

ECOTOURISM: DEFINITION AND CONCEPTS

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Abstract

This paper takes into consideration some theoretical notions about ecotourism, an important segment of the tourism phenomenon, and wants to place face-to-face some of the most important attempts to define it (from Ceballos-Lascurain to David Weaver and Yi-Yen Wu). An important role in understanding ecological tourism is understanding the impacts that it has had on various elements of human society, and in a holistic vision we can conclude that ecotourism should be actually a principle that leads / underpins the entire global phenomenon of tourism.

Key words: *ecotourism, tourism, definition, sustainability, natural setting.*

JEL Classification: *Q20, Q30.*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism phenomenon has penetrated human life as a necessity, as part "created" by man, with man and for man. Practiced knowingly or instinctively, tourism / leisure (leisure) was and is one of human activities with an extensive search and development from the beginning of mankind, and especially now, in the 21st century. Although initially it was maybe just a simple exercise in analysis, discovery and admiration of the natural environment that man was dominated by, thereafter, and especially nowadays it has become a rapprochement, now that the human race has succeeded in some extent, to achieve a certain independence from the environment.

Initially considered the "green industry", "smokeless industry" of society, in order to "re-naturalize" to bring the man closer to the natural environment, tourism, through the widespread practice, by overcrowding, agglomerating areas with high tourist attractiveness, led inevitably to becoming a very serious problem even for the environment. This process of modern society could not be ignored, and gave rise and crystallization to new tourism concerns that will continue to satisfy the human need for relaxation, physical and mental recovery, but at the same time to take into account the protection / conservation of natural support where this complex process takes place. Why? Because tourism was already practiced on a global scale, and its beneficial effects, especially harmful ones, did not fail to appear. Tickell (1994) has some areas that are sensitive and suffer from the presence of tourism there: ecosystem and endemic creatures from Galapagos Islands, modern human intervention in the civilization of Amazonian tribes, accelerated degradation of cave paintings (probably the oldest in the world) from Lascaux caves (France), today available only to a small number of researchers, destruction by overcrowding of archaeological sites in Egypt, the emergence of large

quantities of garbage along the Sacred Path of Mount Everest, and examples can continue, we are daily witnessing this phenomenon of degradation.

A bizarre case was seized by Giovanni Bello in Monteverde Cloud Forest Reservation (Costa Rica), in 1987, when he recorded a population of about 1500 mature golden toads (species that live only in this area) but then, a year later, to find only 10 copies, and in 1989, only one; simultaneously, in other regions of the world have been encountered similar situations. There have been many theories to explain these phenomena (volcanic eruptions, climate warming and degradation of the ozone layer, acid rain, destruction of natural habitats, and so on), but at least in Monteverde, this species of frog coincided with the explosion of tourism activities and especially those of ecotourism. There were "voices" who said that even this new side of tourism, ecotourism, is to blame for this situation by bringing in reservation by visitors (voluntary / involuntary) a foreign body type bacteria / virus (Honey, 1999).

DEFINITION AND CONCEPTS

Among the first to guess this segment of tourism are Hetzer W. (1965), in "Environment, tourism, culture" where the author, talking about sustainable tourism, responsible, defines four key factors of its "lowest possible impact environment, respect for the host culture, increase benefits to local people and increase tourists' satisfaction. "As it can be seen, the first factor is the promoter of the idea of "ecotourism" and puts concern for the environment on a prominent place and the analysis of how the tourism phenomenon can lead to its damage. Also Miller K. (1978) in his reference to planning and management of national parks in South America, is also speaking about a range of eco-trails that have developed in those areas over time (Blamey, 2001). Proper use of the term "ecotourism" belongs to Ceballos-Lascurain (1987)

who defines the type of "tourism is traveling to natural areas untouched and uncontaminated by human factor, with the specific purpose of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery, wild animals and plants in it, as well as any cultural events (past and present) found in these areas(Jafari,J.,2000)."

