has led and continues to lead a growing number of tourists to choose rural tourism (Simion, 2011). This is a kind of tourism that "is practiced in rural areas and has a heterogeneous functional structure of services and accommodation facilities consisting in guest houses, motels, camping, school camps, art camps, ecological activities camps, vacation villages, etc." (Dinu, 2002, pp. 261-262), highly characterized by particular aspects based on territoriality, a fact that emphasizes everyday life, local communities'

history and traditions (Ciugudean (Popa), 2009). Nistoreanu et al. (2003) argue that rural tourism activities show a number of features such as rural location, tourism products created following the characteristics of rural communities, the rural and traditional features, the diversity of presentation forms, preservation of cultural identity, etc. Moreover, the same authors argue that rural tourism has particular features, such as closeness-to-nature, serenity, close knowledge of places and local communities, knowledge of local businesses, the chance of integration into the local community during the stay, contact with local people and local authorities, etc.

The revaluation of cultural values and landscape importance, as well as the increase in personal mobility and the possibility to freely organize their leisure time determines a growing number of tourists to choose rural tourism. Rural tourism attracts more and more tourists since this kind of tourism is deemed by specialists as a diversity generator for rural economies (Vogelij, 2004). In this respect, there are particular aspects associated to the supply and not only to the demand. Thus, farmers diversified their available supply and enhanced the quality of their services. The development of rural tourism triggers different mutations within villages, such as an appropriate capitalization of village-related resources, changes in the field of rural area planning by developing new tourism constructions and information kiosks, sport facilities, etc., changes in the structure of crops, avoidance of villages' depopulation by creating new jobs, development of small rural businesses that capitalize agricultural products, revival of traditional crafts, generation of new income sources for local communities, fighting environmental pollution, designing sustainable development solutions for the following sectors: agricultural, forestry, animal farming, agrotourism, etc. (Cocean, Vlăsceanu and Negoescu, 2002). Also, rural tourism contributes to an increase in local tourism circulation, a growth in the cultural, educational and civilization levels of villagers, an economic growth of local communities, development of regions where rural tourism is practiced. Rural tourism is considered in many regions as a way to safeguard villages, especially those with a strong agricultural character, but that for various reasons have lost such character. Moreover, during the last decades many rural areas from industrialized countries were affected by different issues of the regional, national and local economies, such as: local populations' decline, migration towards urban areas or other countries, income decreases, reductions or worsening of public services, losses to local cultures and identities, etc. Thus, according to Holland and Crofts (1992) and Potts et al. (1992) cited in Dinu (2002), the issue of implementing new structures so as to allow for the economic, social and cultural recovery of local communities as well as for their prosperity is increasingly raised, with tourism being a solution. The persons involved in the preparation and implementation of local development policies consider tourism as

a method to re-establish the economic and demographic balance of local communities. For instance, in the European Union, within the Rural Development Policy 2007-2013 the LEADER methodology is promoted. Such methodology is a way to achieve local development partnership promotion, increasing territorial development, using the endogenous development potential and innovation and cooperation stimulation by local actors (European Network for Rural Development, 2013).

Moreover, tourism is part of the strategy of many local development agencies. In this respect, there is a number of associations that promote rural tourism. For example, in Europe there is the European Federation of Rural Tourism (EuroGites) which, among other aspects, works to promote the European cultural, social, historical, natural and environmental heritage through a tourism concept based on the direct contact and interaction with local communities, in the context of sustainable rural and tourism development (EuroGites, 2010). In Romania, the National Agency for Rural, Ecological and Cultural Tourism (ANTREC) functions as of 1994 as a non-governmental organisation, member of the EuroGites network, with the aim to support the organized development of the Romanian rural tourism, to encourage and promote the ecological conservation and to preserve the Romanian traditions. The association has 2,500 members - owners of tourism and agrotourism guest houses - from 800 locations in 32 counties, and starting from 2007 its activity is structured on the eight Romanian economic development macro-regions having a highly important role in regional development (ANTREC, 2011).

Within rural tourism, agrotourism is one of the most frequented forms of tourism. Agrotourism is a complex form of tourism which merges natural environment, accommodation facilities and agrotourism services and capitalizes natural resources and the economic potential of local households through the development of accommodation services and the promotion of local produces and products. Furthermore, by practicing rural tourism tourists are involved in various household activities, as well as in activities of the local community and region, and implicitly in the regions' economic growth (Dinu, 2002). This explains why the National Programme for Rural Development includes special provisions on the diversification of the rural economy and the improvement of the quality of life in rural areas. The orientation towards the protection of the cultural and natural heritage from rural areas, "the creation, improvement and diversification of tourism facilities and attractions" (Romanian government, 2012, p.85) are also mentioned.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

Managed in a proper way, tourism can represent an important means for ensuring a sustainable development and to promote and sustain local communities.

One of the most representative and important components of sustainable tourism, respectively ecotourism that has a minor impact on the environment and that is based on conservation principles and even on principles related to the improvement of natural, cultural and in general environmental resources, promotes the involvement of local communities and contributes to the increase in local communities' welfare. Also, from another perspective, through preserving, protecting, and even developing the natural environment, ecotourism can represent a significant factor for local development. In this respect, there are many links between ecotourism and ecosystems, the involvement of the local population, the economic opportunities for the local community and the eco-development. The respect of ecosystems' integrity is an important point in most sustainable development projects and emphasizes the importance of natural environment in obtaining tourism benefits. On one hand such benefits cannot be obtained without the involvement by the local population. On the other hand, the economic opportunities for the local communities are varied; important parts of the revenues obtained from tourism activities may be used for the continuation and support of projects already started, as well as for performing new projects that are beneficial to the local community.

Also, by promoting different forms of sustainable tourism within ecotourism, such as rural tourism and agrotourism, local communities can benefit from different positive changes, such as an appropriate capitalization of village-related resources, changes in the field of rural area planning by developing new tourism constructions and information kiosks, sport facilities, etc., changes in the structure of crops, avoidance of villages' depopulation by creating new jobs, development of small rural businesses that capitalize agricultural products, revival of traditional crafts, generation of new income sources for local communities, fighting environmental pollution, increase in local tourism circulation, growth in the cultural, educational and civilization levels of villagers, economic growth of local communities, in few words: *the development of regions where sustainable tourism is practiced.*

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