

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM INDICATORS AS TOOLS FOR A DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

INDICATORII TURISMULUI DURABIL CA INSTRUMENTE DE DEZVOLTARE A UNEI DESTINAȚII TURISTICE

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Abstract

Based on the relevant literature review, this paper proposes a list of the indicators of sustainable tourism. First, the overview of the sustainable development and sustainable tourism concepts are presented. Secondly, the list of the indicators of sustainable tourism is discussed, as useful tools for assessing, planning and management of sustainable tourism in a destination. Finally, it is concluded that the indicators help to understand whether tourism in a specific destination is sustainable or not, and undertake a certain measures towards sustainability.

Key words: *sustainable development, sustainable tourism, indicators*

1. Sustainable development

Sustainable development may have many meanings (Carew and Mitchell, 2008, p.106). There is a variety of interpretations of the definition and use of the concept “Sustainable development”. The existence of many definitions of sustainable development is not surprising, because this concept is young, complex, abstract, and discussed by many authors (Liu, 2003; Wang, 2010).

In order to understand the concept of sustainable development in the tourism sector, it is also necessary to understand the concept of “sustainability”. Different authors give different definitions for this concept. The most general and accurate definition is provided by Bruntland’s Report: “*Sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability for future generations to meet their own needs*” (Our Common Future, 1987, p.37).

In addition Niedziolka (2008) suggests sustainability is a popular trend in present-day life, concerning development, operation, and tourism, among other sectors. The author agrees with Cooper *et al* (2008) this definition identifies basic principles of sustainability, such as:

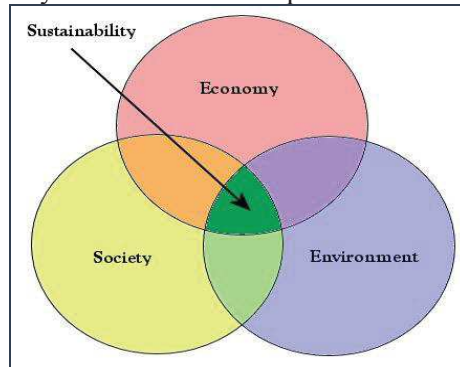
- It takes a holistic approach to planning and strategy;
- It protects the environment and man-made heritage;
- It preserves the main ecological processes;
- It facilitates and engages public participation;
- It ensures that productivity can continue into the long-term future;
- It provides for a better level of fairness and opportunity between different countries (Niedziolka, 2008, p.159).

Many commentators and researchers describe sustainability in terms of three concepts. They expand Bruntland’s vision in their research to include three main objectives of sustainable development, that in turn have a variety of descriptors, namely, environmental sustainability, social sustainability, and economic sustainability (Carew and Mitchell, 2008). This definition highlights the close relationship between ecology and society and represents the key points in the sustainable development issue.

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Figure 1. Sustainability in terms of 3 concepts: environment, society, economy



Furthermore, Elliot (2006) shows the components of these concepts in detail.

Economic sustainability requires an achievement of the benefits for people through scale of economic activity. It provides the structural and territorial shifts in the world economy, increasing the intensity and productivity of the economy, the achievement of optimal from the point of view of maintaining a balance between society and nature in economic growth.

Environmental sustainability puts emphasis on the protection of ecological diversity and the environment. It is essential, because humanity must learn to live within the limits determined by the capacity of the biosphere.

Social sustainability consists of maintaining cultural diversity and historical heritage.

Thus, sustainable development relates the environment, the economy and the well-being of people in a kind of three-pronged system. The key to it lies in improving the management of natural resources, the economy and society at all levels: global, regional, national and local.

In addition, there is a description of these three concepts of sustainability in the tourism sector provided by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO):

Environmental impact is characterized as the sustainability of an area's natural or physical surroundings, production and consumption patterns, including preservation of ecosystems, biodiversity, and the atmosphere.

Social impact is characterized as the positive influence on communities in terms of their organization and the quality of their social indicators, like health, poverty and social inclusion, education and personal development, culture, diversity, and human rights.

Economic impact is characterized as the generation of economic growth and sustainability of the local community, including things like professional development, employment, labor, conditions and contracting, investment, purchase, and trade (UNWTO, 2010, p.9).

