

## Regional economic development supported by sustainable tourism

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### ARTICLE INFO

### ABSTRACT

The subject of sustainable tourism has been increasingly discussed in recent years because the complex connection between the environment and the economy has been acknowledged, and there is a pressing need for the integration of these two components, which means the foundation on the premises of a deep and lasting development, which generates a positive impact on society as a whole. According to the specialized literature, the paradigms in the tourism industry are changing. This shows what are the challenges facing the tourism sector today and requires special attention from the authorities and the economic agents involved, who must guide this industry towards a sustainable development in the future. Taking these findings as a starting point, we proposed for our research to highlight, in the first part, the role of tourism on the regional development and secondly the measurement of the impact of tourism, practiced intensively and extensively, on the environmental factors through a series of qualitative and quantitative indicators, highlighted the fact that the damage of the environment over time implicitly leads to the damage of the economic growth. The results of the research allowed us to formulate, in the conclusions part, several directions of action to be followed by regions with a well-developed economy as well as less developed ones, in order to boost tourism activity in the new context of respecting the environmental factor.

**Keywords:** Regional Development, Sustainable Tourism, Environment, Economic Impact

## INTRODUCTION

The quality of the environment is generally affected by two groups of essential factors: objective factors, resulting from the manifestation of unfavorable natural phenomena and subjective factors, caused by human activities. The paper analyses scientific literature and seeks to discover the main forms and factors using the broad systematic literature review and reveal own critique approach of the interface between tourism, sustainable development and sustainable tourism provided for some interesting findings presented in conclusions.

The reason for choosing this topic derives from the desire for documentation related to this topic, because it is an extremely important one.

Addressing the relationship between tourism and sustainable development has become prominent among tourism practitioners and researchers since the publication of the Bruntland Report in 1987. The principles that this report brought to the fore, starting from the central idea of "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future

generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987), also provided the framework for the development of tourism in the last decades.

Among the many activities through which man can contribute to the destruction of the environment, tourist activities, carried out irrationally and uncontrolled, in the territory are also included. On the other hand, tourism comprises an extensive range of economic activities and can be considered the largest industry in the world.

Adherents of the theory that tourism is primarily an industry with positive effects on society have many arguments in their support. The evolution of tourism in recent decades has led to the development of this sector as a powerful worldwide economic force.

However, unlike the harmful results for the environment, which are generated by some activities (such as, for example, industrial ones), whose effects can be, at best, limited, tourism can make a significant contribution of its own, not only to stop the degradation of the natural environment, caused by the activities carried out, but also in the direction of protecting and preserving the environment, by adopting specific and effective regulations.

It follows that the relationship between tourism and the environment is of particular importance, the protection and preservation of the environment representing the primary condition for the running and development of tourism and therefore of the regional economy. That's the way, the Swiss professor J. Krippendorf (Krippendorf, 1982) emphasized: "If we can lose and then rebuild our capital in other areas of the economy, the same thing does not apply in tourism, where the basic substance - the landscape and the land - once lost, is irretrievably lost".

It is increasingly obvious that the perpetuation of a tourism that considers it legitimate to ignore the environment is impossible to remain valid in the long term.

## CONSIDERATIONS ON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Until now, sustainable tourism has undergone three paradigm shifts (Clarke, 1997). The first paradigm dissociates sustainable tourism from mass tourism, the former being considered good, while the latter is considered to be harmful. The second paradigm deals with sustainable tourism on a scale from weak to strong, where "weak" implies well-being through economic growth and technical innovation and "strong", the protection of scarce resources. The third paradigm claims that sustainable tourism should include all types of tourism and mass tourism should be subjected to improvement. In addition to these aspects, we note that in order to talk about convergence, all forms of tourism should be sustainable. Currently, the need to find a balance between all forms of tourism is present more than ever, economic interests having to be in balance with social and environmental aspects (Kilipirisa&, Zardava, 2012). This means that companies could maximize their profits while at the same time assuming social and environmental responsibility.

For tourism, this concept was stated by The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), (IUCN, 2020) as follows: "Sustainable development is a process that takes place without destroying or exhausting resources, ensuring the development. Resources must be exploited at the same rate as their renewal, abandoning exploitation when the resource regenerates very slowly, in order to replace it with another one with greater regeneration power. All resources must be exploited in such a way that future generations benefit from them".

