

EDUCATING AND INFORMING TOURISM CONSUMERS IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This article addresses aspects of environmental behavior in tourism issues, in the context in which, sustainable development has become increasingly important, due to preservation of natural and cultural heritage, upon which the very existence of future tourism depends. Mass tourism is declining in favor of individualized forms of tourism such as ecotourism, where Romania, especially Bukovina area, has a great potential. Responsible environmental behavior is addressed to all actors involved in tourism, suppliers, consumers and authorities. Necessary initiatives are those of spreading awareness and good practice, and to this end, we chose to present a significant initiative from Bukovina zone, shaped in the form of a project, from which people working in tourism have been trained in the spirit of environmentally friendly behavior and will disseminate it among tourists with which come into contact. What we consider important in the future, in such tourism projects, regardless of their essential objective, is the inclusion of issues related to sustainability and ecological behavior.

Key words: *Tourism, Sustainable development, Ecological behavior, Conservation, Ecotourism, information.*

JEL Classification: *L83, Q57*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the touristic field of activity, the sustainable development is as important as the degradation of nature and the cultural patrimony, which are the tourists' main motivations, would lead to the decrease of their interest, and so, to an activity's decrease. Taking into account the fact that, the tourists are more and more attracted by the unique places and the intact nature, it is necessary to preserve this natural capital, which can consist in the Romania's competitive advantage in order to be on a long term used. Unfortunately, yet, not all the operators think of a long term development, but to their immediate profits, which are desired to be the greatest. The local community, through authorities, as well as the entrepreneurs themselves, should become aware of this aspect and even more than that, to contribute to the promotion of an ecological responsible behavior among tourists, by informing them.

2. THE CONCEPT OF DURABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT OF INFORMING THE TOURISM SUPPLIER AND CONSUMER

The politics and the plans of regional development in the last years took more and more into account the tourism's field of activity as a strategically domain in order to assure an economical dynamic and durable increase of some regions which possess an important touristic potential.

The tourism has the capacity to contribute to the generation of a region's internal development, the reduction of regional disequilibrium, the geographical redistribution of wealth from the metropolitan areas towards the least developed and the most remote areas. The tourism appears, thus, as a realistic alternative of different regions' development. In this context, by its geographical position and the rich natural and entropic potential, Romania will be able to become an area of great attraction for tourists, in the conditions in which a series of strategies of durable touristic development will be created, implemented and promoted, that include also a prevention component of the environment's destruction, at the national and the regional level.

The tourism does not affect the environment at a high level, such as other economical fields of activity, yet, to conserve the natural environment, it is necessary that the tourism's development to be a durable one. *The durable development*, according to the World Commission on Environment and

Development responds to the necessities of actual generations, without destroying the future generations' chances to respond to their own necessities. Thus, the development can generate prosperity, if it regenerates the resources and it protects the environment (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p.43).

In the past, the tourism was perceived especially through its beneficial effects, but simultaneously with its unprecedented development and its transformation into an element of economical development, also some negative effects appear, among which also the destruction of eco-systems or the loss of cultural patrimony. As a consequence of these realities has appeared the need to create alternatives and practices which don't deteriorate the environment in the development politics, gathered around the generic notion of 'sustainable tourism', or 'ecotourism'. The notion of durable tourism has its origin in the ideology of sustainable development, simultaneously with the 'borrowing the sustainability' by the tourism in the report of World Commission on Environment and Development.

The notion of 'sustainable development' appeared in the 1980s, followed then by that of 'durable tourism', with its alternatives ecotourism, green tourism or responsible tourism. This paradigm refers to the fact that this type of touristic development has to possess economical advantages, to create social benefits for the local community and not to present negative effects on the environment, these aspects being real and for the future generations (McMinn, 1997, p.135). As a rule, these impacts are determined by external forces of community.