The first attempts to define it focused on simple idea of protection and conservation of tourism resources. This idea was later preserved, but the 90's were completed in the new literature (and at the same time already used) theory of durable development, of sustainability. We can say, without failing, that the two concepts, ecotourism and sustainability (sustainable development, durable) are based on the same idea , often is even synonymous. In support of this idea comes Blamey`s table which presents the main definitions of ecotourism over time. Besides that of Ceballos-Lascurain, already cited, Blamey groups several ones:

- Ecotourism Society (1991 a, b) - "responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the natural environment and improve the living standards of local people"
- Ecotourism Association of Australia (1992) - "ecologically sustainable tourism that is protecting the natural environment and encourage understanding, appreciation and conservation of cultural elements".
- The National Ecotourism Strategy of Australia- "Ecotourism is a type of nature-based tourism that involves education and interpretation of the natural environment" (including cultural component) "and takes place in order to be sustainable and environmentally" (with direct reference to the local community and long-term conservation) (Allcock et al,1994).
- Tickell (1994) - "the journey to enjoy the impressive diversity of natural life and human culture without causing damage to any of them." This definition is nuanced by the author, highlighting the "human cultural sensitivity", "human curiosity" and "respect" for both the natural environment and the cultural.

Talamanca company based in Costa Rica with an important activity in the field of ecotourism provides an interesting definition of it: "Ecotourism is more than books and albums about wildlife, binoculars, more than folk art that is displayed on hotels` walls and restaurants but in fact is a constant struggle to protect landscapes, with supporting peoples` cultural heritage "(Bran, F. et all, 2000). Other organizations (U.I.C.N., W.N.F., C.N.P.P.A., P.N.N.E.Z), in turn, have developed different shades of defining ecotourism based around the same idea.

Ross and Wall (1999), in the article on ecotourism, are recognizing its role of "strategy for preserving natural areas while promoting sustainable development of the area", but they remarked from the beginning that ecotourism has failed in reaching its goals, the problem is that all theory created around it (which shows good strategy goals and otherwise), is not enough to be implemented properly.

The relationship between ecotourism and sustainability, between conservation and development is shown in Figure 1.

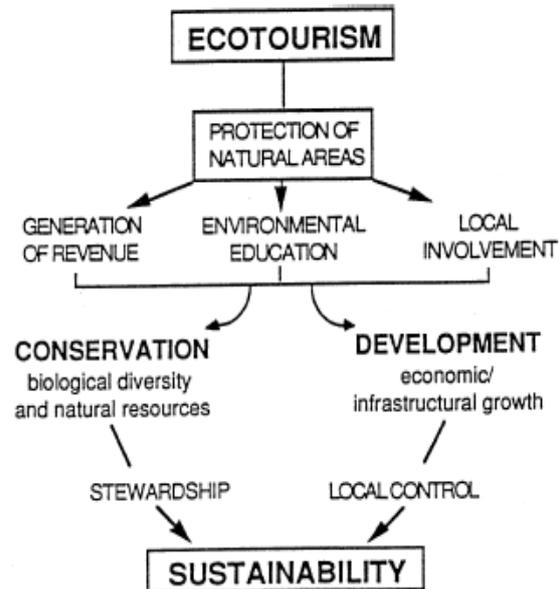


Figure 1- Perspective on Ecotourism (Ross, Wall, 1999)

The two authors observed that in many cases there is no clear distinction between ecotourism and other forms of tourism, that because the criteria used in identifying and highlighting ecotourism. Those criteria may refer to "motivation for why ecotourism is practiced (as a conservation strategy, a business initiative or part of an awareness campaign on environment), the motivation of those who practice it, size and the presence of environmental impact, social and economic (can be considered ecotourism destinations Yellowstone National Park, USA, which receives about three million visitors annually, and Tangkoko Dua Saudara Nature Reserve, Indonesia, which is visited by approximately 2500 visitors every year?), and presence / quality of service ".

