Considerations about Ecotourism and Nature-Based Tourism - Realities and Perspectives

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Abstract

Tourism is globally a major industry, and by some measures it is estimated to be the world’s largest industry. Furthermore, it is a growing industry. Nature-based tourism is undoubtedly one of the most significant areas of research in tourism studies today. Nature-based tourism includes tourism in natural settings (adventure tourism), tourism that focuses on specific elements of the natural environment (safari, wildlife tourism, nature tourism) and tourism that is developed in order to conserve or protect natural areas (ecotourism, national parks). Ecotourism is viewed in many parts of the world as the next wave of community and regional development. Three goals of ecotourism are that is should bring benefits to local people, protect the natural and cultural heritage upon which the tourism is founded. As a nature-based form of tourism, ecotourism requires a relatively untouched landscape that is physically accessible to markets and entrepreneurial individuals who can develop the product within accepted parameters.

Keywords: ecotourism, nature-based tourism, sustainability, tourist satisfaction

Introduction

The tourism industry is one of the fastest-growing industries in the world and is now well established as an object of social scientific study. In the field of tourism studies, branches such as cultural tourism and eco-tourism are recognized and contested domains.

Tourism does not always have to represent globalization or the subjugation of local communities to tourists and the demands of the tourism industry. It should however express the control of local people over their futures. This applies to ecotourism, as well as nature based tourism. By making a connection between nature based tourism and eco-tourism in this way, the focus can be on the opportunities that such an alliance offers for local communities. Such forms of tourism, are sustainable form of tourism.

This article brings these two fields in tourism studies together and proposes eco-nature based tourism as a way for communities with otherwise marginal cultural or environmental resources to develop.
This paper discusses the concepts of ecotourism and nature-based tourism as a system with all connections arising from its elements and forms. Eco-sustainable tourism implement strict measures to protect flora, fauna, ecosystems where appropriate, archaeological sites, historical and cultural materials.

Romania is going through a period of rapid socioeconomic changes. This evolution and its considerable effect on the environment, its protection is now placing in second place to economic development. Tourist facilities are developed explosive and often chaotic, holiday homes penetrate deeper into protected areas severely affecting ecosystems. Tourist routes and ski slopes are multiplying and becoming every day more and more requested. Forest management passes a period of reform, this situation might leading to negative effects in some areas, leading to deteriorating quality of forest. When these phenomena are related to socio-economic development plan and their evolution is uncontrolled negative effect on the environment is significant, leading to its degradation.

**Ecotourism**

After 1970 when global industrial pollution effects became more visible when the big oil leaking damaged thousands of tons of oil destroying the marine environment and beaches, the concepts of ecology, sustainable development, ecotourism gradually imposed themselves as an alternative rational irrational development.

The word „ecotourism” is a contraction of the term „ecological tourism”. Therefore, its prime focus is on the relationship between tourism and living things and their environments (Tisdell and Wilson, 2012, p.8). In practice, however, it has been defined more narrowly and a variety of definitions have evolved. Some of the definitions of ecotourism, that have proved popular in recent years, and which are consistent with the definition offered in introduction are listed in table no.1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Table no.1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ceballos-Lascurain (1987, p.14)</td>
<td>Travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ecotourism Society (1991)</td>
<td>Responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecotourism Association of Australia (1992)</td>
<td>Ecologically sustainable tourism that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>National Ecotourism Strategy of Australia (Alcock, et al., 1994 )</td>
<td>Ecotourism is nature based tourism that involves education and interpretation of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tickell (1994)</td>
<td>Travel to enjoy the world’s amazing diversity of natural life and</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Ecotourism is one of the forms of tourism developed in countries with natural and cultural potential of a universal value.

Ecotourism is a response to increased interest in knowledge of nature, and the warning signs coming from the farthest corners of the world.

Source: adapted from http://www.planeta.com, access at 5 October, 2012

It notes that ecotourism, like any other form of traditional tourism, should be sustainable, provide visitor satisfaction and relaxation, benefits to local people, and be ‘appropriate’ to its environment and cultural setting.

Ecotourism has implications for the optimal use of local tourism resources and in raising the living standards of people in socio-economic development of rural quality and the community in general. Not least in protecting and conserving natural and built environment in the context of an economic activity on ecological principles (sustainable).