One of the challenges the sustainable tourism confronts to, is the one referring to the establishment of the development level or the maximum admitted capacity, beyond which the negative effects manifest. The admitted maximum capacity has to take into account the natural, social and cultural environment, the patrimony and the infrastructure's capacity. On the one hand, there is the every point of view of each component, a maximum capacity, but on the other hand, there is the difficulty and the subjectivity of measuring those components. Of all these maximum different capacities, the choice of a final one will be subjective, for example, the ones with high incomes will choose a lower value, compared to those with low incomes. Another important matter to be discussed is the determination of the prejudicial intergenerational potential. Being given the absence of information referring to the future technological possibilities, it is impossible to know which combinations of elements will be to offer the same level of wealth (Beckerman, 1992, pp.481-496). Thus, it can only be inferred what the necessities for the immediate future will be, this is the reason why this matter remains a problem to be discussed.

Its consistency or its relative delimitation in practice has many critics. Among these, a certain

problem can be remarked referring to the fact that this paradigm has not referred to a new form of tourism, but it can be used in an intelligent advertisement campaigns of some corporations in order to seem as being more ethical, in the promotion of the same touristic product (Lansing and De Vries, 2007, p.77).

Even if the negative effects are regularly associated with mass tourism, in WTO (World Tourism Organization)'s vision, the durable tourism's norms and managerial practices take into account all forms of tourism. The principals of sustainability refer to the aspects regarding the environment, the economical and the socio-cultural aspects of tourism's development, and the creation of equilibrium between these to guarantee its durability on a long term (According to the durable tourism's development conceptual definition, www.world-tourism.org; Lansing and De Vries, 2007, p.78).

From an economical perspective, one of the main preoccupations of the tourism's development is the effect of money losses from the local or national economies. According to some studies (Mowforth and Munt, 2003), these losses refer to the goods acquisition and imported services by tourists, the goods' imports and the touristic institutions' services, and to the redistribution of profits in the original country in the case of foreign proprieties of some touristic capacities. In order to minimize these losses, a more active involvement of local actors is necessary.

From the socio-cultural point of view, the counting of effects can be more difficult to accomplish. It can be mentioned the impacts of price increases for lands and products, as well as the social difference. Through education, it can be offered to a community the possibility of being aware of the eventual changes in their own social environment, and also of finding the modalities of solving them.

The tourism's development should be an integrated one, that can include all important points of view (ecological, social, economical and others), and their combination can be accomplished through the community's involvement in order to find a satisfactory equilibrium for all the implicated actors. The matter to be discussed consists in the level in which the community can evaluate and express its necessities, being sustained the fact that a higher level of community's participation can lead to a greater sustainability, but also to a larger distribution of benefits (Mowforth and Munt, 2003, in Lansing and De Vries, 2007, p.82). However, this fact is not generally true, because a unique vision does not exist in the quantification of durability, and the perceived necessities by those from a community are different.

Regarding the environment, the tourism's durable development takes into account the conservation, as much as it is possible, of the flora, fauna and natural resources. The limiting of the tourists' number is to be imposed. Especially, mass tourism and its increase create problems for the environment and the future development of this

industry. It must not be forgotten and the fact that, the nature itself and the fresh air are among the touristic motivations, considering the everyday life which takes place in a relative polluted environment.

Even if, it may seem that, through the environment's conservation, the economical development is stopped, but, this is the only way a destination can be individualized compared to others. More than that, through the features' conservation of the local environment, the tourism's development will assure its longevity together with the economical benefits, because the tourism depends on the existence of natural, cultural and historical factors. Here, some actors' interests, apparently diametrical opposed, converge, the touristic operators and the community's representatives, the first want to conserve the environment in order to sustain the tourism, but the others being only interested in the environment matter and less in tourism, that, in case it exists, is wanted to be a sustainable one (McMinn, 1997, p.140).

A current tendency in tourism is the movement of tourists from the more developed countries towards the less developed ones, with benefits for both sides: the exploration of new destinations, and, respectively, the new jobs' evolution and the currency incomes. From the sustainable tourism's perspective, these touristic fluxes are in order to bring influences on the host area, being considered by some experts as a form of neo-colonialism (McMinn, 1997, p.141). The evolution of touristic activities in some less developed countries, or in the least developed areas of other countries, brings with itself the danger as, the host population not to think anymore of sustainability and the environment protection, as long as the tourism can bring them an immediate income which can help them overcome the subsistence level. The state and different organizations must intervene here in order to contribute to being aware of the necessity of an ecological behavior.

