

CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT - SYSTEMIC REVIEW FOR EFFECTIVE STRATEGY

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Abstract. This article reviews the literature on sustainable tourism to identify contemporary challenges and attempt to formulate a conceptual approach to developing an effective strategy. Based on the materials analyzed in the work, a conceptual approach for an effective strategy for sustainable tourism has been developed. A formal theoretical framework has elaborated by the author in the form of a Holistic "Mushroom", which systematically reflects the identified challenges and elements. The findings in this work will be helpful for both future scholarly research and the creation of sustainable tourism initiatives.

Keywords: sustainable development, sustainable tourism, tourism strategy, World Tourism Organization, Sustainable Development Goals, ecosystem

ВЫЗОВЫ УСТОЙЧИВОГО РАЗВИТИЯ ТУРИЗМА – СИСТЕМНЫЙ ОБЗОР ДЛЯ ЭФФЕКТИВНОЙ СТРАТЕГИИ

Нино ПАПАЧАШВИЛИ

Аннотация. В этой статье рассматривается литература по устойчивому туризму, чтобы определить современные проблемы и попытаться сформулировать концептуальный подход к разработке эффективной стратегии. На основе проанализированных в работе материалов разработан концептуальный подход эффективной стратегии устойчивого туризма. Формальная теоретическая основа разработана автором в виде целостного «Гриба», систематически отражающего выявленные проблемы и элементы. Результаты этой работы будут полезны как для будущих научных исследований, так и для создания инициатив в области устойчивого туризма.

Ключевые слова: устойчивое развитие, устойчивый туризм, туристическая стратегия, Всемирная туристская организация, экосистема

DAYANIQLI TURİZM İNKİŞAFININ ÇAĞIRIŞLARI: EFFEKTİV STRATEGİYA ÜÇÜN SİSTEMLİ BAXIŞ

Nino PAPAÇAŞVILI

Xülasə. Bu məqalə müasir problemləri müəyyən etmək və effektiv strategiyanın işlənilib hazırlanması məqsədilə konseptual yanaşmanı formalaşdırmaq naminə dayanıqlı turizm üzrə ədəbiyyatı nəzərdən keçirir. Təhlil edilmiş materiallara əsaslanaraq dayanıqlı turizmin effektiv strategiyası üçün konseptual yanaşma işlənilib hazırlanmışdır. Müəllif tərəfindən müəyyən edilmiş problemləri və elementləri sistemə şəkildə əks etdirən Vahid "Göbələk" şəklində rəsmi nəzəri çərçivə hazırlanmışdır. Bu məqalə həm gələcək elmi araşdırmalar, həm də dayanıqlı turizm təşəbbüslərinin yaradılması üçün faydalı olacaqdır.

Açar sözlər: dayanıqlı İnkişaf, dayanıqlı turizm, turizm strategiyası, Dünya Ticarət Təşkilatı, Dayanıqlı İnkişaf Məqsədləri, ekosistem

Introduction

The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by various nations in 2015 marked a turning point for global development. Sustainable tourism is positioned on the 2030 Agenda, however, achieving the goals of this agenda requires a clear implementation framework, adequate financing, and investment in technology, infrastructure, and human resources (Tourism in the 2030 Agenda). Despite the abundance of research on the role of tourism in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), systemic visions of sustainable tourism need to be promoted in both theoretical and practical fields. The process needs acceleration and the development of a relevant theoretical framework for a better strategy. Several factors make the issue even more topical, including the heavy blow inflicted by COVID-19 on the tourism sector and the negative impact caused by increasing tourism flows, a factor that existed before the pandemic and which is still on the agenda amid the revitalization of the sector.

By focusing on sustainable tourism, not only will the community benefit, but the tourism industry will also attract more tourists and increase its longevity. This approach aligns with the long-term sustainability goals of the tourism industry and helps in the recovery of the industry after the devastating impact of the pandemic (Srisawat, et al., 2023).

The article aims to establish a conceptual vision for the development of a sustainable tourism strategy based on the challenges of the sector.

Research method. The formation of a conceptual vision is based on a holistic approach. This method is useful for the study of complex systems, viewed as coherent wholes in which components are best understood in context and in relation to each other and the whole (Marshall, 2002). Holistic thinking in interdisciplinary studies is highly accepted and is a method employed by many scholars (Rick, 2012). In our opinion, this methodological approach is useful and acceptable for developing a sustainable tourism strategy, considering that tourism belongs to such a field.

The study was carried out based on scientific literature dedicated to sustainable tourism, as well as the relevant evaluations of international organizations. Identifying the key elements of sustainable tourism was defined as the main task of the research. A conceptual framework was developed for the systemic view, demonstrated in the form of a diagram of connected elements.

1. Why sustainable tourism?

The World Tourism Organization defines sustainable tourism as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, industry, the environment, and host communities” (Sustainable Tourism, WTO).

