

Key Practices and Approaches to Sustainable Tourism Development

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Abstract: In recent years, the central stage in tourism world is taken by sustainable tourism development. One could say that there is nothing left to say about sustainable tourism development since it has numerous conferences, textbooks and corporate policy statements. However, there are only few examples of successful sustainable tourism initiatives that inspire, mainly due to the failure of putting theory into practice. This study underlines main approaches and practices for more sustainable tourism development giving attention to environmental protection which can be with little willingness and effort easily accomplished. Impact of tourism is huge, it is positive and negative how on natural also on other environments, but it is manageable if the general policy and the aim is sustainable development. Responsible planning, consensus building, holistic thinking, encouraging good practices and regulation of negative impacts are just some of crucial steps toward approaching more sustainable way of tourism development.

Introduction

Surveys done by WTO and many written papers conclude that significant number of the tourism development plans brought in the past have been implemented partially or have not been implemented at all. What or who is guilty for this? Maybe the problem is in tourism industry itself or among those responsible for tourism planning, or it is in approaches used for planning tourism development. However the problem is in place, implementation is not going well and plans remain on papers and shelves gathering only dust while at same time development of sustainable tourism fail. Therefore, the question is not whether to plan or not to plan, but how to plan, which practices to use and what approaches to choose. Tourism planning requires knowledge and rationality which in practice may not be achievable. Besides that planning for sustainable tourism development assumes environmental and social protection over pure economic goals. Finally politics is in the center of tourism planning. Achieving agreement on a rationale, comprehensive, holistic and long-range planning approach to tourism may look impossible task. However, knowledge, rationality and willingness may find suitable approaches to planning, implementation and control.

The aim of this paper is to take you back to importance of tourism planning and to address key approaches and practices, among many, to sustainable tourism development. One could say that there is nothing left to say about sustainable tourism development since it has numerous conferences, textbooks and corporate policy statements but when we look for good example of such tourism development there are only few of them. As Getz (1986) argues, this is mainly because of the failure to put together theory and practice. Almost three decades ago the issue was evident but still problem is not solved and drawing of rigid "Master Plans" is with no hesitation still considered as main approach to tourism planning mainly in developing countries (Burns 2004). Although tourism planning recently moved toward application of more sustainable approaches still failures of sustainable development are superior.

Tourism, Planning and Sustainability

Tourism for long time is a major topic for many academics, researchers, industries, governments and publics (Coppock 1982; Jenkins 1982; Getz 1986; Davidson 1993; Burns 2004). It is widely accepted that tourism is one of the largest industries today with rare ability to move millions of people from one place to another on base of something what is intangible in core. Until know many definitions on tourism have been brought and discussed. However problem of developing one that best describes tourism phenomena is present. Permanently used term "tourism industry" also received some criticisms, where some authors suggest that tourism cannot be described as an industry because it does not produce a single, distinct product (Jefferson and Lickorish 1988). As Gilbert (1990)

argues this difficulty of defining tourism is mainly because of the nature of tourism as a concept and also inputs involved in satisfying tourist's demands and needs and recently interests of host community. Tourism left that issue behind and until now developed into a truly worldwide activity that goes far beyond political, cultural, geographical, and ideological boundaries. It is not just another industry but important part of economy foundation in many countries. Besides that is fastest growing and leading industry at global level and one of the top five exports for 80% of countries (WTO 1998).

Tourism can be viewed, described and measured from different perspectives depending on nature of main interests, objectives and aims. Decades ago the most important indicators and objectives of tourism were related to economic growth and employment rate, mainly measuring how much money can bring into a country, how many people can employ and how much visitors can attract. Still these elements are important indicators in measuring overall tourism development, but also by time some other essential aspects have been considered as well. Today significance of tourism is also measured through impacts which tourism has on people's lives, places where they live and also the way tourism is affected by different forces. It has been argued by Cook, Yale and Marqua (2002, p. 5), "Tourism is much like the elephant: diverse and sometime hard to describe, but just like the elephant, too big to be ignored". Finally we can say that tourism represents an important element of global economy and today almost every country in some way is trying to achieve greater development through development of tourism.

