



PROCEEDINGS BOOK

12th ICEEE-2021

“Global Environmental Development & Sustainability: Research, Engineering & Management”

November 18 – 19, 2021 RKK – Óbuda University, Budapest, Hungary

ISBN: 978-963-449-256-6

www.iceee.hu

MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF ECOTOURISM DESTINATIONS

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Abstract: The accelerated development of ecotourism reflects through an almost equally rapid increase in the number of researchers who draw attention to potentially harmful and destructive consequences of tourism development. Sustainable tourism and ecotourism destinations are essential for sustainable development, which arose as a logical necessity to stop the expansive economic growth based on the uncontrolled use of available resources. A positive approach, designed to reduce tensions and conflicts that create complicated interactions between the tourism industry, visitors, the environment and the communities that host tourists, advocates the concept of sustainable tourism. Tourism and the environment are interconnected and dependent, while environmental protection is of fundamental importance for the future development of tourist destinations. The motivation of modern tourists is increasingly tied to destinations guided by the principles of sustainable development, so the decision-makers and the local community should pay more attention to the regulations related to environmental protection and the effectiveness of its implementation. Environment protection aims to properly constitute new or implement existing protection measures to achieve positive environmental and social results of a long-term nature. Despite numerous studies regarding ecotourism, there is a particular gap regarding the management of ecotourism destinations. This article provides better insight into ecotourism destinations' management and sustainable development through a comprehensive literature review of groundbreaking researches and articles from state-of-art journals. The concept of ecotourism destination management requires finding new and revising various management strategies to preserve biodiversity in tourism destinations and educate about the importance of sustainable development.

Keywords: Eco-management, ecotourism destinations, strategic planning, sustainable development, tourism.

INTRODUCTION

Travelling for vacation has become an inevitable part of a modern lifestyle. The idea of travelling for pleasure, visiting attractive landscapes, meeting other cultures, or experiencing the environment in some other way, for about 900 million people participating in international tourism, is an unavoidable part of life at the beginning of the 21st century [1].

As a multidisciplinary phenomenon, tourism has a high, above all, economic significance; it represents a significant driving force of economic development. However, in addition to economic, tourism has a broader social and political significance that strongly impacts the overall development of many countries. Therefore, in tourism development, particular attention must be paid to its sustainable development [2]. When it comes to tourism and sustainable development, these are two interdependent variables. The concept of sustainable tourism development is the protection and sustainability of all tourism resources and is based on meeting the needs of all generations [3].

Modern tourism has undergone numerous changes during its development. In line with the spirit of

change, where sustainable development is becoming the leading criterion for development, numerous changes occur in the international tourism market. Changes in the structure of tourist demand have led to the emergence of new, modern forms of tourism where it is necessary to satisfy the different interests of tourists [4]. According to some estimates, ecotourism covers five to seven per cent of the world tourism market, while other authors state that this share reaches as high as twenty per cent [5].

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable tourism implies an industry with a minimal negative impact on the environment and local culture while creating numerous economic outcomes on the environment in which it develops, such as earning money, creating new jobs, and financing the protection of local ecosystems. The degree of development of sustainable tourism largely depends on the relationship it has with the environment. These relations are two-way [6]:

17. The impact of the environment on the development of sustainable tourism, and

18. The impact of tourism on the environment.

If sustainable development is observed as a goal and a process, it is clear that it is a dynamic concept with many dimensions. Both global and local aspects of sustainable development are essential for tourism. This concept endeavors to create a better world where economic, social, cultural, and environmental factors are balanced. One of the most significant research challenges related to sustainable tourism development is the operationalization of this concept and its consideration as a process that should be applied at the local level, at the level of tourist destination, through activities of tourists, businesses, and other participants. There are certain specifics of tourism, due to which it has a unique role in achieving overall sustainability. Tourism is not a consumer of non-renewable resources, both natural and cultural [7].

The relations between tourism and the environment are complex and reciprocally conditioned. This conditionality and complexity depend principally on the scope and intensity of tourist activity and the level of tourist development in the environment [8].

The fundamental characteristic of the environment is the turbulence of tourism, its variability, and the unpredictability of changes. In a relatively short time, rapid changes that affect the quality of tourism and changes that occur in tourism affect the number, volume, and quality of elements.

The primary forms of environmental impact on tourism activities are [9]:

- Difficult possibility of connecting the causes and consequences of a particular phenomenon, it is complicated to isolate two aspects and determine the impact on each other due to the action of many variables;
- The unpredictability of changes - the connection between predicting events in the environment is significantly reduced because the future movements of actions and interactions of many autonomous participants that are very difficult to influence;
- Difficulty achieving goals - achieving the desired business results is significantly important, but also challenging to predict the elements of the environment; and
- Limited ability to control future events due to the effects of accelerated changes, a considerable number of interdependent participants, and characteristics of change, which are under the action of the environment itself.

It is important to include the working environment of a person when environmental protection is mentioned.

