

THE IMPERATIVE OF INVOLVING PUBLIC AUTHORITIES (CENTRAL AND LOCAL) IN DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Abstract

Despite tourism is one the activities which had a spectacular development in the last decades and although our country has a notable tourism potential, Romanian local and central public authorities` interest in this direction is very low. Apart from being a scientific approach, the paper acts as a stimulent for local and central public authorities that promote sustainable tourism.

The general trend in tourism evolution and in the attempt to strenghten its position within sustainable economic development process, is to analysing the tourism phenomenon at global level. This proves that at the moment, tourism is one of the most dynamic economy sectors, constantly dealing with changes and positive evolutions. Discovering the trends, the challanges facing international toursim in the third millenium, the determinant factors that will influence global tourism activities in the future, tourism categories that will grow fast in the first part of the 21st century, all must be taken into consideration by central and local public authorities when developing policies, strategies, plans and programs for developing tourism.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, local public administration management, sustainable tourism, economic integration, local and regional development.

JEL CODES: H70, Q01, Q56, Q57

IMPERATIVITATEA IMPLICĂRII AUTORITĂȚILOR PUBLICE (CENTRALE ȘI LOCALE) ÎN DEZVOLTAREA TURISMULUI DURABIL

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Rezumat

Deși activitatea turistică se numără printre fenomenele care au înregistrat în epoca contemporană o dezvoltare spectaculoasă, iar țara noastră dispune de un potențial turistic deloc de neglijat, totuși, interesul autorităților publice locale și centrale din România pentru acest sector este destul de redus. Acest articol, pe lângă faptul că reprezintă un demers științific, poate reprezenta un imbold pentru autoritățile publice locale și centrale implicate în promovarea unui turism durabil.

Tendința generală în evoluția turismului și întărirea locului acestuia în dezvoltarea economică durabilă presupune realizarea unei analize a fenomenului turistic la scară mondială. Aceasta arată că în prezent, turismul reprezintă unul dintre cele mai dinamice sectoare economice, care înregistrează schimbări permanente și o evoluție ascendentă. Cunoașterea tendințelor, a provocărilor cu care se confruntă turismul mondial la începutul mileniului trei, a factorilor determinanți care își vor exercita influența asupra activității turistice internaționale în perioada următoare, a formelor de turism care vor înregistra ritmuri înalte de creștere în prima parte a secolului 21, trebuie avute în vedere de către autoritățile administrației publice locale și centrale atunci când elaborează politici, strategii, planuri și programe de dezvoltare a turismului.

Cuvinte cheie: dezvoltare durabilă, managementul administrației locale, turism durabil, integrare economică, dezvoltare locală și regională.

In the modern society, the negative effects of the development of human society can be noted. Therefore, the question of a new interpretation of the concept of development arises, taking into account the interdependences between environmental, general welfare and economic growth process issues. At present, special attention is paid to sustainable development. The principles of sustainable development should underpin statal policies, and private initiatives. Sustainable development of tourism is a type of tourism development currently focusing on resource capitalization, so as to maintain their reproductive capacity in the future. For the tourism industry, sustainability is not a static state of harmony, but rather a process of change, where capitalization of resources, investments achieving, technological orientation and institutional development should be comparable with current and future requirements. Sustainable development of tourism can be achieved by the management of all resources so that we can meet economically, socially and aesthetically the needs of tourists, while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems.

Romania is one of Europe's countries which has taken important steps towards EU integration and tries to approach the union standards in all areas, including in tourism. Tourism is a strategic economic priority for the Union, whose specific status is that of an industry essential to economic growth and an important social factor in achieving diversity in the community unit and in reducing regional differences. Tourism development is a vector of economic and social cohesion within the European Union. In order for decision makers of Romanian tourism to take the best measures, the characteristics and trends in community tourism development must be known.

An economic branch of interference, very interesting and with important availabilities, Romanian tourism must become a dynamic component of the global economic system. A subsystem of national economy, tourism supports influences from other subsystems and exercises, in turn, an increasing influence on their evolution. The tourism sector in Romania currently holds only a modest share of GDP, mainly due to the fact that it was not strongly supported by policy makers, its development being left to chance. Tourism's ability to become a primary sector of national economy is widely recognized, considering that the national targets in this area will be met, and also idea that social, cultural and economic phenomenon implications of the touristic phenomenon, its complexity, its heterogeneous merging components require attention from the governments of the world, which have understood that they can have important benefits from this activity (Mazilu, 2007a).