As it was mentioned before tourism was widely accepted and used to accomplish quick economic growth and to increase employment rate which is important element of economical indicators. However, in early 1980s such tourism development receives many critics because of increasing evidence of negative impacts of tourism (Logar 2010). Tourism planners are asked to employ different approaches to tourism planning in order to regulate tourism development before essential resources and potentials reach their end. In different destinations unfortunately this occurred, mainly due to planning approaches used which did not include social, cultural and environmental aspect (Hall 2000). And this is in fact how the need for more appropriate and more responsible approach to tourism planning was born. This remains difficult task to solve, although today is possible to find different and quite adoptable approaches to work out. In following we remind on value and role of planning process.

Planning is a term that is difficult to define because it may be used in relation to individuals or groups, governments and organizations and can be applied to different levels like regional, national and international. In addition it is a term widely accepted and used to describe ways and means to achieve future goals and objectives. However planning means and requires much more. As it was argued by Williams (1998) without planning there is a risk that activities undertaken will be unregulated, formless or haphazard and likely will lead to a range of negative economic, social and environmental impacts. This actually best describes the situation with tourism in early 1970s and 1980s. Also Gunn (1988), argued similarly when he claimed that the lack of planning may cause serious mal functions and inefficiencies.

It is important to mention that planning in early stages was largely reactive while modern planning in the late twentieth century was far proactive and future oriented. Furthermore, in early stages focus on the plan as physical design has probably contributed to the failure to recognize the importance of actions involved in planning (Gunn, 1988), while main aim of modern planning is to seek for optimal solutions to perceive problems that is designed to maximize development of benefits, producing predictable outcomes (Williams, 1998). In addition, planning is an ordered sequence of operations and actions that are designed to realize one single goal or interrelated goals. To conclude, making plans and estimates for the future including measurable outcomes is essential and continuous process that helps, and is necessary activity in today's uncertainty.

Previously mentioned brought us to discussion of tourism planning. Nearly three decades ago tourism planning was summarized in following way: "to ensure that opportunities are available for tourist to gain enjoyable and satisfying experience and at the same time to provide a mean of improving the way of life for residents and of destination area" (Matthieson and Wall 1982, p.186). Many researchers agreed upon that planning for tourism is not an easy task (Boud-Bovy 1982; Gunn 1988; Williams 1998; Spanoudis 1982; Burns 1999) and it is more difficult than planning for other industries. Tourism planning is not a fixed process, but rather is continuous and dynamic. Similarly as it is argued by Cook, Yale and Marqua (2000, p. 294) "tourism planning is continuous process based on a number of steps to develop and also sustain revenues created by tourism". Planners are facing many challenges when planning for tourism, and mainly in the areas of aims and objectives, coordination and corporation, compromises, and more so impacts. Since tourism involves so many other industries in its functioning, its benefits must be integrated with the development of other sectors and its goals set to be sustainable.

In another words approaches to tourism planning should pay attention to the real mechanisms of tourism development and to its integration into the whole economy. One direction planning has led to the negative tourism consequences in many countries what was mentioned previously. In addition, where planning process was limited to the few narrow goals or interests of few people plans failed to bring positive and measurable outcomes. This can be

considered as one of the reasons why so many plans couldn't be implemented. Still debates and researches are going on in direction of finding approach for tourism planning which will include broader set of economic, social and environmental needs without excluding the indigenous values (Haywood 1988). According to Boud-Bovy (1982), planners should ensure that important factors are integrated into planning sequence and some of them are:

- The interdependency between tourism development and overall development of a country
- The interdependency between tourism sector and all other participants in tourism development
- The interdependency between domestic and foreign tourism.

Thus, it is obvious that need for elaboration of planning approach with ability to integrate all those factors and much more is very present. Furthermore, stakeholders' participation in planning process should be completely accepted and encouraged.

Evolution of tourism and different political, socioeconomic, technical and environmental factors has created different approaches to tourism planning which were extensively used. We will mention and give very short explanation about few of them:

- Boosterism
- Economic approach
- Physical spatial approach
- Community oriented approach
- Sustainable approach

Boosterism has been planning approach since the emergence of mass tourism focusing on positive and ignoring negative impacts on economic, social, cultural and environmental aspects (Baidal 2004).

Economic approach is actually continuation of boosterism giving importance to economic issues over social and environmental ones (Burns 1999). The focus is on tourism as an export industry and its potentials for economic growth.

Physical spatial approaches appear as opposite to those previously mentioned, focusing mainly on the environmental issues, with emphasis on preservation of the natural resources.

Community oriented approach focuses on tourism development at local level and greater social involvement in planning process.

And finally concept of sustainability and sustainable planning approach become incorporated in tourism. This approach is based on a coherent, holistic perspective, and focusing on the balance between economic growth, social justice and environmental preservation (Hall, 2000). In the following attention will be on sustainability and sustainable tourism.