At international level, countries with old tourism traditions adopt a tourism planning at the national level based on the aspect of protecting their own tourism resources in order to develop a sustainable tourism, they took into account three main objectives:

- economic - essential in identifying, valorizing and increasing the degree of exploitation of tourist resources;
- social - especially by making the population permanent, increasing the employment rate, supporting the practice of traditional meals and attracting the population to the practice of tourism;
- ecologic - important for avoiding environmental degradation and pollution and ensuring a balanced and long-term exploitation of tourist resources.

In accordance with these requirements, there was a need to develop and adopt national tourism development plans, intended to allow combining the experience and positions of the main economic agents: public administration, employers' organizations, professional, social associations and organizations, trade unions, specialists in the specialized research etc.

At the Global Conference for Business and the Environment held in Vancouver (Canada) in 1992, GLOBE'92, specialists from over 60 countries presented the major changes that took place in the tourism industry sector in the last decade (Wight, 1992).

Thus, changes were imposed at the international level in terms of policies, legislation and regulations in the field (EU, 2021). Almost all of international regulations are iteming with:

- the creation of institutions and framework necessary for the implementation of sustainable tourism;
- ensuring the conservation and protection of basic tourist resources;
- the mobilization of the tourism industry sectors for the practice of sustainable tourism in accordance with environmental requirements;
- **in the economic-financial field:** the inclusion of the environmental cost in the collected receipts for tourist activities, in the idea that the polluter must bear certain taxes related to the forms of pollution, thereby contributing indirectly to the preservation of the environment;
- the preparation of reports regarding the degree of implementation of the proposed projects (at international, national, regional level), of actions undertaken and changes related to adaptation to the environmental requirements of the tourism industry;
- using the influence of the domestic and international market to identify new tourist markets, respecting the environmental requirements and creating common partnerships for the implementation of the new concept of ecotourism - a supporting element of sustainable tourism;
- obtaining benefits from environmental marketing, through development and sale of tourist products compatible with their value.
- **in the social field:** practicing an active protection education in other sectors that benefit from the natural and cultural resources of the tourism industry, with the understanding of environmental issues;
- establishing collaborative relationships with other sectors of activity involved in environmental protection (forestry, agriculture, regional planning, etc.);
- the creation of models and projects to support the sustainable development of tourism, with the presentation of models and application possibilities;
- the evaluation of positive results from the past, in order to establish new proposals for sustainable development, with the transmission of positive projects and experiences through national and international bodies.

## MODELS FOR EVALUATING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF TOURISM

Starting from the aspects presented, next we want to capture the relationship between tourism and sustainable regional development, being guided in our analysis by the following considerations:

- tourism activity has a major impact on the economy. On the one hand, it has positive influences on the environment and the community (increased employment, greater contribution to GDP, better quality services, higher wages, higher production, capital generation, larger local budget through tax collection , attracting investors to the area, etc.), and on the other hand, it can generate negative effects (high degree of pollution, more pronounced polarization, etc.) (Saarinen, 2006), (Cernat & Gourdon, 2012);
- most studies evaluating the economic impact of tourist activities usually take into account data on the number of arrivals, income per tourist, average length of stay and other economic indicators. Unlike many studies that treat only the physical and human environment, (Miller, 2010), presents a series of indicators that cover many aspects related to sustainability: environmental issues, employment, financial leakages from the system, aspects related to the client (satisfaction level, consumption behavior, degree of social responsibility of tourism companies, etc.).
- (Ko, 2003), and (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006) believes that most studies on the sustainable development of tourism are descriptive, based on qualitative data and subjective in their conclusions, thus lacking a rigorous methodology.

At the same time, the level of development of a territory, through its economic, social and cultural characteristics, but also through the natural resources it possesses, is a factor that influences the predisposition of the inhabitants of the respective territories to travel and, implicitly, influences their behavior later to the destination, so also the effects on it (Table. 1).

**Table 1.** Relations between tourism and sustainable development.

Geographical elements of the tourist system	Area of origin	Transit area*	Area of destination
			Effects
Dimension			
Interactions between tourism and sustainable development	<i>ECONOMIC DIMENSION</i> The level of economic development influences the income of potential tourists;	-investments for the development of transport infrastructure for the accommodation of tourists;	- economic growth; profit from local resources that -do not require major investments; creating jobs; -the development of transport infrastructure and public utilities; - price increase (land, goods, services, etc.); - poorly paid jobs and affected by seasonality; - addiction to tourism.
	<i>SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIMENSION</i> Access to education (the educational level of the population); cultural values;	- over time, it can become a destination, becoming specific to its impact and relationships;	- improving the quality of life; - diversifying the job offer; - the revitalization of the region; - the revival and protection of local cultural values; - acculturation; - overcrowding; - potential conflicts;
	<i>ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSION</i>	- pollution and degradation of landscapes;	- encouraging environmental protection; - conservation of historical buildings/monuments; - pollution; - degradation of landscapes, historical sites, monuments; - changes in wild habitats; - constructions inconsistent with the environment

POSITIVE

NEGATIVE

\*The transit area is specific to the transport infrastructures intended to ensure tourists from the area of origin to the destination. Depending on the distance covered, various other elements of the tourist system may be present: infrastructure, leisure, tourist attractions.