Blamey (1997) is discussing in more detail the definition's elements / criteria provided by the National Ecotourism Strategy (based on nature,being environmental educated and administered / managed in sustainable manner) and shows that things are far from being completely drawn, there are many unclear situations on those three criteria; these cases of doubt may arise from the different variables that arise in practice by analyzing "tourist motivation", "results on tourists' satisfaction", "perception operators to consumers` motivation and results/outcomes in the field". Finally, to answer the question "What are the effects of ecotourism?" Ross and Wall appeal to the 5 functions and objectives defined by Pedersen (1991): "protection of natural areas (providing socio-economic benefits to the local community), cash flows generation (providing environmental education strategies), education (conservation of natural areas), quality tourism (providing a superior travel experience) and local involvement (increasing foreign exchange,

promoting and supporting environmental protection)". Having this agenda, ecotourism is seen truly as a real "panacea" of all tourism phenomenon , necessary and effective.

Weaver, Lawton (2007), in a review article of 20 years on ecotourism is presenting and detailing the state of research and implications / interactions that ecotourism has with certain sectors of human society (economic, institutional, environmental) (Fig. 2).

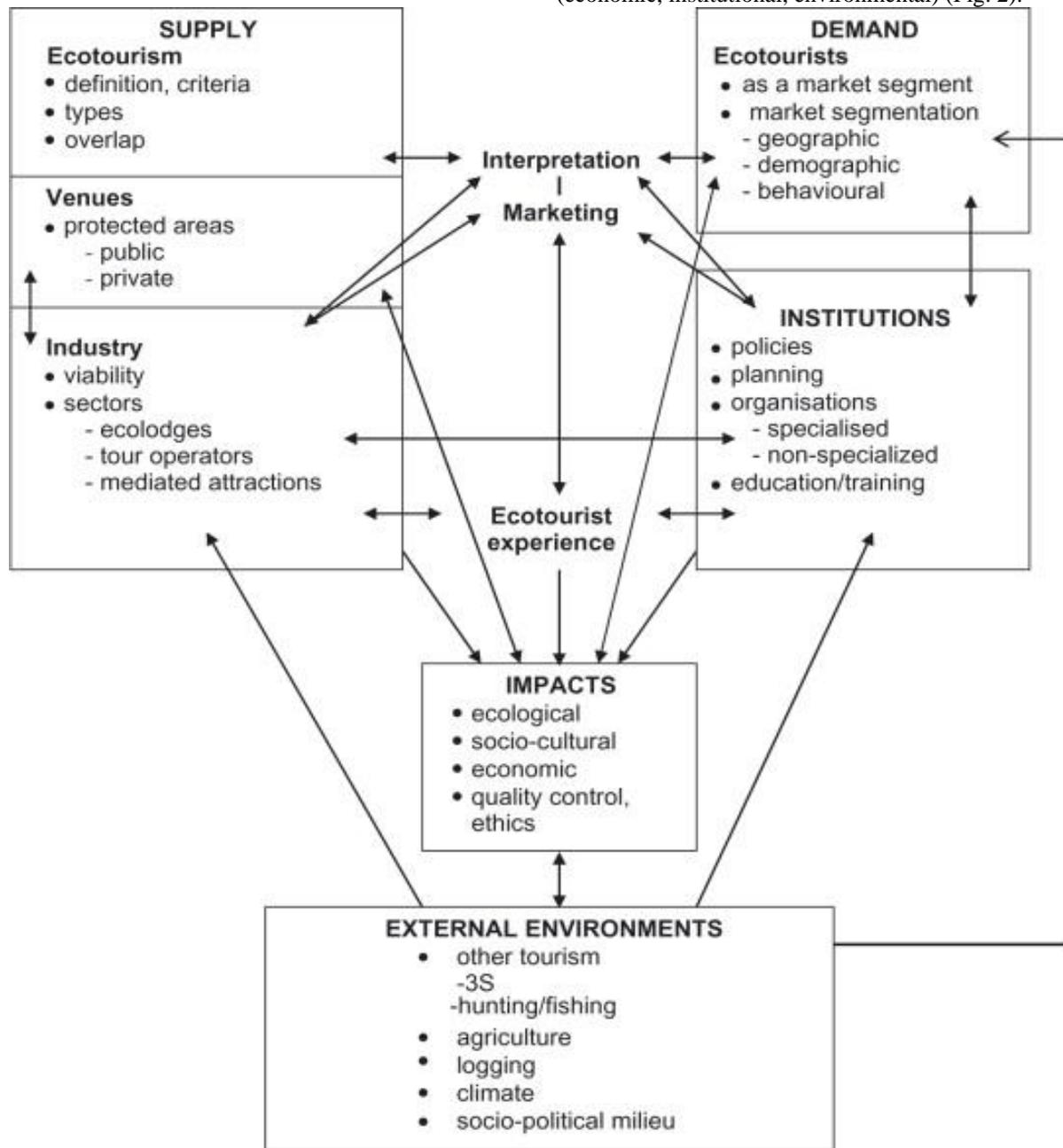


Figure 2 – Ecotourism sector scheme (Weaver, Lawton, 2007)

Graphical representation is one of the most complex encountered, perhaps because it comes at a time when tourism segment is already mature; from their research, and using the internet at that time (2007), the authors identified approximately 75,000 abstracts works (even from adjacent areas of geography and economics) that relate directly to "ecotourism" or variations of the term. Also, Fennell (2001) states that there are published about 85 definitions of ecotourism, but of course, as we said before, all are based on the concepts of "conservation", "sustainability",

"education", "local benefit". The scheme in question puts face-to-face the offer (from overwatching ecotourism, locations, to economic-industrial sector which seeks profit from this activity) and demand (defining ecotourists as distinct in the consumer segment, on geographic criteria -according to the different regions of the world, demographic - according to various characteristics of the population, behavior, and according to the first two criteria); is not a generally accepted approach in literature because of how the addressed criteria are listed do not provide the