Taking into account the fact that the ethics of durability is based on theory and practice, at a local level, as well as a global one, the industry should, finally, rethink its strategies in order to respect the limits of durable development.

The tourism's industry borrowed the concept of *durable development* and adopted the notion of *durable tourism*. Thus, the latter develops the idea of satisfying the actual tourists and touristic industry and, in the same time, protecting the environment and the future opportunities. The environment has a durable value which is extremely important for tourism; the future generations should benefit of it, and the tourism's evolution must not lead to the environment's degradation.

3. THE TOURISTIC POTENTIAL IN THE BUKOVINA AREA

Such as there are cases of regions in Europe, not the presence of some top industries or some multinationals is the only capable to assure evolution. The agriculture and the services can contribute to the assurance of a satisfactory level of occupation, but what can be constituted as a basis element for development, is the tourism, this including also the promotion of original elements, that can change into economical goods. A problematical aspect of the area, respectively, the existence of a countryside archaic style of life can be changed into a competitive advantage, meaning that it can attract tourists, it can stimulate the craftsmanship activities, as well as, the evolution of investment activities.

This integrating vision of touristic activities, in the region's economy, reserves tourism the role of stimulating and connecting other fields of activities. There are many opinions about the report between tourism and the general development, and precisely: the evolution of this field of activity is a consequence of the general development of the region, the two develop simultaneously, and, respectively that, the tourism stimulates evolution. Regarding these points of views, we do not think that one of them should be considered absolute, even if there is the tendency to consider especially only the first two, whose truth is supported by the touristic movement much greater in the developed countries. There are, also, situations, as previously mentioned, the case of some unused resources that will be used thanks to tourism, or some regions which have no alternative from the economical point of view. In these situations, the tourism can contribute to the increase of the general development's level, this being the case of some areas of North-East Region. In the countryside, the traditional ways of life were kept, many times, to an exaggerated backwards, yet, the modernization will make room, undoubtedly, due to some imposed standards. In such a context, the problem which appears is how the rural tradition can be preserved, in the imposed modernization conditions, and which its limits are, in order not to affect this cultural component of rural areas (Botezat, 2009, p.495).

Bukovina region, as well as Romania in general, has a considerable potential for the rural tourism due to the best natural and the cultural resources. The regions from the neighborhood of mountainous touristic resorts and the important cities from the cultural point of view are the places where the rural tourism develops. The agrotourism is a form of tourism tightly connected to the countryside, as a place for taking place, thus, providing the accommodation and other services, by the peasantry farmyard. It must be mentioned that it is not compatible to mass tourism, where the productivity is everything, a certain closeness, leaving it without the substance which gives its consistency and potential (customs, traditions, etc.). From this perspective, the rurality of some areas, such as the mountainous part of Suceava County can be changed into an advantage. A

danger, which can threaten the traditions and the cultural values of people from the countryside, is constituted by some structural changes imposed by the E.U., having as an aim to get to some qualitative standards, even if, generally speaking, the diversity is promoted. The peasants should be aware of preserving the cultural inheritance, which has the capacity to sell the touristic product. Some components of tradition have the authenticity only if they are part themselves from this way of life, this will not happen if they are looked only as exhibits for tourists. Although European Union applies a series of exceptions in order to preserve the cultural values, the tendency towards modernization will express anyway, and the agro tourism's opportunity is the offer of the rural touristic product, simultaneously with the preservation of a traditional way of life, in the disadvantage of a luxurious one, permitted by the growing material possibilities.

The tourism of adventure does not represent a consistent part on the market, and, it has to remain the same, in other conditions, it would destroy its own sustainability. (Hall, Marciszewska and Smith, 2006, p.75) Here can be included those who look for individual experiences, which can be joined the practicing of some sports activities, such as: walking, alpinism, climbing, cycling, paragliding, sailing, fishing, horse riding, cave explorations, etc. For these, it is not necessary the existence of an elaborated infrastructures, but only an untouched nature and a less populated area.

One of the predisposed areas for tourism of adventure consists in the Austria's Alps, but the area of Central and East Europe has, similarly, potential (for example, the Carpathians, in Poland, Slovakia and Romania). Even if the destinations already classical attract the most part of the tourists, the new regions from the Central and Eastern Europe can become attractive through the creation of some positive images, that, in some cases they would replace the negative perception which exists. The eco-tourism's itineraries and the tourism of adventure are organized by the specialized tour-operators, who can be found especially in the mountainous regions.