Tourism is a significant employer and source of income. It has a strong impact on the social, economic, and environmental well-being of many nations, particularly developing ones. The total contribution of travel and tourism to global gross domestic product (GDP) rose by 21.7% in 2021, up on the previous year, after dropping sharply in 2020 due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Overall, the contribution of travel and tourism to the global GDP amounted to 5.81 trillion U.S. dollars in 2021, which is an increase from the amount it was in 2020. Travel and tourism accounted for 6.1% of the global gross domestic product (GDP) in

2021, denoting an increase over 2020, but not returning to the figures reported prior to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The share of the sector in global GDP was 10.9% in 2000; 9.3 in 2010; 10.4 in 2018, and 10.3 in 2019 (Statista Research Department, 2023).

Over the past 60 years, tourism has generally continued to grow and diversify, becoming one of the largest and fastest-growing economic sectors in the world. The United Nations World Tourism Organization predicts that 1.8 bln. foreign visitors will travel worldwide by 2030.

Despite the positive effects, the exponential rise of tourism creates problems due to increased resource use, leading to the deterioration of cultural and natural assets, and resulting in detrimental social effects, underscoring the need for a paradigm shift.

According to different estimations, the travel and tourism sector accounts for about 11% of global emissions. CO₂ emissions are mainly generated by transport, but also by the operation of tourism facilities such as accommodation. Accommodation industries are frequently big consumers of non-renewable and precious resources, such as land, energy, and water. This can lead to local pollution of land and water due to poor handling of solid and liquid waste by tourism firms and through visitor activities. In some regions, a resort may use far more water per person than the local community.

The biodiversity of sensitive places can be severely harmed by improper activities and poorly sited tourism development. Inadequate tourist management can have detrimental effects on cultural heritage sites. Tourism can also negatively affect a community's way of life by limiting access to land and resources and endangering social and cultural norms and values. Sometimes, the sector has subpar working conditions. The economic performance of the sector is susceptible to influences from source markets, such as economic conditions, natural events, and security concerns, although recovery may be rapid when circumstances change (Sustainable Tourism for Development Guidebook, 2013).

It is commonly acknowledged that modern tourism mobility, particularly flying, conflicts with sustainability objectives. Fundamental changes in travel behavior are required. Some studies indicate that environmental values have little impact on tourists' travel decisions and that voluntary behavior change is unlikely (Luzecka, 2016). While surveys reveal that 71% of travellers intend to travel more sustainably, there are still significant gaps between consumers' intentions and their behavior (United Nations Climate Change Conference COP27). The challenges of the tourism sector, especially during the pandemic crisis, revealed relevant policy challenges and shifted the focus of both researchers and policymakers toward tourism sustainability.

The aforementioned drawbacks highlight the need for a deeper understanding of the factors influencing sustainable tourism development and the vital importance of having relevant strategies and policies.

In determining the strategy and considering the local characteristics, international cooperation, and the support of the World Tourism Organization for the development of political orientation is very important, while for the successful implementation of the policy and achievement of the targets, the involvement and cooperation of all stakeholders is needed. The concept of sustainable tourism development emerged due to the intent to decrease the impact of mass tourism seen over the last forty years (Roblek, et al., 2021).

Although conceptual visions of sustainable tourism originate from the adoption of the Rio de Janeiro Declaration, it is still problematic to understand the issue on the one hand – i.e., what

sustainable tourism is, and, on the other hand, to overcome the many obstacles to achieving sustainable tourism. Clearly, countries around the world differ in their levels of achievement in this sense, and varying levels of achievement are seen within regions within countries.

Achieving sustainability in tourism is a difficult challenge. It is not a specific type of tourism, it's more about fixing an approach. The World Tourism Organization indicates that sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership, to ensure wide participation and consensus building. (Sustainable Development, WTO).

2. Challenges for More Sustainable Tourism

Developing countries have great potential but face more challenges, although several such countries have already taken successful steps to implement sustainable tourism strategies and have made sustainable tourism a priority in their national development policies, seeking to formulate and implement interventions to increase tourism's contribution to poverty reduction.

Sustainable tourism goals were developed back in 2005 by the UNWTO and UNEP, focusing on 12 important themes: economic viability, local prosperity, employment quality, social equity, visitor fulfilment, local control, community well-being, cultural richness, physical integrity, biological diversity, resource efficiency, and environmental purity (Making Tourism More Sustainable - A Guide for Policy Makers, 2005).

Each aim is a moving target and thus achieving them remains a challenge even today. There is also criticism regarding the sustainability of tourism. For example, a study based on the analysis of institutional initiatives on international, European, and Spanish tourism policy notes that the strategic tourist policies and initiatives stress the environmental dimension to the detriment of a balance with the social and economic dimensions. They are all too often repetitive and overlap with each other in their eagerness to adapt to the conditions of each case. The greatest challenge facing sustainable tourism is thus its appropriate application to changing conditions and times. What is undeniable is that sustainability is widely accepted as a feature of tourism, to the extent that it is now inseparable from the notion of contemporary tourism (Torres-Delgado & López Palomeque, 2012).

