

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE INTEGRATED TOURISM DEVELOPMENT OF A REGION AND THE RESPECTIVE LOCAL COMMUNITIES OF ROMANIA. A MORAL APPROACH

(Relația dintre dezvoltarea turistică integrată a unei regiuni și comunitatea locală în România)

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Abstract

The current social and economic stage of development observed in Romania and, implicitly, that of the national tourism, requires a new type of approach vis-à-vis the "tourism development" concept. Until the 90s, tourism development was carried out in a centralized fashion and, in most cases, with little regard to the impact that strategy had on the environment and the local population. This strategy-which, in some cases, is still applied today-has had a significant impact on a national level, by creating huge discrepancies among the country's regions, with direct repercussions on local communities and the national labor market. Recent years have shown a distinct linkage between tourism and local communities, largely owed to the multiplying effect that tourism activities have, but also to the intricate network of correspondences between themselves.

The purpose of this academic endeavor is to analyze the existing relationship between tourism development and the local community where it occurs, between the need for development and the need to preserve the local traditions, and to observe if such equilibrium is feasible between these two terms. The ethics of tourist development should be the niche where the development policy should meet the expectations of the host local community.

Keywords: ● tourist ● integrated tourism development ● local community ● Romania ● ethics ● preserving traditions ● eco-tourism

JEL Classification: L83, O21, R11, Q56

Rezumat

Situația actuală de dezvoltare economico-socială a României și a turismului național impune o nouă abordare a conceptului de dezvoltare turistică. Până în anii '90, dezvoltarea turistică s-a realizat planificat și, de multe ori, fără a se ține cont de efectele provocate asupra mediului său asupra populației din zonă. De bună seamă această situație, ce se regăsește în linii mari și azi, a produs - la nivel național, diferențe mari de dezvoltare economică între regiunile țării, cu repercusiuni asupra comunităților locale și a pieței forței de muncă. Ultimii ani au pus în evidență existența unei strânse legături între turism și comunitățile locale, datorate efectului multiplicator al activităților de turism cât și multiplexelor interferențe care există între ele.

Scopul demersului nostru este analiza legăturii dintre dezvoltarea turistică și comunitatea locală, între necesitatea dezvoltării și prezervarea tradițiilor, prin prisma păstrării unui echilibru între aceste două noțiuni, de multe ori opuse. Etica dezvoltării turistice trebuie să fie eșicherul pe care să se construiască politica de dezvoltare în conformitate cu așteptările comunităților locale gazde.

Cuvinte cheie: ● turism ● dezvoltare turistică integrată ● comunitate locală ● România ● etică ● prezervarea tradițiilor ● ecoturism

Clasificare JEL: L83, O21, R11, Q56

Introduction

The current social and economic stage of development observed in Romania and, implicitly, that of the national tourism, requires a new type of approach vis-à-vis the "tourism development" concept. Until the 90s, tourism development was carried out in a centralized fashion and, in most cases, with little regard to the impact that strategy had on the environment and the local population. The result was a concentrated development of certain tourist areas, as far as room numbers is concerned. The Black Sea beach-side encompasses almost 42% of the total number of rooms available and 50% of all entertainment facilities and Prahova Valley

has 7% of the number of available rooms and 52% of all passenger cable transportation means (Minciu Rodica, 2001). It is obvious that this situation—still observed today—has led to the appearance, on a national level, of important differences of economic development between the country's regions, with direct impact on the respective local communities and the labor market.

Recent years have highlighted the existence of a close relationship between tourism and local communities, owed mainly to the multiplying effect of tourism activities, but also to the intricate network of correspondences between themselves. A careful analysis of the two aforementioned terms reveals the following:

- Tourism acts as a stimulus for the entire economic environment largely due to the fact that it is an intensive consumer of workforce and has an invigorating effect on the production in adjacent industries; thus, a diversification of the local/regional economic structure takes place, which, together with a superior use for the local resources, leads to a smoothening of inter-regional lack of equilibrium (Minciu Rodica, 2001). We can therefore infer that tourism represents a “*solution for the incipient prosperity of disfavored areas and a remedy for under industrialized towns*”. (Tinard Y., 1994).