Recent research (Sambotin et al., 2011) shown the eligibility for accreditation in ecotourism is based on the following eight principles:

**Figure no.1 – Principles of ecotourism**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus on nature</td>
<td>Focuses on personally experiencing natural areas in ways that lead to greater understanding and appreciation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interpretation</td>
<td>Integrates opportunities to understand natural areas into each experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Sustainability</td>
<td>Represents best practice for ecologically sustainable tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributions to conservation</td>
<td>Proactively contributes to the conservation of natural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involving local communities</td>
<td>Provides constructive ongoing contributions to local communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural component</td>
<td>Is sensitive to, interprets and involves different cultures, particularly indigenous culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer Satisfaction</td>
<td>Consistently meets customer expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Marketing</td>
<td>Marketing is accurate and leads to realistic expectations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These principles are being agreed and promoted by the Romanian Ecotourism Association (AER), having on their base two international models: *Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program (NEAP)* developed by the Australian Ecotourism Association and Nature’s Best, accreditation system promoted by Sweden Ecotourism Association.
These principles must be put in place by those who develop ecotourism products, as well as those who plan the development of an area-based ecotourism. In ecotourism branch a special place is given by the marketing concept. The importance of proper marketing is widely recognized throughout the tourism sector that today tourism market has become increasingly segmented over the methods of communication to reach consumers have multiplied and diversified (Boghean C. and BogheanF, 2006).

Ţigu and Ţuclea (2008) in their research paper found four cultural determinants of tourist satisfaction, as are shown in the next figure, the first two having a cultural interaction:

**Figure no. 2 – Cultural determinants of tourist satisfaction**

![Cultural determinants of tourist satisfaction](image)

In the next figure are shown the main need of eco-tourists:

**Figure no. 3-The pyramid of eco-tourism need**

![The pyramid of eco-tourism need](image)

Ecotourism occupies a specialist niche within tourism activity. It includes forms of tourism (green tourism, nature based tourism, rural tourism) which are consistent with natural, social and local community values and that promote cultural and environmental interaction in authentic natural settings.
Ecotourism is about:

- environmentally responsible travel to relatively undisturbed natural areas,
- travel in order to enjoy, study and appreciate nature,
- the promotion of conservation,
- combining sustainable development with the natural environments,
- the use of natural assets and resources in ecologically sensitive areas to create unique visitor experiences with minimal impact on the areas.

Nature-Based Tourism

Tourism that features ‘nature’ is generally termed environmental or ‘nature based tourism’; a broad term that includes a range of tourism experiences including adventure tourism, ecotourism, and aspects of cultural and rural tourism, eg. farmstay. Aboriginal culture is included as part of nature based tourism because of its inextricable link with the natural environment. Nature based tourism is distinguished from other tourism forms by its natural area setting. Ecotourism may include elements of other nature based tourism types such as adventure tourism in which the focus is on the activity, for example, white water rafting or scuba diving. However ecotourism is also characterized by a number of other features, in particular

- its conservation ethos,
- its environmental education and interpretation elements,
- its emphasis on ecological sustainability and minimizing potential impacts,
- ensuring that those natural areas used for ecotourism remain in a conserved natural state for future generations to enjoy.

Nature-based tourism embracing a large spectrum of activities, such as: bird watching, stargazing, biking, scuba diving, fishing, camping, hiking. The lack of generally accepted definitions has hindered our abilities to identify and analyze nature tourism and its many variations, such as results in table no.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Rainbow of Nature-Based Tourism</th>
<th>Table no.2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incidental travel</td>
<td>Any travel during which the traveller views or appreciates the green environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature-Centred Support</td>
<td>Travel in which nature is the central element rather than an after-thought.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>Travel organized to provide appreciable financial support for the protection of the green environment visited or enjoyed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecological</td>
<td>Travel in which the traveller personally engages in activities that support conservation or restoration.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: adapted from [http://www.planeta.com](http://www.planeta.com), access at 5 October, 2012
Pickering and Weaver (2001, p. 10) said in their research paper that it is fair to say that nature-based tourism is now a permanent fixture in most of the world’s high-ordered protected areas, and the ability to balance and, hopefully, synergize the twin mandates of tourism and environmental preservation is perhaps the greatest challenge faced by protected area managers.

Whether nature-based tourism is likely to remain sustainable will depend of several factors (Tisdell, 1998). These include:

- Whether it conserves the resource base on which it relies;
- Whether nature-based tourism provides sufficient continuing economic benefits to influential stakeholders for them to maintain their support for allocating the resources involved in this type of tourism.

**Conclusion**

Practicing these new forms of tourism involves modernizing the infrastructure development of rural urban areas in a sustainable forms of energy use, unconventional techniques cleaner. At the same time, we need effective marketing, a good knowledge of places of tourist destination, an effective macroeconomic development areas to avoid overexploitation, pollution avoidance of investments and assets.

Ecotourism and nature-based tourism should be seen in direct relation to nature conservation (protected areas), with preservation of the authentic and involving local communities in all stages of the process. Development process is a lengthy process (5-10 years), which requires a sustained effort from all those involved but can bring major benefits in the long term, contribute directly to the creation of "sustainable existing target area.

Decision to initiate such a process should be guided by local communities, requiring the initiation of a comprehensive development planning ecotourism planning to integrate all social, economic and environmental. In other authors opinion it takes decades to achieve a competitive advantage: the history of the U.S. national parks spreads over 150 years, for example.

**References**


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[http://www.planeta.com](http://www.planeta.com), access at 5 October, 2012