possibility of achieving highly accurate results, scientific 100%.

The role of institutions is to formalize, enact and implement the whole assembly theory (principles, purpose, progress) giving it and existing framework, a permanent protection and improvement. Impacts (environmental, socio-cultural, economic) have always been considered and analyzed in attempts to define ecotourism as a pillar for research, but also a negative aspect concerning the ecological tourism. The last item, "external environments" brings into question the fact that, from what it has been studied so far, ecotourism in its entirety is not always directly influenced / affected by "geophysical forces" and anthropogenic ones (primary activities like fishing / hunting, agriculture, logging, etc.).

In all attempts to define and theoretical approaches to ecotourism, the most common feature is that it is based on the work of nature, even in the most sensitive and restrictive areas to human access, and simultaneously, the concern for conservation / environmental protection. A unique and bold term with a relatively new approach to ecotourism, is that of "urban ecotourism". We could say that there is a contradiction in terms. There may be such a thing as long as there is already a traditional reference to ecotourism as transposing human activity in natural locations of the most outstanding, virgin, perhaps already under institutional protection?

Among the first who tangentially brought this idea was Orams (1995) who, in an attempt of depth analysis of the existing definitions on ecotourism, starts from a somewhat logical statement, but taken to the extreme: "people are living organisms with a behavior that is perceived to be natural, and have no obligation to consider other living beings. "Right, isn't it? The man is as "natural" as any element in the landscape or natural environment, including its behavior (that if you were to simplify the idea to the maximum). In conclusion, man can not behave in a "non-ecotourism" way (reasoning is logical, but the idea is taken to the extreme, the author himself recognizes, but it is interesting to note how it is questioned) and so, says Orams, we can state that there should not be any differences within the natural and the man-made environment, so all travel types becoming "ecotourism". Aware of the extreme ideological paradigm from above, he actually believes that those who wish to define / explain ecotourism should focus on showing the human degree of responsibility (implication) (higher / lower) for the surrounding nature and the impact of its work. This approach divides tourism in active or passive (with greater or lesser involvement).