- Alongside these benefits, characterized by a strong economic component, come a series of less desirable aspects, such as: the gradual decay of the environment, the presence of tackiness brought about by the shift in moral value under the influence of the tourists, an increase in the general cost of life (Nistoreanu P.-coord., 2003).

It is easily observed that tourism activity has a significant impact on the targeted areas and, implicitly, on the respective local population and environment. Therefore, any project aimed at tourism development and/or eco-tourism should firstly be concerned with the lessening of the negative impact presented by this type of activity and the increase of the positive traits. There are several notions of tourism development: eco-tourism, durable development, integrated development; each of these terms consists of a balance between tourism development and economic benefits on the one hand, and environment protection and safe-keeping of the local communities, on the other.

1. The Relation between Local/Regional Communities and Tourism Activity

The analysis of local/regional communities faced with tourism activities, their reaction vis-à-

vis tourists, their implication with the project, the changes that occur within the community in a certain time-frame, are all aspects which cannot be analyzed exclusively through economic models and indicators. The social approach of tourism development becomes a necessity, especially in a time when globalization is the general concern, because the loss of cultural identity, customs and traditions, environment pollution, global warming are all very serious aspects that need a careful scrutiny.

People, and to a broader extent, local and regional communities are the basis for tourism development of a certain region. Their consideration as an equal rights partner considerably increases the success rate of any tourism development project. Alongside the inevitable frictions that might arise as a consequence of an increase in tourist traffic, these changes may induce a state of social stress and disorganization. This aspect becomes clearer in situations where a traditional community is faced with rapid change that require, in turn, a rapid adaptation to new ideas, customs, behavioral patterns and technologies that might emerge from this process.

The aim of this academic endeavor is the analysis of the relationship between tourism development and local community, between the need to develop and the need to preserve traditions, by means of balancing these two by-and-large opposed options. The ethics of tourist development should be the niche where the development policy should meet the expectations of the host local community.

Thus, a few issues must be made clear from the start.

The first one addresses the effect that tourism activity has on local communities, especially from an economic point of view. Alongside “regular” benefits, such as a drop in unemployment rate, an increase in income level, development of infrastructure, also come negative aspects and the possible emergence of undesirable activities, like: drug traffic, prostitution, illegal gambling, and thefts. The social and cultural implications are represented by the alteration in consumption patterns of local communities, which takes place due to an increase of living conditions and an imitation of tourist behavior. These alterations are most visible especially in those areas where the number of tourists largely outnumbers the number of local residents. In those areas, other aspects can be observed: traffic jams, congestion around the main natural and entropic resources, alteration of customs and traditions to make them more appealing

for tourists and even certain negative feelings regarding tourism and tourists, in general.

2. Integrated Tourism and Integrated Tourism Development

Faced with a large array of implications and effects stemming from tourism activity, following concerns need to be addressed:

- What means of including the local community in the decision-making process are available?
- How far is "too far" in developing a region, tourism-wise?
- How can local communities get involved in the development project?

The answer to these questions is vital in obtaining an integrated tourism at a regional level. As opposed to other forms of tourism development like eco-tourism ("*responsible traveling in natural areas, that is environment friendly and upholds local welfare*" - International Ecotourism Society) or durable tourism, integrated tourism can be loosely defined as a type of tourism that is closely tied to the economic, social, cultural, natural and human structures of the region where it occurs and seeks to utilize them at an optimal level. In practical terms, it is the type of tourism that is in direct relation to the economy, activities and resources that are available in a certain region and to the participating local community. Integrated tourism has the potential to offer consumers a distinctive mix of products, services and local experiences.

