

ECOTOURISM IN SOME COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD

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ABSTRACT

In the first place even before chemicals, food, IT and also oil, nowadays tourism (born since the 1960s) is the main source of export earnings and the powerful economic engine. Indeed, this sector involves significant investments, generates income. In addition, it offers many thousands of jobs, develops the infrastructure of a country and creates a feeling of cultural exchange between the local population and foreigners. According to a report by the World Tourism Organization published in 2002, for 38% of countries it is the primary economic source and the latter's direct contribution to world GDP is around 10.4%. Thus, ecotourism is a form of sustainable tourism of which it presents several benefits and advantages in ecological, economic and socio-cultural terms. But, despite the importance of this alternative tourism, ecotourism still knows limits in some regions and countries. For this reason, the current study was carried out with the aim to present briefly some features of ecotourism in some countries in the world such as Australia, Jordan, Nepal and Romania.

KEYWORDS

Ecotourism; Australia, Jordan, Nepal, Romania.

INTRODUCTION

Several definitions of ecotourism are cited in the literature, Haibo[1], relates some definitions among which: “agritourism is a form of tourism which consists in visiting relatively intact or little disturbed natural areas, in order to study and admire the landscape and the plants and animals’ wilderness that it shelters, as well as any cultural manifestation (past and present) observable in these areas” [2].

Ecotourism involves tourist trips to destinations in a flora and fauna, which reflected the favorable conditions of unspoiled nature, environment, clean air, unpolluted rivers and lakes, flora and fauna, rich fauna. Thus outside, tourists preserved whose environmental impact is minimal. Rural tourism is closely related with ecotourism would have the opportunity to walk, have fun, play sports, visit caves, nearby waterfalls, hunting and fishing, picking fruits and herbs wilderness and other recreational activities.

In ecotourism there are also economic impacts including the purely economic impact and that of economic value. The impacts of ecotourism as an economic activity can be direct or indirect. The main economic activity of ecotourism may be such as creating the conditions for community development, with emphasis on the link between ecotourism and rural tourism [3].

Traditional tourism is still dominant and it is not possible to compare the benefits of ecotourism with those of mass tourism. To resolve certain economic, social, etc. problems, it is therefore necessary to invest in tourism, ecological, rural and sustainable and its forms to the detriment of classic mass tourism. The progress of ecotourism remains linked to the political, economic and social phenomena and state of countries and to the strategies and decisions taken therein. A new term " ecotourism " or " agritourism " appeared about forty years ago when environmental protection was at the heart of all debates[4].

Principle

Participants in the first World Ecotourism Summit, held in Quebec City in 2002, recognized that ecotourism encompasses the principles of sustainable tourism with regard to the impacts of this activity on the economy, society and environment and that in addition, it includes the following specific principles that distinguish it from the broader notion of sustainable tourism [5]:

- ecotourism actively contributes to the protection of natural and cultural heritage;
- ecotourism includes local and indigenous communities in its planning, development and operation and contributes to their well-being;
- ecotourism offers visitors an interpretation of the natural and cultural heritage;
- ecotourism lends itself better to individual travel as well as organized trips for small groups.

More concisely, Koumantiga et al. [6] argues that an analysis of definitions leads us to consider three dimensions that constitute the very essence of the concept of ecotourism:

- Nature-based tourism;
- An educational component;
- A need for sustainability.

Emergence of ecotourism

Ecotourism developed in the wake of the environmental movement that took shape in the early 1970s. Growing public interest in the environment and outdoor-oriented travel, coupled with growing dissatisfaction with tourism mass, has shown the tourism industry that there is a place for ecotourism [7;8]. The understanding and acceptance of the principles of conservation and sustainability by a growing portion of the population has also contributed to the phenomenal evolution of the term ecotourism [7].

According to some authors, it appeared for the first time in English in an article [9]. However, the Mexican ecologist Ceballos-Lascurain used the Spanish word ecoturismo even earlier, when the National Forest Service of Canada was, as early as 1973, promoting ecotours along the Trans-Canada Highway [10].

Recently, the term was even traced in an article by Hertzler[11] who used it to explain the complex relationship between tourists and the environment and the cultures

with which they interact [10]. However, it is Budowski[12] who is widely cited as the pioneer regarding the very concept of ecotourism [9;7].