Wu (2010) takes this idea and other studies (Higham, Luke, 2002, Gibson, Dodd, Joppa, Jamieson, 2003, Kastelein, 2004, Wu and Wang, 2007) to develop the concept of urban ecotourism. First ones to propose this term were those of the Blackstone Corporation (1996) which they called simply as sustainable way to travel to urban areas or " the journey into nature and its

preservation in an urban environment" (Urban ecotourism Conference, 2004). Conservation process, in this case, according to Urban Ecotourism Declaration (2006), has the following issues: "1. natural landscapes, biodiversity and indigenous cultures 2. maximizing local benefits and community involvement as owners, investors, hosts and guides 3. educate visitors and locals about the environment, heritage resources and sustainability, human environmental footprint 4. reduction of human footprint in the environment "Wu (2010). Using the "Delphi technique" (a number of experts in several areas are subjected to questionnaires at least twice, and after each round, a moderator provides some of the answers and the experts` reasoning from the previous round; the goal is that after several such exercises, experts will rethink their answers so that their variety will decrease and hence the group will get closer to correct/true answers - www.wikipedia.org) author wishes to quantify the contribution of the three dimensions of urban ecotourism, environmental dimension, social and economic one, results showing that the last factor has a lower role / contribution in limiting this unique touring segment.

CONCLUSIONS

Ecotourism is a well exploited segment on tourist industry level and has a particular resonance among tourists, especially among those who even have special consideration for the environment, and want the best possible protection and conservation of it. Often, however, this term and its variations (eco-vacation, eco-tour, eco-adventure, eco-cruise, etc.) were introduced in tourism offers operators only as simple words, tricks to attract a wide range of tourists, or to enter and to benefit from the special natural and cultural areas. Regarding this, organizations / responsible institutions (especially environmental ones) can say what is best , but for this a special focus on this aspect of verification and control is needed. In Romania, primarily responsible for this are the Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism, and the Ministry of Environment and Forests (with National Agency for Environmental Protection and the National Institute of Research - Development for Environmental Protection). The ideal situation would be when the two Ministries would build bridges of cooperation with other ministries (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, Ministry of Economy, Trade and Business Environment, Ministry of Finance) to create plans and strategies for the development and control of ecotourism impacts on the natural environment and how it is perceived / practiced by the society.

Erleta Cater (1994) in its approach on Ecotourism, with a simple title opens our eyes to a different size / coverage of ecotourism: "product or principle?", "Rhetoric or reality?". Why we do not make ecotourism, first of all, a principle, a way of life,

a way of looking at tourism-environment interaction as a whole ... Why just talk about eco-tourism as a segment of tourism and not as a basic principle of the whole sector? There are favorable answers and circumstances to support this direction (too few solutions), but again we return to the human factor, education, institutions, industries, cultures, which should work in sustainability to each other and to absolutely all the human society and the natural environment.). At the moment Romania has about 192 NGOs with environmental profile (<http://www.mmediu.ro/ong.htm>); these organizations can play a very important contribution, and through close collaboration to at ministerial level, and with a particular focus on education and the local community, the "eco-tourism principle" can become a reality. The way in which the concept of tourism evolved, from simple theory (based on the low impact of tourism on the environment) towards what is supposed to be a

general principle of conduct tourism phenomenon, we could say it is a happy case of transposing theory into practice. The existence of "urban ecotourism" idea proves globalization of the idea / environmental concern promoted by this type of tourism that has exceeded its original boundaries (conservation and protection of the natural environment), becoming an integral part in the anthropic environment.

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