

SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT PLAN APPLICABLE FOR ECOTOURISM CERTIFICATION SYSTEMS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to introduce the certification procedure of ecological tourism as well as the criteria that have to be fulfilled by the lodging units whose desire is to voluntarily adhere to this new form of tourism. In Romania, the Certifying System in Ecotourism is used by the AER (Romanian Association of Ecotourism) and that adjusts the international experience into the national context. This is developed as the same as the Accreditation Program in Nature and Ecotourism promoted by the Australian Association of Ecotourism (NEAP is the first accreditation system in ecological tourism) and in conformity with Nature's Best of the Swedish Association of Ecotourism (the first accreditation system in Ecotourism in the northern hemisphere). An important element in the certification procedure consists of drawing up a plan of sustained development which has to respond to the entirely certification requirements. The hereby study allows to see a model of sustained development plan that maybe used by managers and directors of lodging units which wanted to acquire this certification of tourism.

Key words: certification system, ecotourism, management, principles of ecological tourism.

INTRODUCTION

In agreement with the Global Organization of Tourism, Ecotourism consist in a form of tourism where the tourist's principal motivation consists into observe and to appreciate nature and local traditions linked to nature that must fulfil the next conditions:

- Nature protection and conservation;
- To use the local human resources;
- Educational character, appreciation for nature
- tourists and local communities' alertness;
- A minimal negative impact on the social-cultural and natural environment.

The development of a Certification System in Ecotourism is imperatively needed as a mechanism which puts into practice the basic principles of Ecotourism for ensuring the nature conservation and the sustained development of local communities through tourism. Those are some important steps taken forward given the fact that, starting with March, 2003, the Global Organization of Tourism has made a proposal to governments to bear the initiatives that promote the certification for sustained tourism (Bran, 2007). [3].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The development of the ecological tourism assumes the following principles of ecotourism: Focusing on natural areas; Contribution to preserving nature; Interpretation of the Eco touristic products; The principles of durability; The development of local communities; Tourists' level of satisfaction; Adequate promotion of marketing.

The data collected linked to the *Certification System in Ecotourism* have been processed, interpreted and involves the fulfilling of all general principles and the criteria which are checked and scored.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The principles of Ecotourism are approved and promoted by the Romanian Association of Ecotourism (AER) and are based on 2 international models: Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program developed by the Australian Ecotourism Association and Nature's Best, the accreditation system promoted by the Swedish Ecotourism

Association. These principles should be put into practice both by those who try to develop Eco touristic products, as well as by those that plan the development of some area based on ecotourism. (Fig.1.)

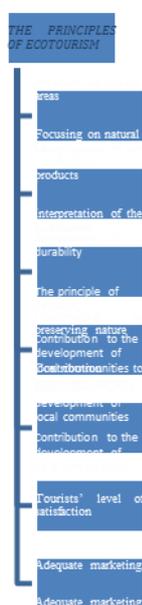


Fig. 1. The Principles of Ecotourism

Focusing on natural areas – Ecotourism concentrates on direct and personal experience in nature, in a natural environment and it is based on using it, respectively of its geomorphological, biological, cultural and physical features. Therefore, the accent on the natural area becomes very important in ecotourism planning, management or developing.

Interpretation of the Eco touristic product – Ecotourism can offer a lot of opportunities to have experiences in nature that can lead to an appreciation, a better understanding, and joy to discover and protect nature and local traditional culture, both for tourists, as well as for the local residents. The Ecotourism is attractive to those visitors who are willing to interact with the natural environment and who desire to increase their knowledge, appreciation, comprehension and pleasure to different levels. Those who try to develop and to coordinate Eco touristic activities must offer a good level of comprehending the values both natural as cultural of the visited areas, often by using properly trained tourist guides and providing accurate information

both prior as well as during the entire experience. The interpretation level and type are designed, planned and gifted in such a manner so that it answers to the client's interests, expectations and needs, by including a wide range of both personal and non-personal interpretation possibilities. Therewith, as far as the destination and the Eco touristic products are concerned, it is very important to forge the opportunity for those rural community residents to gain access to information and to interpretation gifted by the Eco touristic project developed in the respective area (Beciu S.). [2].

The principle of durability - seen from the perspective of preserving the natural habitat – The ecotourism activities and their planning should offer the best planning support and tourism practices from the perspective of nature protection and sustained development. The tourism activities should be planned and progressed so that to reduce the impact produced on nature. The Eco touristic product unfolds is administrated so that it preserves and capitalizes the cultural and the natural environment where it can be finding, by acknowledging and putting into practice the activities that characterize the sustained tourism (Bran, 2005) [4].