The dissemination of the term and the concept is often associated with Elizabeth Boo whose book, *Ecotourism: The Potentials and Pitfalls* [10], contained a definition put forward by Ceballos-Lascurain at the end of the 1980s [13].

The limits and critiques of ecotourism

According to Tardif and Sarrasin[14], they mainly come from the proliferation of names, used to designate forms of sustainable tourism, while its principles are simple and well defined. From green tourism to ecotourism, including pro-poor tourism, nature tourism, rural tourism, agrotourism, adventure tourism, solidarity tourism, participatory, responsible, ethical, fair, humanitarian, the consumer is confronted with an interminable list of terms which are not very accessible and which refer to comparable realities.

It is an informational and terminological overload confusing for the general public, which has difficulty in differentiating these forms and sees them as a great disorder. This confusion hinders the development of sustainable forms of tourism, including ecotourism, and undermines the credibility of truly responsible offers.

In addition, the lack of ecotourism indicators, criteria or standards can be a source of drift, linked to the implementation of activities associated with the ecotourism product. In Jordan, ecotourism must, above all, make visitors aware of the beauty and fragility of nature in the areas visited, but under this pretext, some operators do not hesitate to offer routes in all-terrain vehicles, to modify the natural landscape to set up Bedouin-style camps with air conditioning and swimming pools, without worrying about their delayed impact on flora and fauna or on local natural resources [15].

Vision on some ecotourism strategies at the international level

In what follows, a general perception of some ecotourism practices in some countries located in different areas in the world.

Australia case

Australia is one of the countries to follow in terms of management and planning of ecotourism because it is one of the few countries to make this form of tourism a pillar of economic development. Australia was among the first countries in the world to develop a national ecotourism strategy in 1994.

This strategy was the result of a consultative process between the various actors: government, protected area planning authorities, park conservators. It makes it possible to plan, develop and manage ecotourism in Australia while ensuring to minimize the negative impacts that can degrade the places. Thus, at the end of this strategy several projects were developed:

- The publication of brochures and ecotourism guides in order to instill good practices for tourists which ensure natural and cultural conservation, to promote awareness of Australia's natural places: this approach is part of a communication and promotion strategy for ecotourism and natural places

- Certification program for eco-tourism products (nature and ecotourism certification program) to help tourists easily identify local eco-tourism products and ensure their qualities thus creating a tourism industry that is economically viable and socially and culturally responsible.

The certification concerns organized trips, attractions, lodges, restaurants, and local products marketed on the premises. This program has 3 levels of certification: nature tourism, ecotourism and advanced ecotourism. It is obtained based on respect for the three pillars of sustainable development: Economic, Sociocultural and Environmental [16].

So, they developed these three criteria into ten principles, of which to be able to obtain the advanced ecotourism certification for a given one must respect them:

Economic principles

- Have good business management and business planning (marketing plan, insurance, human resources ...)
- Respect business ethics (have an operating license, up-to-date insurance, no legal problem)
- Ensure responsible marketing by promoting respect for the environment to customers
- Seek to satisfy customers by meeting all their expectations

Environmental principles

- Promote and enhance protected areas
- Minimize negative impacts on the environment: light constructions, use of renewable energies, recycling
- Educate customers on the importance of conserving Australia's protected areas
- Contribute financially or physically to conservation

Socio-cultural principles

- Working with the local community
- Respect the site's cultural values

The positive points are: The certification programs guarantee to the travelers outstanding visits with qualified eco-guides as well as the development of effective promotion strategies: brochure, natural films. The negatives are as follows: Certification programs are expensive and optional. Also, there is a lack of knowledge of the principles of ecotourism practices via the local populations.

Jordan case

Despite its economic and political situation, Jordan is the only one to develop an ecotourism strategy in the Arab world. This strategy was developed in 2004 in

collaboration with environmental associations such as the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (SRCN) and the Royal Jordanian Society for Ecology. Thanks to this collaboration, principles have been established to ensure sustainable ecotourism and to reduce negative impacts on the environment, these principles have been published in brochures accessible to tourists. According to Al-Mugharbi[17], they aim to :

- Respect the cultures and traditions of the communities
- Promote local products
- Use energy conservation practices
- Follow the instructions of the protected areas
- Use water conservation practices

These brochures even encourage visitors to become a member of the association by offering several advantages: adopting an animal by paying a royalty so the tourist can visit his animal at any time[17]. There has also been the development of a program called Wild Program which subsidizes and provides assistance to micro-enterprises established in the vicinity of natural sites, the managers of this program also exhibit all ecotourism products in a room in the center of the Jordan. The income from their sales goes to the development of natural areas and the training of the local population[17].