Adopting sustainable tourism concepts and focusing on achieving sustainable development goals are important guidelines for the tourism industry to follow. Sustainable tourism should not be regarded as a separate component of tourism, as a set of niche products, but rather as a condition of the tourism sector, which should work to become more sustainable.

Researchers of the evolution of the concept of sustainable tourism point to the right combination of economic prosperity, ecological protection, and social benefits. They also note that it is necessary to coordinate interests between the main stakeholders to trigger new styles of economic development related to sustainable eco-tourism and the environmental protection system (Roblek, et al., 2021).

Because of the rapid development of tourism resources and the tourism industry, the conflict between economic growth and the ecological environment is highlighted in another study. In addition, the author indicated the emphasis on the constant development of various stakeholders who need to be made aware of the need for environmental balance (Chen & Liaw, 2012).

Cultural tourism, as heritage-based tourism that can promote inclusive and sustainable

development, especially in remote or peripheral areas, has been the focus of several studies, and its proper development is recognized as a significant challenge (Ottaviani, et al., 2023). Researchers point to the need to consider the peculiarities of the mentality of residents and the need for them to accumulate new knowledge to increase the country's competitiveness in the tourism industry (Korganashvili & Mammadova, 2016).

Understanding the traditions for competitive positioning in the modern context requires consideration of that modern context and the formation of a new vision, for which entrepreneurial ideas are essential. Stimulation of such thinking has become the focus of the attention of researchers (Lekashvili, 2015). The development of sustainable tourism should also be considered.

Achieving sustainability in tourism is a contradictory and complex process. Studies single out the state as a major actor and indicate that it plays a significant role in guiding sustainable tourism policies. Governments in developed countries have a better understanding of the concept of sustainable tourism, and stakeholders are increasingly using sustainability principles in their operations to gain a competitive advantage.

To achieve sustainable tourism, it is necessary for all stakeholders, throughout society, to be involved in the process. Stakeholders need to see a climate of business ethics in economic and ecological compatibility. More specifically, agents that promote the development of “sustainability values” in economic tourism should look towards the promotion of rational use of resources and their conservation, as well as the values of culture (Padin, 2012).

Due to its connection with various sectors, tourism provides a broad arena for the state to conduct public policies in the context of sustainable development. However, it should be noted that there is also a great responsibility for other stakeholders (World Tourism Organization and United Nations Development Programme, 2017). Scientific studies and guidelines of international organizations place special emphasis on the involvement, cooperation, and coordination of tourism actors in seeking to achieve sustainability.

The ability of the many stakeholders to collaborate successfully during the planning, management, and execution of projects and activities is a vital necessity for sustainable tourism. This should be supported by the creation of efficient cooperation and coordination structures, both at the national level and among local destinations.

Tourism stakeholders who directly or indirectly influence the development of sustainable tourism are represented by the following entities: international development assistance agencies; national government; local government and destination bodies; private sector businesses, employees, and related bodies; non governmental organization – international and national; local, education and training bodies; local communities, and consumers/tourists. Each actor can make an important contribution to ensuring sustainability.

Researchers point to the crucial role of education and science and the involvement of relevant stakeholders in solving the problems of sustainable development. They suggest different ways of enhancing this connection (Gagnidze, 2018, Seturidze & Topuria, 2021).

3. Summary of Systematic Review - Holistic "Mushroom"

Sustainability principles pertain to the environmental, economic, social, and cultural components of tourism development. To ensure the long-term sustainability of tourist growth, a sufficient balance between these dimensions must be maintained. The Covid-19 pandemic,

which dealt a huge blow to the tourism sector, has convinced the whole world of the need for harmonious coexistence of society with nature. Perhaps no other economic sector is connected to the ecosystem as diversely and deeply as tourism, which dictates the need to use holistic approaches in the process of developing and implementing tourism strategies and policies.

The studied and analyzed issues gave us the opportunity to create a conceptual framework diagram for the development of an effective sustainable tourism strategy (Fig. 1).

Figure 1.

Holistic “Mushroom” for Effective Sustainable Tourism Strategy



Source: Created by the author.

Tourism stakeholders are the main actors, and therefore they should be able to understand the challenges of sustainable tourism on the one hand and implement them on the other. Coordination and cooperation between them are important prerequisites to achieve a synergistic effect.

The government, as one of the main actors, should promote coordination between the stakeholders. Cooperation between them can be developed in different ways. Among them, the use of technological advances (for example, social platforms) is important. Innovations and new and entrepreneurial approaches can have a big impact on raising people's awareness and on shaping positive behavior to achieve sustainable tourism. That is why these components are marked with the corresponding arrows. These topics are extremely relevant for future scientific research.

The identified challenges can be grouped into four pillars, which can be broken down in detail, taking into account the specific context. In this sense, the diagram is very flexible.

Sustainable tourism, as a means of achieving the goals of sustainable development, is based primarily on knowledge of sustainable development.

It is important for the wider public to understand the nature of and commitment needed for sustainable tourism, and how it is a mechanism for promoting economic and social growth by achieving development goals. The proposed conceptual approach will be useful for policymakers, planners, tourism managers, and other relevant stakeholders.

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