Since its emergence and until now, the state was faced with a difficult choice: freedom or control? This choice consists in the modern society's difficulty to opt for freedom, sacrificing the society's survival chances, or for control, sacrificing individual freedom. Tourism is a very complex, sophisticated industry,

which includes a set of sectors. No other industry covers such a wide group of related sectors as tourism. It is a combination of industries worldwide, of the highest diversity, with a very complicated structure. From this statement it is clear that the complexity of tourism requires coordination and cooperation that only governments have the authority and mechanisms to organize. Governments have good reasons to get involved in tourism.

The economic and social importance of tourism and its contribution to the increase of the quality of life are arguments regarding the need for intervention. Also, tourism can contribute more than other sectors to achieve the broader objectives set by governments as priorities in the general interest of citizens: fighting poverty, improving living conditions, increasing revenue rates, intensifying connections between countries and even political goals.

The state has and will continue to play an important role in organizing and conducting the tourist activity. The inability of governments from 1990 to present and of state institutions to develop and implement strategies, policies and consistent programs have greatly damaged the interests of Romanian tourism, and its development based on sustainable principles. In the next few years, certainly, success will be assured to the extent that there will be a combination of market mechanisms with the economic and social role of the state (Vellas, 1998).

Tourism is a highly complex sector, including activities in many sectors of national economy (Neacșu, Baron, Snak, 2006). The diversity of those involved in the tourism sector requires a system of organization of tourist activities to ensure coordination between various governmental institutions and organizations dealing with tourism activities. There must be, outside the central coordination of the touristic activity, coordination between representatives of tourism government bodies at regional and local level.

Complex mechanism of interaction between state and market economy entails the use by the public power of means and techniques adequate to the difficult role that the state is required to play in the economy. The allocative, distributive, and especially regulatory role of the state implies promoting the economic policy. Macroeconomic developed policies exercise a profound impact on the economic agent's activity in tourism. It has an active role in transforming the environment and its actions on other factors to achieve the purposes which it proposes. The environment provides the company with an ordered framework, but the behavior of economic agents must take into account the specific constraints posed by the economic policies of the state.

Economic policy instruments produce certain effects on the objectives of sustainable tourism development.

Some instruments, such as the fiscal, monetary or those related to currency, tend to have global effects, meaning they act on multiple objectives. Others produce specific effects, with limited character, acting only on the tourism sector. The problem is to find the link between objectives and instruments and to choose those with the broadest and most effective impact. To remove negative phenomena, the economic system should react first by adjusting or regulating the flows of resources and redistributing income and by adapting institutions to new conditions; when the economic system fails to respond adequately, the state must act.

Economic policies that aim to deepen the actions for recovery of the tourism sector in a long-term trend (fiscal policy, monetary policy, trade policy) should be structured so that the development of tourism businesses is supported and encouraged (Neacșu, Baron, Snak, 2006).

The state must make an adequate policy and affirm a clear and coherent position in relation to tourism. It draws the lines without imposing them, serving as a guide for its partners, both public and private. To carry out its policy, the state must ensure coherence of all means of intervention available. It is obliged to anticipate all the phenomena that may have influence on the touristic activity by intensifying research and exploration, by expanding partnerships with private companies or non-governmental bodies and integrating in planning activities the European and international dimension.

Also, the experience of countries with long tradition in tourism shows that tourism planning is needed at all levels to achieve sustainable tourism (Mazilu & Marinescu, 2008b). This is because ignoring tourism planning methods can lead to social and environmental problems, to the inadequate development of tourism activities in relation to resources. It is clear that it is necessary to develop national plans for development of tourism, enabling harmonization of positions and joint efforts of all stakeholders in the tourism industry (local and central public authorities, economic agents, professional organizations, research specialists in the field, etc.).

The essential role in the development of such plans falls on non-governmental bodies, they having the obligation to listen, analyze and harmonize the views of all concerned. Collaboration is the key to tourism development plans at the national level.

A desired and not at all utopian relationship: Local Public Authority – a partner in the sustainable development of tourism is explained by the fact that local authorities are increasingly involved in the development and management of many aspects of tourism. This is based on the decentralization trend registered in many countries, which includes giving more responsibilities to local authorities. They know best what is of interest in the areas they manage and will do everything possible to achieve local

development objectives. This also reflects the emphasis on community involvement in tourism planning and in the development process of their areas.