The economic externalities of tourism have frequently been argued and supported by empirical studies, given the considerable potential of the tourism industry to generate jobs and income for the local community and investors (Garcia, et al, 2015).

The approaches regarding the impact of tourism on the environment are based on the complementary perspectives aimed at inventorying the natural resources used by tourism for purposes more or less connected with the tourist experience itself, but also perspectives aimed at evaluating the transformations induced by the tourism industry on the environment .

The negative effects of tourism on the environment arouse interest in the academic environment, the evaluation methods used vary from surveys aimed at analyzing the perception of residents, local actors or even tourists on these effects, to complex quantitative analyses, involving data related to energy consumption or emissions of different chemical compounds associated to the tourism industry or other indicators (Table 2), (Gössling & Peeters, 2019).

**Table 2.** Indicators taken into account regarding the Regional sustainability of tourism

<b>Indicators within the Environmental Sustainability pillar</b>	
1	The strictness of environmental regulations
2	Application of environmental protection regulations
3	Sustainability of the development of the tourism sector
4	Carbon dioxide emissions
5	Concentration of harmful particles
6	Endangered species
7	Ratification of environmental protection treaties

Tourism also represents a means of diversifying the structure of a country's economy. The tourism industry has two sides. On the one hand, it contributes to the economic prosperity of a region in various ways, and on the other hand it must be environmental friendly and socially responsible.

Thus, the need to adapt the tourist activity to the increasingly diversified, more complex needs of tourists determines the appearance of specific activities.

In order to measure the global competitiveness of a country's travel and tourism, the World Economic Forum annually calculates an index, as an aggregated arithmetic mean of several variables: the regulatory framework of tourism policies, business in tourism, the environment, infrastructure, natural and cultural resources, the affinity for travel and tourism etc. Therefore, the impact of tourism on the environment can be measured indirectly through these indicators, independent of the level of their direct affiliation to the tourist activity, being an important aspect regarding the extent to which development efforts correspond to the principles of sustainability.

Thus, the regions can be classified under the aspect of competitiveness in tourism in regions that are efficient or non-efficient, but also highlight a tendency to emphasize tourist activities in more developed areas and an endangerment of the environmental factor. Regarding the convergence regions, a rethinking of tourism strategies is required, a special emphasis must be placed on the valorization of natural factors, the effective management of resources, the implementation of the principles of social responsibility and sustainable development.

If the economic growth occurs as a result of the increase of macroeconomic, synthetic indicators, by assumption with the efficient use of environmental factors (thus emphasizing the qualitative side), according to the quality of the economic growth, the following five types can be highlighted:

- negative economic growth, which means the decrease over time of the measurement indicator or economic recession;
- stationary economic growth which means a zero rate of the measurement indicator (it is also called replacement economic growth or zero growth);
- balanced economic growth which is characterized by a positive rate of the measurement indicator and in addition, the growth rates in different sectors or branches keep constant ratios between them;
- efficient economic growth that shows us that the growth rate is positive, the degree of use of a certain factor of production, being satisfactory;
- optimal economic growth which shows us that the growth rate is positive and an optimization criterion is satisfied as the case may be (either through maximization or minimization) under certain restrictive conditions, explicitly formulated.

The creation of models, over the years, aimed at a balanced economic growth, thus shaping several types of models.

Most of the tourism development strategies formulated in the last two decades approach, at least generically, the concept of sustainable development. First of all, an approach from the perspective of sustainability harmoniously incorporates the environmental components, respectively the socio-cultural and the economic component (Kişi, 2019), thus offering, at a theoretical level, the promise of benefits on all levels and, at the same time, proposing a holistic approach to the tourist phenomenon (Dezvoltare, 2022).

## Indicators of support capacities for tourism

As a result of the development of environmental science, the increase in the volume of information regarding economic and social sciences, the deepening of research in these fields of activity, their connections with the tourism industry have led to the delimitation of the following types-capacity of support for tourism (Rodríguez, 2021), (WTTC, 2020).