The issue of sustainability is introduced almost twenty or thirty years ago while its roots are found even centuries ago. However, discussion over sustainable tourism is phenomenon of the 1990s. It is widely accepted that sustainable in general represents development which meets our needs today without compromising the ability of people in the future to meet their needs (Swarbrooke 1999). It is obvious that is directed toward future considering long term perspectives what is hard to find in human decision-making. Besides that it underlines importance and need of planning and interventions before it is too late. Furthermore, concept of sustainability is including integration of environmental, people and economic systems. Discussions and debates over this were going on which mainly influenced emergence of sustainable tourism.

In 1997, Hunter addresses some of essential issues of sustainable development that can be adopted as important part of sustainable tourism debate and those are:

- The role of economic growth in promoting human well-being
- The impacts and importance of human population growth
- The effective existence of environmental limits to growth
- The sustainability of natural resources with human made capital created through economic growth and technical innovation
- The different interpretation of the criticality of various components of the natural resource base and, therefore, the potential for substitution
- The ability of technologies to decouple economic growth and unwanted environmental side-effects
- The meaning of the value attributed to the natural world and the rights of non-human species, sentient or otherwise
- The degree to which a system (ecosystem) perspective should be adopted and the importance of maintaining the functional integrity of ecosystems

Apparently, tourism industry begins to accept idea of sustainable tourism, but little of that actually was applied. Much of that remains on presentation papers, reports and in poorly designed “Master plans” for tourism development.

Well known elements of sustainability can for sure provide better future how for human and natural environments also for tourism industry. But it is clear that application of concept somehow find hidden reasons to be pushed in a side while the center is occupied by economic growth and related indicators.

Finally we can say that incorporation of main principles of sustainable development into tourism may play key management issues in its development. The study will proceed with new heading under which some of noteworthy practices and approaches for sustainable tourism development will be presented.

Prospective approaches and practices for sustainable tourism

For quite long period, convincingly, mass tourism was blamed for negative impacts on the social, natural and economic aspects. In addition arguments have appeared like, reaction to the tourism planning biases, discussion of limited growth and suggestion of alternative tourism. This brought emergence of alternative forms of tourism and especially ecotourism as a practical option (Cater 1993).

Burns (1999) in his work presents two basic approaches or so called bipolarities in tourism planning and concludes that all tourism planning approaches can be placed within two main groups. First is so called “Tourism First, basically supply-led approach, focusing on the development of tourism facilities and on the need of production. Tourism represents consumerism and commodisation, led by globalization where markers drive distribution. Second approach is “Development First” which is in line with UN’s National Development concept and supposes to achieve poverty elimination, development of rural areas creating productive employment. Tourism is perceived as holistic system with emphasis on distribution and sustainable human development. Additionally, holds the philosophy that tourism is the part of a whole structure for economic improvement.

As it can be understood these two approaches represents two opposite sides, containing definite paradoxes in relation to tourism planning. However, each of them has its advantages and disadvantages. While “Development First “cannot ensure achievement of short-term goals, return on investment and other related issues, “Tourism First” approach cannot satisfy needs of environmental preservation, sustainable use of resources and fair distribution of benefits.

After all, as result of previously mentioned Burns (2004) presents its work introducing new model for tourism planning so called “Third Way”. The attributes are fairly significant as listed below:

- It is more flexible
- Less limited with more alternatives for development
- More politically and socially adjustable
- May help the formation of different civil institutions
- Moves beyond many other models
- It requires realistic assessment of potential benefits and problems

Besides, application of this approach asks for complete commitment within democratic process giving no rights without responsibilities. With its remarkable six elements, important factors and prerequisites “Third Way” approach somehow appears as solution for sustainable tourism development especially in developing countries. However, it is necessary to mention that model has not been tried representing an valuable option, what inspires in fact. This proves still problematic harmonization between theories and practices. Unfortunately, what is given on paper remains on paper. More about the model is given in original study written by Burns (2004).

Some benefits of sustainable tourism brought at Globe `90 conference in Vancouver are summarized in following give us chance to draw adjustable actions toward sustainable tourism development.