Thus, durable tourism should:

- Make optimal use of the available natural resources, because they are the key-element in tourism development, by maintaining the essential ecologic processes, while conserving the natural resources and biodiversity.
- Respect the social and cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve the social heritage, traditional values and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.
- Ensure viable economic operations in the long run, by offering evenly distributed social and economic benefits among all stake-holders; stable workplaces, social services and win-win opportunities to host communities; decreasing the poverty rate by generally improving the quality of life.

Durable tourism development requires a relevant degree of involvement from all stakeholders, as well as strong leadership on a political level, in order to ensure a large participation and consensus. Achieving a durable development is an on-going process, because the impact needs to be constantly supervised, in order to be able to take

timely preventive/corrective measures, when needed.

Durable tourism should maintain a high degree of tourist satisfaction and provide for a memorable experience, appealing to his/her conscience vis-a-vis durability issues and promoting durable tourism.

3. Integrated Tourism Ethics and Development

An analysis of the connection between ethics and integrated tourism development can only be conducted by having the Global Ethics for Tourism Guide, put together by the World Organization for Tourism in 2001, as a starting point. The main pathways it introduces, which regard the link between tourism and local communities, are:

- Tourism activities shall be conducted in harmony with the attributes and traditions of host regions by showing respect for their laws, traditions and customs;
- Tourism activities should respect the equality between men and women, should promote human rights and, especially, the individual rights of underprivileged groups, such as the elderly and the young, persons with any kind of disabilities, ethnic minorities and indigenous populations;
- All participants engaged in tourism activities should protect the environment to ensure a sustainable, durable and continuous economic growth, meant to satisfy in an equitable fashion the needs and expectations of present and future generations;
- Tourism activity should be planned in such a way that it allows for the survival and flourishing of traditional cultural products, crafts and folklore, instead of degenerating and standardizing them;
- Local populations should be associated to tourist activities as an equitable partner, equally involved in all economic, social and cultural processes generated by these and whose direct result is the creation of direct and indirect workplaces.

Tourism policies must be designed in order to allow for a general improvement of raising the general quality of life of the population in the target-areas and to satisfy its needs; the planning and the architectural approach as well as the management of tourism resorts should seek their integration in the local economic and social structure, at a maximum possible level, and where there are equal levels of workforce qualification, priority shall have the local one (World Organization for Tourism, Santiago, Chile, October 1999).

The morality of tourism activity can only be correctly assessed if it is propped against the local community. Intensive tourist development of an area, if undertaken without the consent of host population, it can only result in dissatisfactions and adverse reactions. Given all this, to assess the necessity of an action, its opportunity, one must constantly keep in mind the local community. How can that be done? Can local population be consulted each and every time? Is it necessary to obtain its “go ahead” for opening a new hotel or a new ski slope?

4. Involving the Local Community

Consulting with the local community, involving it in the initiation and realization of the tourist development project, considerably increases its success rate and may result in positive effects in all areas: economic, social, cultural and environmental. The efficiency and morality of a tourism development project is more visible when the entire community benefits from its implementation and its negative aspects are limited to the environment or population of the host area. The level of benefits and their even and equitable distribution is the first step in implementing a successful tourism project. Knowing what the local priorities are can only be achieved by a thorough consultation of the local communities, which, in turn, can only be achieved by implementing a set of social terms—participative democracy which is regarded as „a conception of democratic policies in which decision-making and policy-planning are set by a process of debate among free and equal citizens or their representatives” (Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, 2000).

The importance of consulting the local communities in the decision-making process has been stressed by other authors as well: „in the consultation phase of decision-making, participants express their stands and form certain groups according to expressed opinions. In backing the stands, the respective groups must present arguments which other groups find relevant. The most important aspect is the fact that the participants must find those arguments which appeal to collective actions, those not being necessarily the most advantageous ones” (Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright, 2003).