Bukovina region can remark itself from this point of view through the promotion of tourism of adventure: alpinism, paragliding on the Ouşorul Cliff from Suhard mountain, nordic-walking, mountain-biking, river-rafting down the Bistriţa river, based on some specific aspects: wild scenery, isolated mountainous villages and authentic peasants, the way it does not exist anymore in the occidental countries.

Health tourism is represented in the Central and Eastern Europe, by the resorts from the Sudeten Mountains (Poland and Czech Republic) and the Carpathian Mountains (Poland, Slovakia, Romania), these countries having a significant potential in this segment. There is local growth potential of this niche from Vatra Dornei, Gura Humorului, Suceviţa.

Rest and recreation tourism can also be practiced, due to favorable natural environment. This type of tourism is suitable for almost all rural mountainous part of Suceava County, due to special natural endowment and a rich natural environment in areas such as Gura Humorului, Vatra Dornei, Câmpulung Moldovenesc and others.

Romanian Cultural tourism takes place mainly around some objectives like the monasteries of Bukovina (which are also favorite destinations for religious tourism). To this other attractions are added, such as folk traditions, but, however, few tourists visit places of cultural remains, especially since they are not well promoted. In this case, tourists which go on vacation could be attracted, or those who seek only this type of tourism.

Study and thematic tourism has experienced a rising in Central and Eastern Europe, especially after the Cold War. This segment is mainly based on active pensioners with a high level of education, who are looking for intellectual stimulation and personal contacts, here the infrastructure not being paramount. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, and the accession of several countries in Central and Eastern Europe to the EU, this area was established as a relatively new destination, new and exotic for western tourists.

So, given that tourism, by its specific from North-East Region can not produce agglomeration effects, it is vital to develop in an integrated manner, involving also other related fields. As issues that have to be reported, are the failure of the private operators which are unable to support some projects, and also the increase danger of widespread forms of tourism that must remain small in order not to self sabotage. Therefore, we must not forget that the preservation of cultural values is imperative, thus ensuring sustainability of tourism, without turning into a mass one, where this is not suitable. Even so, one can obtain wealth from tourism, much of the tourism potential coming from just a so-called *exotic*, which can not be found everywhere. Tourism can only develop in an integrated way, being connected with other sectors, this being the vision that should be a starting point for developing future strategies for development.

4. HOW CAN ONE CONTRIBUTE TO THE EDUCATION AND INFORMATION OF THE CONSUMER

We consider that the potential area where tourism is stimulated has to be also the subject of awareness of a responsible ecological behavior need.

We are aware that, also the territory of a country, as well as of a region, is not equally suited to tourism activities. North-East Region, which includes also Bukovina, is no exception, so that not all component counties have the same tourism potential, and therefore the same importance as tourist destinations.

With respect to these ideas, we consider appropriate to demonstrate that Bukovina is a tourism favorite area of the North-East Region, which differs of others, from the point of view of accommodation capacities and number of tourists, thus motivating the choice of our research theme. What we focus on, is the share in the region of Suceava County, which is formed mainly from the southern part (the only remaining part in Romania) of the historical region of Bukovina.

In terms of accommodation capacity, we can say that this had a general upward trend after 2000.

During the past two decades, the share of counties has changed, so that Bacău owns currently 12.95% of accommodation places of the region (from 28.18% in 1990). Botoșani and Vaslui continue to have very low weights, reaching less than 5%. Iași and Neamț have significant weights, with 25,74, respectively, 15,82%. However, the largest share of accommodation places holds Suceava County, which is of 37,73% (from 27,38% in 1990) (Figure 1).