Figure (1) shows the model of sustainable tourism in which tourists, by satisfying tourist needs, positively influence the living and working environment, the tourist economy, and the local community itself.

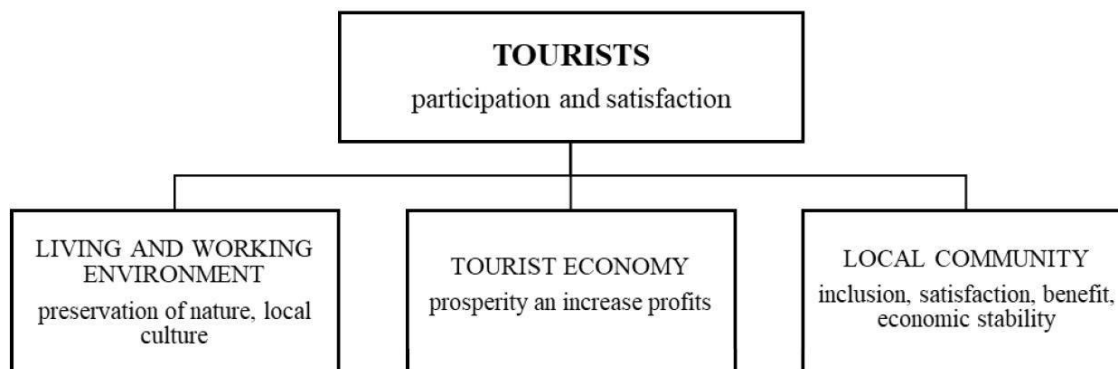


Figure 1. Sustainable tourism model

Having in mind the current theoretical views, interpretations, and definitions, as well as practical solutions in the implementation of sustainable tourism, five key goals can be singled out, none of which must be dominant to the others [7]:

- Protection of life and work environment and conservation of natural resources;
- Preservation of the social integrity of the local community;
- Protection of the cultural heritage of the destination and respect for the cultural specifics of the domicile population;
- Recognition of economic benefits in and from tourism, and
- Optimal satisfaction of tourists' needs through the offer of high-quality tourist products.

The study of human needs from an economic point of view is a vital and wide area. For this study, the scientific conclusions of macroeconomic and microeconomic research are used and the scientific outcomes of sociology and psychology.

There are many classifications in the literature, which take different criteria as a starting point, and for the purpose of this article, the need will be divided in the following way [10]:

- Necessary needs (related to the existence of the individual in the biological sense);
- Additional needs (general cultural needs and luxury needs).

ENVIRONMENT AS AN ECOTURISM DESTINATION

Tourism as an economic activity depends more than any other activity on the quality of the environment. Therefore, the unbreakable link between tourism and the environment can be considered as symbiotic. Furthermore, tourism is an activity that also valorises those elements of large areas of preserved nature that are of marginal interest for other activities [1].

Some authors defined tourism as the sum of process activities and outcomes resulting from interactions between tourists, service providers, local authorities, host countries, communities, countries of origin, universities, community colleges and NGOs, in the process of attracting, transporting, hosting and managing tourists, other visitors and stake-holders [11]. Tourism uses the environment, and its specificity is that it is not an irreversible consumer of natural elements. Therefore, the controlled development of tourism and the construction of appropriate facilities lead to the improvement of the environment [12].

Although nature has always been the subject of human interest, a significant contribution to the development of nature-based tourism was made in the late 18th century. In Romanticism, nature became the ideal of artistic creation [1]. In that period, as today, the shores of the sea and ocean are considered tourist destinations that are in the first place, ahead of national parks, lakes, rivers and forests. Researchers even agree that the attractiveness of wild, natural, and predominantly coastal areas are undeniable for now [13].

The term ecotourism was first formulated by Ceballos-Lascurain, a Mexican architect and ecologist, as follows: environment results in a small impact of visitors and enables the local population's functional

and active socio-economic involvement. Ecotourism preserves certain values: protection and preservation, ethics, sustainability, education and benefits for the local community [14].

Certain authors underline that the term "ecotourism" first appeared in 1985 in the literature and as a new topic. It promptly attracted the attention of a large number of researchers. The same authors single out British scientist Darwin, who visited the Galapagos Islands as the first ecotourist [15].

Ecotourism is an integral element of the concept of sustainable tourism. However, there is an essential difference between these terms. Ecotourism focuses more on environmental protection and educating guests about the local, natural environment, while sustainable tourism concentrates on travel with the least possible negative impact on the environment and local communities.

The International Society for Ecotourism emphasises the following principles of ecotourism [16]:

- Minimising physical, social, behavioural and psychological impact;
- Building environmental and cultural awareness;
- Providing a positive experience for guests and hosts;
- Creating direct financial benefits for nature conservation;
- Generating financial benefits for both the local population and the private sector;
- Delivering unforgettable experiences for guests, which enable raising awareness of the political, environmental and social climate of the host country;
- Design, construction and management of facilities that have a low impact on the environment;
- Recognition of the rights and spiritual beliefs of the native population to strengthen them and preserve their authenticity.