There are multiple levels where the concept of deliberative democracy can be implemented, such as: local groups, medium-level institutions, national and global levels. In this article we shall reflect only on the first level and analyze its particularities in the context of local communities.

At a local level, groups may be constituted of: NGOs, public administration and social groups that require outside assistance. Even if these groups manifest the potential to exert participative democracy, it is possible that, in certain communities where that process is in incipient stage, the decision-making process is seized by the local elites. In order to protect themselves and to avoid being overwhelmed by anti-democratic forces, or simply to increase the size of the target-group affected by a certain decision, local groups must expand „horizontally” by joining forces with other similar groups and „vertically”, by cooperating with groups found at higher levels.

All decisions, even in the case of participative democracies, have an impact on local communities. Economic impact aside—which is easily assessed in tangible terms—there is another one, with social and cultural consequences, which are harder to define and therefore, evaluate. The social and cultural impact may manifest through:

- An increase in the economic independence of the groups which previously were dependent (i.e., new job opportunities for women and young adults);
- Decay of the traditional economic model, access to fishing and hunting areas or forests;
- Shift in the traditional occupational structure (cattle raising, agriculture, crafts) towards new employment opportunities in restaurants and hotels;
- Shift in land destination to make room for new activities (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, United Nations, New York, 1999).

To observe and analyze the cultural impact of tourism, two new sets of characteristics must be introduced: visitors and target-area. Typical for visitors are:

- Volume: a small number of visitors in a heavily populated area will have an insignificant impact on the latter. On the other hand, a large number of tourists visiting a relatively small area, in a small window of time, will have an enormous impact.
- Length of stay: the longer it is, the more significant the impact on that region it will have.
- Racial issues: the more radical the racial, language and cultural the differences, the larger the impact.
- Economic: differences of economic development generate feelings of discomfort among the local population along with a desire for equality.

Typical for the target area are:

- The level of economic development: the more developed the region is, the smaller the

dependence on touristic activities, thus lessening the impact on local communities.

- Special characteristics: including the physical dimension of the region, population size, number of tourism facilities, number of access roads. In a later stage, one can evaluate the rapport between the number of arrivals/number of guests and host population/surface. The higher the ratio, the more plausible the emergence of tensions between sides.

- Level of local involvement: if tourism activities are conducted on the property of, or are being led by locals, the possibility of crisis dramatically decreases.

- Strength of local culture: the stronger it is, the weaker will be the impact.

Each of these factors plays a role in the day-to-day life of the local population of target areas. By combining these two factors, one can achieve various levels of physical and mental saturation, levels that need different approaches.

In initiating a programme of tourism development, aiming to preserve local authenticity, one must observe the features displayed by the tourist destination. By combining the two factors, following forms of tourism become available:

		Recommended Form of Tourism			
Level of Economic Development	High		X	Large	Physical Characteristics: population, surface, facilities
	Low	X		Small	
		Strong	Weak		
		Local Culture			

Conclusion

Choosing the optimal form of tourism and implementing it within a target-area does not solve the problem of „cultural contamination” of the two sides. These cultural exchanges are perfectly normal and existed since times long gone. The purpose of this essay was to present the ways of action which are available in order to avoid the cultural decay of local communities and to identify the optimal method for tourism development at a local/regional level.

Sources for the data used in estimating the cultural impact include:

- Direct observations and interviews;
- Establishing a reference point, with which to compare subsequent evolution;

- Study and opinion observation;
- Statistical analysis with economic, social and demographic variables;
- Delphi-techniques testing of expert opinions;
- Secondary data sources analysis.

Adopting several methodologies of analysis was deemed necessary as the quality of obtained data was significantly increased and furthermore, because the defining and assesment processes are strenuous and challenging, no single methodology would have been sufficient by itself. Problems that might arise are tied to the credibility of data quality, the way it is collected and the interests of the respondents, which can be conflicting or hidden, as far as different perceptions and values are concerned.

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