Sustainable tourism involves using components of the natural environment and conserving them, minimizing negative impact both socially and economically, and maximizing the benefits to local communities. These definitions are just a sample of the huge volume of existing definitions, and they give an overview of what sustainable development is.

2. Sustainable tourism

Sustainable tourism is defined by the United Nations World Tourism organization (UNWTO) as follows:

Sustainable Tourism Development meets the needs of present tourists, host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, and biological diversity and life support systems (UNWTO, 2013).

Furthermore according to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in Ireland (DEHLG, 1997) "Sustainable tourism is based on the principles of sustainable development." Here they propose to, "minimize the adverse impacts on local

communities, our built heritage, landscapes, water resources, habitats and species while supporting economic and social prosperity.” (p. 116.)

When considering all the problems arising in consequence of the development of tourism industry, for tourists and local communities, it is clear there is a need for a comprehensive solution of the problem based on the concept of sustainable development. In order for tourism to be a factor of social-economic development of the region, it must follow the principles of sustainable development.

Creaco and Querini (2003) consider that tourism sustainability should put strong emphasis on three simple concerns:

- “The need to avoid the uncontrolled destructive degradation of the environment and the loss of local identity, while respecting the fragile balance that characterizes many tourist destinations, in particularly environmentally sensitive areas.”
- “The need to actively pursue and strengthen the quality of life and equity between present generations.”
- “The exigency not to reduce the opportunities offered to future generations.” (p. 14)

If these core elements of tourism sustainability such as economy, ecology and society are taken into consideration, there is a greater chance to keep the process of sustainable development in tourism.

It should be noted, that sustainable tourism is often equated with nature-based tourism and ecotourism. However, sustainable tourism is not only about protection of the natural environment; it is about consideration of the host peoples in the area, the communities, their culture and heritage, their lifestyle, and the existing social and economic systems. For example, many countries have a big interest in supporting tourism development given the potential socio-economic benefits of this sector. They mainly refer to the positive impact on the balance of payments, regional development, and diversification of the economy, income levels, state revenue, and employment opportunities. (Creaco and Querini, 2003)

3. The indicators of sustainable tourism

Indicators of sustainable tourism are tools that are useful for planning and management of sustainable tourism that have been proved. It means they are essential element of planning and management process. Indicators help to understand if tourism in specific destination is sustainable or not (Bellaterra, 2010).

As we already know, sustainable tourism is tourism that follows the principles of sustainable development, such as economic efficiency, social equity and environmental conservation. As a result, the indicators of sustainable tourism should evaluate all three objectives of sustainable development. The main objectives of such indicators are highlighted below on the table:

Table 1. Objectives of the indicators of sustainable tourism

| Objectives | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| To be a strategic tool | They can help in defining, developing and evaluating what the destination wants to be in the future |
| To become a management tool | They should answer these questions: what a destination of quality wants? How to monitor if we reach what we want? |
| To be a communication tool | The can identify problems and indicate what is going well or badly in relation to the agreement on what we want. |

Source: Bellaterra, 2010

Indicators of sustainable tourism are associated with sustainability objectives and with the process of monitoring them in specific destination.

The European Union (EU) has been working on the establishment of these indicators for tourism sustainability, which are outlined in the table below:

Table 2. The indicators of sustainable tourism

| Section A: Destination Management | | |
|---|----------------------------|--|
| Criteria | Indicator Reference | CORE indicators |
| A.1 Sustainable Tourism Public Policy | A.1.1 | Percentage of the destination with a sustainable tourism strategy/action plan, with agreed monitoring, development control and evaluation arrangement |
| A.2 Sustainable Tourism Management in Tourism Enterprises | A.2.1 | Percentage of tourism enterprises/establishments in the destination using a voluntary verified certification/labeling for environmental/quality/sustainability and/or CSR measures |
| A.3 Customer Satisfaction | A.3.1 | Percentage of visitors that are satisfied with their overall experience in the destination |
| A.4 Information and Communication | A.4.1 | The percentage of visitors who note that they are aware of destination sustainability efforts |
| Section B: Economic Value | | |
| Criteria | Indicator Reference | CORE indicators |
| B.1 Tourism Flow (volume & value) at Destination | B.1.1 | Number of tourist nights per month |
| | B.1.2 | Daily spending per tourist (accommodation, food and drinks, other services) |
| B.2 Tourism Enterprise(s) Performance | B.2.1 | Average length of stay of tourists (nights) |
| | B.2.2 | Occupancy rate in commercial accommodation per month and average for the year |
| B.3 Quantity and Quality of Employment | B.3.1 | Direct tourism employment as percentage of total employment |
| B.4 Safety and Health | B.4.1 | Percentage of tourism enterprises inspected for fire safety in the last year |
| B.5 Tourism Supply Chain | B.5.1 | Percentage of tourism enterprises actively taking steps to source local, sustainable, and fair trade goods and services |
| Section C: Social and Cultural Impact | | |
| Criteria | Indicator Reference | CORE indicators |
| C.1 Community/Social Impact | C.1.1 | Number of tourists/visitors per 100 residents |
| C.2 Gender Equality | C.2.1 | Percentage of men and women employed in the tourism sector |
| C.3 Equality/Accessibility | C.3.1 | Percentage of commercial accommodation with rooms accessible to people with disabilities and/or participating in recognized accessibility schemes |
| | C.3.2 | Percentage of visitor attractions that are accessible to people with disabilities and/or participating in recognized accessibility schemes |
| C.4 Protecting and Enhancing Cultural Heritage, Local Identity and Assets | C.4.1 | Percentage of the destination covered by a policy or plan that protects cultural heritage |
| Section D: Environmental Impact | | |
| Criteria | Indicator Reference | CORE indicators |
| D.1 Reducing Transport Impact | D.1.1 | Percentage of tourists and same day visitors using different modes of transport to arrive at the destination (public/private and type) |
| | D.1.2 | Average travel (km) by tourists to and from home or average travel (km) from the previous destination to the current destination |
| D.2 Climate Change | D.2.1 | Percentage of tourism enterprises involved in climate change mitigation schemes—such as: CO2 offset, low energy systems etc. |

| | | |
|---|-------|--|
| D.3 Solid Waste Management | D.3.1 | Waste volume produced by destination (tonnes per resident per year or per month) |
| | D.3.2 | Volume of waste recycled (percent or per resident per year) |
| D.4 Sewage Treatment | D.4.1 | Percentage of sewage from the destination treated to at least secondary level prior to discharge |
| D.5 Water Management | D.5.1 | Fresh water consumption per tourist night compared to general water consumption per person night |
| D.6 Energy Usage | D.6.1 | Energy consumption per tourist night compared to general population energy consumption per person night |
| D.7 Landscape and Biodiversity Protection | D.7.1 | Percentage of destination (area in km ²) that is designated for protection |
| D.8 Light and Noise Management | D.8.1 | The destination has policies in place that require tourism enterprises to minimize light and noise pollution |
| D.9 Bathing Water Quality | D.9.1 | Level of contamination per 100 ml (faecal coliforms, campylobacter) |

Source: European Union, 2013

Core indicators are the focus for measuring levels of sustainability in the destination such as environmental, social and economic.

As shown in the table 2 there are 27 core indicators of sustainable tourism that are divided into four sections, such as destination management core indicators, economic value, social and cultural impact, environmental impact indicators.

Destination management indicators embrace important decision-making and communication issues that help to sustainable tourism management in specific destination.

Economic value indicators help to define the contribution of tourism to economic sustainability in specific destination.

Social and cultural impact indicators use for defining the effects of tourism on the residents and cultural heritage in specific destination.

Environmental impact indicators focus on those elements that are essential to the sustainability of the natural environment of specific destination (EU, 2013).

4. Conclusions

The current paper discusses the concepts of sustainable development and its main characteristics, along with the concept of sustainable tourism and its main indicators. It could be recognized that sustainable tourism is an approach that should be used to make all types of tourism more environmentally, socially and economically beneficial. Moreover, EU indicator system is considered as an useful tool for designing and implementing tourism models that focuses on the sustainability approach. Indicators also allow to tourism managers to evaluate the situation of a particular destination, and to identify its main issues, that require addressing to improve the level of sustainability of the tourism activities. The list of the indicators can assist to identify the gaps in sustainable development practices in various tourism destinations. Furthermore, the list of the indicators could be supplemented depending on the specific characteristics of a destination.

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