Figure (2) shows the graphical representation of sustainable glocal tourism as a circular matter, which must achieve its natural circulation with minimal human guidance through the satisfaction of all facts. The term glocal is a word created by crossing words globally and locally.

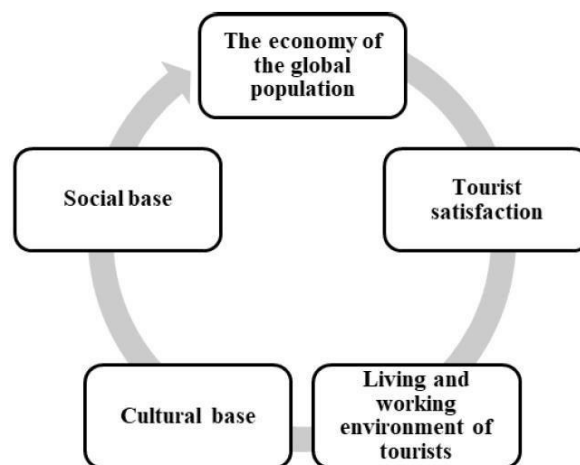


Figure 2. Sustainable glocal tourism

The primary characteristics of an eco-destination are [17]:

- i. Preserved natural attractions within the protected landscape;
- ii. Low density of development;
- iii. Tourism does not harm nature;
- iv. Development of small local enterprises owned by residents;
- v. Places intended for outdoor recreation are designed to protect sensitive resources;
- vi. Improving accommodation facilities that provide genuine hospitality by friendly and motivated staff;
- vii. Diversity of local festivals and festivities, by which the local community manifests a sense of pride in the natural environment and cultural heritage;
- viii. Clean public facilities used by both tourists and residents, such as public showers or toilets;
- ix. Mutual friendly relationship between locals and visitors at meeting places, such as local shops or benches by the sea.

The definition of environmental management means the management and development of the company, which takes care of the environment. Environmental management is a decision-making process that regulates the impact of human activities on the environment not to disrupt the environment's capacity for sustainable human development. Environmental management in all company functions takes into account the interaction with the environment and includes it with full responsibility in all business decision-making processes.

As presented in Figure (3), the VICE model provides a framework that destination management can use to ensure the sustainability of its actions. The VICE model defines tourism in a destination as the interaction between [18]:

- i. Visitors staying in a tourist destination;
- ii. Tourism economy provides travellers with services;
- iii. A local community hosts and reacts to various impacts of tourism; and
- iv. The environment in which this interaction takes place and includes natural and built resources on which tourism products are based in the broadest understanding.

Figure (3) shows interconnectivity between key destination stakeholders.

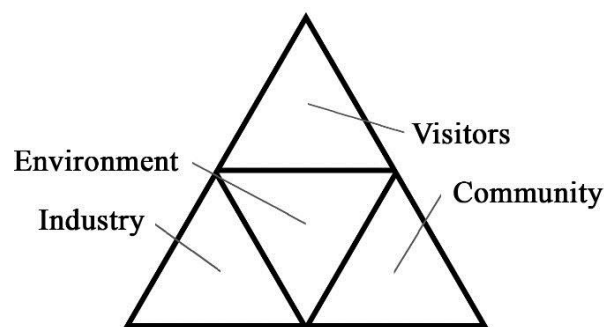


Figure 3. VICE model

Although it may seem that the VICE model is presented in a relatively simplified way, it integrates the fundamental areas of destination eco-management activity with the tourist destination's key interest groups [19]. Optimal use of natural resources provides a better quality of life for residents and visitors [20]. The task of destination eco-management is to shape its own specific set of local VICE elements and to create a tourist destination management plan through the deployment of local partnerships, by which the destination [9]:

- i. Welcomes and hosts tourists and meets their needs;
- ii. Creates a profitable and prosperous tourism economy;
- iii. Includes and creates benefits for the local community, and
- iv. Protects and enriches the local environment.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Interconnectivity and codependence between tourism and the environment are undoubtful, implying that environmental protection is significantly important for developing tourist destinations. Local and national decision-makers need to recognize the need and importance of sustainable tourism postulates and ecotourism principles and implement them, to improve and further develop ecotourism destinations. Without strategic planning and management of sustainable development, tourism can cause significant damage to the destination environment and cause social and cultural conflicts in the local community. Therefore, it is necessary to plan and manage every aspect of ecotourism and sustainable tourism. Planning and managing are essential for developing ecotourism destinations and all stakeholders, contributing to the quality of life of the local population improve its natural and cultural environment. Furthermore, sustainable development of ecotourism destinations is vital for the environment and local population because it is necessary to create new jobs, diverse possibilities for new investments and

enhance economic development.

This paper addresses the existing gap regarding ecotourism destinations and provides better insight into ecotourism destinations' management and sustainable development. The recommendation for further research is to conduct an even more extensive literature review to have more precise insight into the management and sustainable development of ecotourism destinations.

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