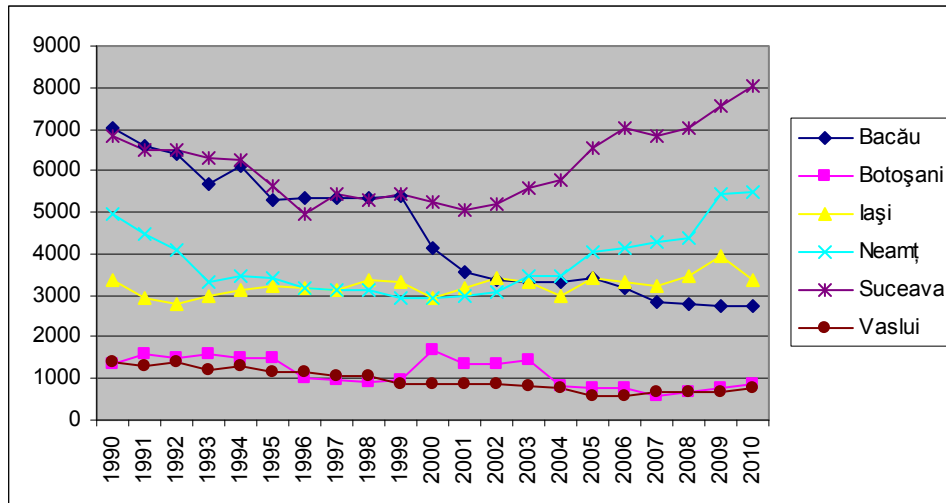


Figure 1 - The evolution of accommodation capacity in North-East Region counties, during 1990-2010 (number of places)

Source: Elaborated using the data from the National Statistics Institute of Romania, <https://statistici.insse.ro/shop>

In terms of number of tourists arrivals, their evolution at county level, as evidenced in the chart no. 2, shows stagnation in Botoșani and Vaslui counties, and the downward trend for Bacău, all these having currently much lower values compared to the other

counties. Suceava attracts the largest number of tourists (31,3% in 2010, from 25.03% in 1990), followed by Iași (27,85% in 2010, from 13,7% in 1990) and Neamț (21,09% in 2010, from 22,1% in 1990).

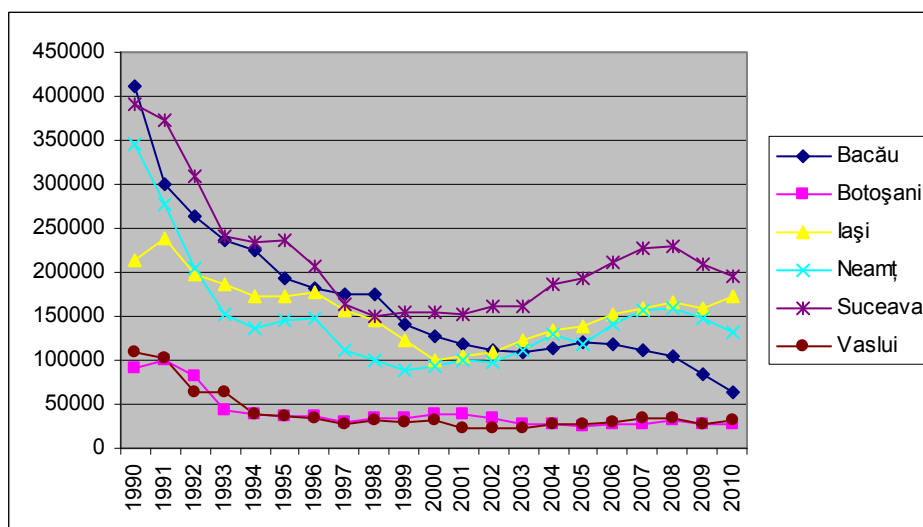


Figure 2 - Evolution of tourist arrivals in North-East Region counties, during 1990-2010

Source: Elaborated using the data from the National Statistics Institute of Romania, <https://statistici.insse.ro/shop>

From the data presented, we see that Suceava has about a third of the accommodation capacity of the North-East Region, and records about a third of the number of tourist arrivals in the region, so, any initiative to stimulate tourism development, and, includes in the same issues related to the formation of ecological behavior, is important.

New approaches of tourism increasingly take into account the nature, the cultural heritage and the recreational destinations, so that the restrictions relating to environmental protection are increasingly important. It is important that tourism operators are aware of the necessity of good nature conservation, because nature is the one that attracts tourists, enabling them to continue their activity.