Contribution to preserving nature – Ecotourism help to preserving natural areas. Ecotourism involves the participation to protecting the visited areas, by giving constructive possibilities for a reliable management and, by this way, preserving the natural areas (e.g.: offering financial support within rehabilitation programs of natural areas, gathering waste left behind by tourists or helping to preservation organizations). *Contribution to the development of local communities* – Ecotourism offers sustainable contributions concerning local communities. Local community is commonly part of the Eco touristic product. Benefits of ecotourism should be allocated in their vast majority also to local communities.

Local benefits can come from purchasing local goods and services, using local facilities and using local tourist guides.

The ecotourism activities and their planning must ensure an attenuation of the negative

impact on the local visited community and on their life style, by supplying in the same time long term constructive contributions for these communities.

As a result, ecotourism must equally bring out the cultural component of the visited area and helping to protecting this resource (Honțuș, 2005) [5].

Tourists' level of satisfaction – Ecotourism should answer of tourists' expectations. In developing Eco touristic products, one must take into account that, generally speaking, potential tourists in this field have a high level of education and more expectations. Therefore, the satisfaction level related to the Eco touristic product is essential, the experience offered fulfilling or even surpassing the tourists' level of satisfaction (Honțuș, 2012) [6].

Adequate marketing – That regards carrying out marketing adequate which results into realistic expectations. Ecotourism marketing give customers complete and accountable information which result into increasing respect for the cultural and natural environment of the visited areas and of tourists' level of satisfaction.

Table 1. The Certification System in Ecotourism

GENERAL PRINCIPLES	CRITERIA
Principles of sustained management of the guesthouse	The criteria of demonstrating a sustained/long-lasting and efficient management of the guesthouse.
	The criteria of implementing a durable management system.
	The criteria of observing the national and international laws.
	The criterion of personnel's continuous training.
Product focused principles	The criteria of concentrating on natural areas.
	The criteria of interpreting the Eco touristic product.
	The sustainability criteria seen from the perspective of preserving the natural habitat.
	The criteria of contribution to conservation.
	The criteria of contribution to developing local communities.
	The sensitivity criteria towards culture and local traditions.
	The criteria concerning the tourists' level of satisfaction.
	The criteria of adequate marketing.

Source: <http://eco-romania.ro> - The Romanian Ecotourism Association [9].

The certification system in Ecotourism is enforced depending on two categories:

- Ecotourism programs offered by tourist guides or tour-operators (maximum 15 participants);
- Small guesthouses from rural and natural areas (maximum 25 rooms).

As far as guesthouses are concerned, the C.S.E. involves the fulfilling of general principles and then of some criteria which are checked and scored in Table 1.

Vision - Guesthouse offers touristic services with a minimal impact on nature and aims for grow the quality of life in those communities to which it belongs by an adequate behaviour towards employees and promoting culture, products and local traditions. [10]

Sustained management plan (SMP)- Content Proposal



Fig. 2. Elements of the Sustainable Management Plan (SMP) [11]

Goals:

- Reducing the environmental impact and preserving natural resources;
- Provocation the development of the local community by hiring staff from local communities and by promoting local culture and traditions;
- Providing good quality and secure services;
- Both, tourists and employees, not only benefit of the trust in their jobs, but also of the one in the activities they undertake. [10,12]

A.Protecting natural resources and diminishing the environmental impact can be reached by decreasing water consumption, lowering the quantity of dissipation and garbage, reducing the energy consumption and the impact on air, ground and water.

□ In order to *lowering the water consumption* we suggest the following: the use of shower heads with low streaming and buttoned faucets; toilets to have vessels with controllable water stream; showers to be fitted in bathrooms; using a little quantity of water for plants (watering systems or water dripping plants mainly during in the evenings or in the mornings); collecting rain water and using it for some activities; assuming other means of cutting down the volume of used water; displaying written warnings for reducing the water losing; encouraging tourists to use towels over several times and days; connecting all touristic features to a draining system or inserting a water collecting, retaining and treatment system or a system for ejecting residual waters to a water treatment plant.

□ *Diminishing the quantity of garbage and waste*: purchasing materials so as to escape by packages in excess; to use as much as possible to use bio-degradable packages; use only recipients which are re-usable or bio-degradable (like glasses); use disposable items (utensils or recipients) only in some special situations, maximum one time by person by stay; encourage both employees and customers to take part of programs for collecting, diminishing and recycling the quantity of waste; gather and remove all noticed garbage; to make composts of the organic waste; organize and subsidize (labour, finance) cleaning days (once a year at least).