- Idea of sustainable tourism is based on understanding impacts of tourism on cultural, human and natural environment. Education with accent on negative and positive impacts of tourism may play an important role in understanding the main idea of sustainable tourism. Furthermore involvement of academics and researchers in planning processes and open public discussions may contribute as well.
- Fair distribution of benefits and costs is encouraged by sustainable tourism. Tourism development should be intergraded into broader national development ensuring involvement of different stakeholders who will agree on responsibilities. Tourism development must manage to avoid chances for achievement of monopolistic power and personal interests.

- Sustainable tourism encourages development of domestic industries. Domestic investors and owners of different enterprises should be encouraged through incentives and preferable conditions to support the completion of tourism products. How various sectors directly or indirectly influence tourism industry it is necessary to ensure good cooperation among them.
- Tourism generates employment at local level, directly or through other sectors. Thus, local people should have priorities even cheaper working force can be imported. This may reduce leakages and contribute to the economy. Finally, seasonally imported workers are not part of long-term sustainable development.
- Tourism is a foreign currency earner for the country and helps the economy. Invisible export is key power of tourism industry. Inflow of foreign tourists should be encouraged with respect to interests of host community, cultural aspects and environmental issues like carrying capacity.
- Tourism encourages improvement of local infrastructure, transportation and communication. Developed infrastructure should be primarily there to serve local needs, then needs of tourism, what ensures greater quality of life at the destination. Governmental involvement is necessary here.
- Tourism encourages preservation of existing man-made attraction and development or recreational facilities. Interest of tourists may help to preserve important historical monuments and sites previously neglected. Development of various facilities should be encouraged mainly by governmental help but also domestic investors, ensuring the same right for everyone. Such policies may reduce tensions between hosts and foreigners.
- Tourism helps the local economy to be diverse. Development of supporting tourism sectors should be done at local level resulting in direct decrease of importing costs. In addition this is way to help development of rural areas.
- Sustainable tourism requires involvement of all stakeholders in the decision-making process. Here is important to balance the interests of stakeholders and to develop mechanisms to manage different views on same issues. This can be difficult task due to difficulty to find homogenous communities but sustainable concept should be held at the center of main objectives and interests.
- Sustainable tourism encourages natural protection and proper land use. Here the importance is on understanding what is to be preserved and what is to be achieved. Clear thinking and good management are very important which will help to design best ways for land use and methods for natural preservation.
- Sustainable tourism influence cultural aspect in a positive way. Tourism as it is known brings diverse cultures together. Thus it can be used to help preservation of cultural heritage, traditional way of life, and even civilizations.
- Sustainable tourism is environmentally oriented and serves to protect natural and cultural resources creating social and economical well being for community. Managing quality of the natural environment is of great importance for tourism existence. It is the environment that mainly attracts visitors. Control can be done through regular application of different methods like: Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), Environmental auditing etc. Application of different policies, laws and regulation can also help preservation of cultural heritage.
- Sustainable tourism requires monitoring, assessment and management of tourism impacts. In addition, counters any negative impact. To remain sustainable tourism must be monitored and controlled by established regulatory institution. Thus development of different institutions is necessary. Besides, different measures encountering negative impacts of tourism should be constantly enlarged and improved.

Although one can think that sustainable tourism is impossible dream, sustainability can be managed by application of different laws and regulations, policies, measures and methods. Trade-offs as well will be necessary in accomplishing this task.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore the importance of planning process especially in relation to tourism industry and development. However the main aim was to underline the appropriate approaches and practices to sustainable tourism development. Aims were accomplished through relevant literature review what broaden the discussion on mentioned issues. Based on this discussion it is possible to draw some general conclusions that can be understood as recommendations. Firstly, concept of planning should be deeply understood and learned by so called

“planners”. This can help to avoid pitfalls in designing plans especially for tourism development. Second, tourism should be perceived from different perspectives but not only economical in order to forecast the possible social and environmental changes resulting from tourism development. Third, concept of sustainability should not be used to hide from view various unsustainable interests, goals, and objectives. In addition, sustainability should be at the center of human, environmental, social and economical development. Fourth, agreement should be achieved at all levels and among various stakeholders in order to carry on with tourism development. That is a way of ensuring broader involvement of local people what is at the same time prerequisite for sustainable development. . Fifth, appropriate approaches for sustainable development of tourism must be at place, developed according to all potentials, problems, social, cultural and environmental characteristics of particular destination. This ensures integration of home-grown values and their respect. Finally, benefits of sustainable tourism development should be ensured through carefully designed practices, policies and methods. We like it or not, sustainability represents our future. It is hoped that this study will at least encourage some promising thoughts or likely brighter future for sustainable tourism development.

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