The ecological capacity refers to the establishment of that level of development of touristic structures and activities without strongly affecting the environment, through the process of degradation of its components. We consider the natural components (air, water, soil, vegetation) and the production and economic recovery process, which do not involve special investment costs, determined by the degradation of some tourist destinations.

The physical capacity has an essential role in establishing the level of saturation that tourist activities can reach, beyond which environmental problems begin to appear. The upward development of tourism, manifested in the last decades, raises the problem of the appearance of many forms of pollution (coastal, mountain areas, etc.). Protecting the physical components of the territory can be done by investing in high-performance technology and by providing high-quality tourist services.

The social-receptive capacity aims at the importance of maintaining good relations between hosts (local population) and visitors (tourists). From the moment the local population realizes that tourist activities also contribute to the degradation of the natural and cultural environment, hostile reactions of rejection may appear on their part, at the same time registering a decrease in the threshold of tolerance. To avoid such situations, the development of a tourist area or locality must take into account the traditional way of life of the inhabitants, their habits etc;

The economic capacity highlights the valorization of all the present resources, through tourist activities and represents the capacity to maintain the tourist function of a given territory. The efficiency of exploitation is measured by the ratio between costs and benefits, and the weight of benefits can be increased by using high-performance technologies. The level of costs is also given by the qualitative and quantitative value of resources (natural, cultural, labor force, general infrastructure, etc.);

The psychological capacity is related to the negative perception of tourists towards the tourist destination, following environmental degradation or the inadequate attitude of the native population.

This concept is attached to supporting tourist motivations for a certain destination and maintaining their personal satisfaction. Its application is also conditioned by the quality of the managerial activity that can determine, in the end, the loyalty of the request.

All these types of support capacities, closely related to tourist activities, determine the tangible or intangible, measurable or immeasurable limit of a space that has or to which it can be attributed a tourist function.

Although these capacity indicators do not offer a standard formula, as a result of the fact that some components of the natural or cultural framework are difficult to quantify through statistical-mathematical data series, nevertheless these support concepts give us the measure of the sustainable development of tourism. At the same time, the types of support capacities also indicate the extent to which the impact of tourism on the environment can reach, giving the opportunity to identify ways to reduce the degradation produced by traffic and tourist activities.

Also in socio-economic, but also political terms, we must remember the particularly important role of tourism in intensifying and diversifying ties between nations worldwide. Indeed, along with trade itself, international tourism tends to become one of the main forms of connection between people located on different continents.

## CONCLUSIONS

An increasing number of developed or less developed countries have discovered the possibilities and prospects of tourism becoming aware that it can be an additional source of income as well as balancing foreign exchanges and creating a global image.

Expressed in a few words, sustainable tourism must focus on creating a synergy between the pursuit of tourism goals and the protection of nature, landscapes and cultural heritage, promoting "environmentally friendly" transport for leisure activities. For this, an integrated governmental approach is needed, which encourages and supports the increase in the level of competitiveness and the sustainable development of tourism.



This essentially means an effort to investigate and discover the best practices of social responsibility for sustainable development. Also, the ambitious policies carried out to accredit and favorably position a tourist destination that include awareness of the beneficial effects of tourism on economic growth (creating income, jobs, adequately trained human resources, economies of scale etc.)

In order to achieve more sustainable forms of tourism, it is necessary to emphasize the less economically developed areas but with environmental potential, by intensifying the involvement of the competent authorities, the various professional categories, the local population of the respective tourist destination, in finding weaknesses and transforming them into possible advantages that attract tourists.

In order to practice "green" tourism, it is necessary to involve several decision-making factors, first of all the state, through its economic development policy, through the elaboration of sustainable development plans with the provision of quality services but with the reduction of excessive and inadequate exploitation of natural and cultural heritage. Ecological education for the protection of nature and tourism potential must have a permanent character, starting from childhood and being consolidated in educational institutions of all genres and grades.

Competitiveness and environmental and social issues of sustainable tourism development can be addressed together by implementing innovations and fostering sustainable consumption principles, providing new tourism services for people and achieving complete advantage together by contributing to welfare and needs of local communities and dealing with sustainable development priorities of tourism destinations.

The tourism industry still remains a well-defined current branch, whose development at each stage is dependent on the levels and development rates of the other branches of the national economy. In this sense, tourism's contribution to economic-social progress, the intensity of its actions differs significantly from a country to country, depending on its level of development and the policy promoted towards it.

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