□ *Lowering the energy consumption*: use fluorescent light over 90% in place of incandescent light; rooms can be naturally aery; over day light use the natural light (as much as possible); use solar energy; the loss of heat through doors and windows can be diminished by an adequate sealing, the usage of double or triple windows and insulation strips; one of the employees trained in this way is authorized with making the energy consumption more productive; heat is produced and distributed by centralized installations; electrical equipment appertain to “energy efficient” (energy class A); at least 50% of the building have to be made by wood or by other natural materials; itineraries, tours and schedules are planned so that the travel

time and distances are shortened; encourage tourists to use an efficient transport from a fuel point of view (e.g. providing bikes when they visit tourist objectives); to convince employees to go on foot, by bike or by public transportation in order to get to work and not only for that; all vehicles to be well maintained (technical check-up to date); when picking and/or buying vehicles to make efficient choices from the fuel consumption point of view; recommended to use vehicles that consume less than 9-10 litres/100 km.

□ *Lowering the impact on air, water and ground*: enhancements and touristic activities (e.g. buildings, pathways) do not determine to remodelling the ground, make changes of the rivers' courses, entirely termination of vegetation...; to utilize fences, undergrowth's, barriers or other corresponding marks for maintaining movement in the areas designated for some categories of users; waste is stored in special designated places; the regular point of the noise made by the ensemble of activities related to the product (transport operations, concerts, music, telephones, public communication systems, equipment's and mechanical installations) does not meaningfully exceed the background noise of the region; servicing and maintenance units caused noise are located at some distance from the quiet areas or they are soundproofed.

B. Motivating the development of the local community by hiring employees from that area and by promoting all local traditions and culture from the region (Stefan, 2012) [7].

Actions made for stimulating the development of the local community are the following:

- The turn to account of local tourist guides' services for looking off the significant tourist attractions and for systematically making ready other local tourist guides;
- The turn to account of other persons' services on a local level (e.g. kitchen staff, transport, etc.);
- Encouraging the purchase of local souvenirs and products;
- Utilising other services from that area: guesthouses; renting bikes, carts etc.;
- Giving money for creating and developing the local infrastructure and the local events (e.g. festivals and other traditional holidays);

•Giving the chance for the students/youngsters who live in the region for practising, in order to accumulate work experience in the ecotourism branch.

Promoting local traditions and local culture:

•Informing tourists about the behaviour code that should be adopted inward the local community;

•Showing tourists the most important traditions of the region, encouraging the participation in traditional festivals;

•Preparing and serving specific food for the respective area especially;

•Buying products from the region as much as possible: souvenirs, food, drinks, etc. (Beciu, 2011) [1]

C. Insurance of good quality services: we must have carried out a risk analysis that cover the activities impacting both on the environment, as well as on the safety of work, as well as identifying the measures against these risks; in some situations, there is an employee's responsible for resolving a problem as soon as possible; tourists should have access to a list with persons of contact in case of emergencies that includes: the fire fighting department, the mountain rescue, hospital, the administration of the natural habitat and others; all the company's employees have to wear the "safety equipment" when it is required; the correct utilisation of the equipment is explained by the specialized companies/persons; at least one of company employee is prepared for giving the first aid. The first aid kit is available at any moment and it is situated in an easily accessible location.

D. Employees and customers (tourists) enjoy both of the confidence in their jobs, as well as of the activities that they undertake: all employees of the company have insurances according with the type of activities they undertake; tourists get clear information about the insurances covered by the company's product (Tindeche C., 2013). [8]

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the study revealed the certification procedure in ecotourism, as well as the criteria that must be fulfilled by the lodging units that voluntarily wish to adhere

to this modern type of tourism. In our country, the Certification System in Ecotourism is used by the Romanian Ecotourism Association (AER) which adapts the international experience to the existing context.

The present study showed a sustained management plan as a model that can be used by managers or owners of the lodging units that desire to acquire that certification in tourism. Guesthouses that implement the certification in tourism have a series of benefits, such as: it allows customers to identify better those products that can offer great experiences linked to nature and rural culture; contributes to grow up the level of confidence in Romanian ecotourism items on the international market; becomes a marketing instrument for guesthouses owners and for tour-operators; guarantees a higher quality point of services; contributes actively to protecting nature; helping local administrations in the preserving areas with developing of a tourism form with a minimal impact; offers a platform for shared activities between the entrepreneurial sector and the nature protecting organizations.

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