Sustainable development of tourism is an alternative that local authorities can use for the existing potential of the administrative-territorial units, trends and opportunities they identify (Mazilu & Marinescu, 2008a).

Local communities should be more and more involved in tourism development, since, as our country will go through the difficult road to EU integration, work will be done towards decentralization and granting increasingly high responsibilities to local authorities. Unfortunately, Romanian legislation does not give a very encouraging signal for local tourism development.

Therefore, in Romania, the involvement in the tourism sector at county, town or village level is quite low. As a result, local authorities' efforts in this area can be divergent and therefore may be a waste of valuable resources. Proper planning, effective implementation of development and effective leadership in the tourism sector are essential, given the benefits that sustainable tourism development can bring to an area. In order to fund and commonly implement actions, works, services or projects of local interest in tourist areas (at county, town or village level) tourism offices could be set up to coordinate tourism planning (Stăncioiu, 2000). Such an office should include representatives of local authorities, private sector, NGOs and even the local community opinion leaders.

How the state is involved in tourism and delegating more responsibilities to public institutions in the territory requires rethinking. Rapid recovery of Romanian tourism will be achieved not only by providing tax incentives for privatization and encouraging new investment, but also by carrying out regulatory actions to bring tourism rules to unitary characteristics, simplified and functional, but also through an active partnership between state institutions, and between them and employers', professional and union associations, for the purposes of the participation of all those involved in tourism in decision-making and establishing specific regulations.

Creating a healthy, well-structured and effective local public administration is a factor of balance and stability, essential elements in strengthening the rule of law, in promoting the principles and guidelines to ensure progress and prosperity in all sectors, including in tourism.

Sustainable development of tourism depends on the ratio between central and local administration which harmonizes national interests with local ones. Through careful planning, systematic implementation of planning and smart quality management, the benefits can be maximized and problems minimized (Olaru, 1999).

It is a known fact that regional development is a prerequisite for Romania's acceptance into the European Union (Dinu, Socol, Marinaş, 2005).

Regional development policies and plans in recent years increasingly take more into account tourism as a strategic sector to ensure dynamic and sustainable economic growth of regions that have a significant tourism potential (Mazilu, 2007b).

Sustainable regional development must correlate and integrate tourism among other components of the local economy. A good project for sustainable development, included in a regional development program, involves much less expensive investment in this activity as integration is more harmoniously achieved.

To promote and coordinate regional development policies, the Government, through the Ministry of European Integration, other ministries and subordinated institutions, develops multiannual programs as a financial support for economic and social development of development regions.

Regional development policy reinforces the role and responsibilities of local public administrations and regional bodies in the economic and social development of each locality and of development regions, while diminishing governmental institutions' involvement in such activities.

Thus, the regional development policy is an essential component of local autonomy.

Tourism can become an important component of national economy to determine important changes in the territory, contributing to social and economic growth of regions falling behind or lacking other resources (Mazilu, 2010).

There is a development tendency of the tourism sector in more developed regions of the country (Bucharest, South-East), observing a lack of concern of the authorities and investors towards less developed areas (Northeast, Southwest, Northwest and South), although these areas have major tourist attractions. However, the multifactorial hierarchy method of regions used to measure the gaps and develop strategies indicates that, in recent years, the tourism development level of the eight development regions has increased.

It is also noticeable that the differences between regions have decreased. It is thus obvious that regional development plans and the measures they have proposed have panned out, contributing to achieving the main objective of regional development policy: stimulating balanced development and alleviating regional imbalances.

In Romania, the general development plans were drawn up for each development region. Given the importance of tourism in national economy at the level of each development region, tourism development plans should be developed highlighting the specific problems of the region concerned and the measures to help improve tourism development and stimulation of the tourism sector on the medium and long term.

Applying the criteria of sustainable development in tourism induces specific aspects in the drafting regional development programs that need to address explicitly the space and savings and local communities' issues (Stănciulescu, 2004). In general terms, given the complexity of sustainable development at regional level, it is conceived as a long-term goal will be achieved gradually. Firstly, attention will focus on major challenges concerning the environment, so that some compensation will be allowed on the positive and negative changes in the components of welfare function (weak, fragile sustainable development) (Mazilu, 2009). However, strong sustainable development which involves improving the welfare function of all components without allowing the decline any of them represents the ultimate goal.

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