The concept of ecotourism integrates cultural tourism, nature tourism and adventure tourism. It is based on local culture, spirit of adventure, volunteering, and personal development. This is, in essence, to travel where main attractions are the flora, fauna and cultural heritage. Organizing a responsible ecotourism should minimize adverse effects on the environment and on the cultural integrity of the residents. However, local operators' initiatives for the purposes of recycling or use resources without wasting are also important.

Ecotourism has become, nowadays, one of the forms of tourism with a growing market, that's why, it is even more important to minimize negative environmental impacts. Those are mainly due to inadequate plans, irresponsible behavior of tourists and lack of education about possible negative impacts.

One's goal is that the offered services not cause damage to the environment and ecosystems. Informing and educating tourists in this spirit is meant to complement the economic agents, in the general approach to carry out a sustainable tourism. So, good practices relates to the conservation of nature and culture, natural resources using efficiency, recycling programs, organic waste collection, ecotourist education of guides, managers and tourists, and natural areas protection through restrictions. Currently, one of the weaknesses of tourism in Romania is poor education on the long-term importance natural heritage.

In this context, one of the local initiatives, which we consider representative for the formation of a ecological behavior, is the "NAP Tourism - Bukovina – Nature Active Tourism Parks in Bukovina" project, conducted in 2008-2009 by Ștefan cel Mare University of Suceava with the following partners: the Society "Science" in Chernivtsi - "Znannya", Vatra Dornei City Hall, Gura Humorului City Hall, Sucevița City Hall (Project funded by the European Neighborhood Programme Romania-Ukraine 2004-2006, Phare CBC Component 2006/018.449, with a budget amounting to 528.887,625 Euros).

The project goal was to create a leisure alternative for tourists who come to Bukovina by

developing Active Tourism Parks in Nature in the Vatra Dornei area, Humor-Humor Monastery, Sucevița. Basically, it was intended to develop networks of trails for hiking, biking and nordic-walking, developed on forest roads or existing hiking trails, with different degrees of difficulty and lengths. Through such initiatives one can contribute to the length of stay of tourists increase in the area.

Such actions were thought to fill in the context of sustainable development of tourism on good practices European models, in which, both the organizer and tourists are aware of the need of their environmental behavior. Thus, the goal of the mentioned project was to improve the leisure tourism infrastructure and active tourism supply in the border area, for a sustainable development of tourism, based on European good practices (www.turismactiv.ro).

Educating and informing tourism consumers is made, in this case, by the persons trained in the project in activities of "interpretation of nature, environment and ecology", but also by those prepared in the same project, namely, active tourism activities instructors and persons employed in tourism, which were trained in two Entrepreneurial Training in Tourism seminars.

Also, through such projects, and by some of their results (including articles, studies, in this case, presented in the frame of a conference and printed in a volume), one is made more aware of the notion of ecological behavior of the tourism suppliers and consumers.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The importance of sustainable tourism development has increased, because of the danger of natural and cultural heritage degradation and of the conservation necessity, on which even the future of tourism activities depends. This is especially important, because ecotourism is increasingly preferred, instead of mass tourism, so the touristic potential conservation is essential. In this context, initiatives from the community and operators in promoting environmentally responsible behavior and spread good practices appear to be necessary and welcomed.

Putting into practice of such initiatives took many shapes, one of them being the NAP project conducted in the Bukovina area, which trained people working in tourism (guides, instructors, employees) in line with good practices and nature conservation. These people, who interact directly with tourists, have an important influence on them in the matter of encouraging the protection of the surrounding nature. Thus, after its activities, the project contributed to promoting environmentally responsible behavior among tourists, by informing them.

The mentioned project sought to improve tourism infrastructure in the border area recreation *for sustainable tourism development on models of good*

practices in Europe, thus, fitting within the responsible vision of environmental protection and promotion of a related behavior. What's new in this project, in addition to its main goal related linked with leisure tourism, is the inclusion of promoting sustainable development and ecological behavior. Thus, we consider important in the future, in the frame of such projects in tourism, whatever would be the

main purpose, to include issues related to environmental behavior and its promotion.

We consider essential that tourism initiatives are designed so that they fit in the context of sustainable development, building and promoting models of good practices in Europe, in which, both the organizer and the tourist to be aware of their environmental behavior necessity.

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