The positive points consist of cooperation between associations and local communities and the involvement of tourists in community life. Encouraging partnership between Private-Public. The negative points are: the Practices are unorganized: unorganized visits and trips which do not always meet the standards.

Nepal case

Nepal is a landlocked country in the Himalayas. Its borders border with India and Tibet. The relief is made up of a series of mountain ranges but also wide valleys and plateaus. Nepal has 9 of the 2 peaks exceeding 8,000 meters in altitude in the world.

According to the United Nations Environment Program, Nepal is the country in Asia with the highest risk of ecological crisis [18].

Since the establishment of the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act in 1973 and the creation of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC), vested with the power to decree the protection of territory for conservation purposes [19], 20 protected areas have gradually been established.

Originally, this practice was aimed at countering poaching and deforestation [19]. Indeed, between 1947 and 1980, forest cover fell from 57% to 23% of the national territory [20;15], then continued to decrease between 1980 and 2000, at a rate of 1.8% annual [21].

However, the 1973 Act generated numerous conflicts between the State and the local populations since several were deprived of customary rights over the extraction and use of natural resources, or were expelled from the territory [19].

Subsequently, amendments to the act restored control over certain resources to populations and relaxed regulations, particularly in conservation areas and buffer zones.

Nepal's protected area system today consists of eleven national parks, two wildlife reserves, a game reserve and six conservation areas. In addition, there are 12 buffer zones.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) proposes a classification of protected areas recognized worldwide, which contains seven categories defined according to the objectives of management and the type of governance. The protected areas set up in the different countries of the world can thus be classified according to, among other things, the restrictions imposed on the extraction and use of natural resources within the zone, as well as the objectives targeted by protection of the territory.

Three categories of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) are represented in the network of protected areas in Nepal. First, category II, national parks aim to protect biodiversity and ecosystems while offering educational and recreational activities compatible with the objective of conservation. Then, category IV, wildlife reserves have a primary objective of conservation and restoration of species and their habitats. Finally, the game reserve, conservation areas and buffer zones belong to category VI. Areas in this category must promote sustainable use of resources, considering ecological, economic and social dimensions.

Thus, although the initial objective of the Government of Nepal aimed at protecting the territory was to reduce deforestation and poaching, some protected areas were subsequently set up with the aim of combining conservation with economic development and social, notably through ecotourism [13].

Today, the government of Nepal considers tourism to be one of the most promising sectors for the economic development of the country. In addition, it is an alternative of an income-generating sector to agriculture in mountainous regions[22].

Nepal has a richness and a natural and cultural diversity giving it a comparative advantage for the development of ecotourism. Since the opening of the borders in the 1950s, there has been significant and sustained growth in tourism activity.

In 2012, industry represented 4.7% of total GDP and it is estimated that in 2020, the share of GDP attributed to tourism will be 8.1%, which represents a growth of 4.4% for

the period 2011 -2020. Between 40 and 50% of visitors to Nepal participate in ecotourism and visit protected areas [23].

Thus, considering the importance of its system of protected areas and its tourism sector, Nepal is an appropriate country to carry out this study. One could suppose, for example, that a protected zone increases the notoriety of space, generating a rise in prices for tourist goods, favorable to the producers. Moreover, if the rights of access to a protected area are redistributed locally, the protection of the territory is then likely to strengthen the positive relationship between ecotourism and well-being.

The main objective of national parks and wildlife reserves is the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems, and are subject to more stringent regulations in terms of the extraction and use of natural resources. Conservation areas, game reserve and buffer zones aim to promote sustainable use of resources, by combining economic and social development, with environmental conservation initiatives [24]. In addition, around 75% of protected areas in Nepal aim to involve local people in resource management and in sharing the benefits of conservation [25].

Example of a protected area in Nepal

According to Nepal, K. [26], Chitwan National Park, or Chitwan, is the oldest national park in Nepal. It was created in 1973, and was inscribed in 1984 on the Unesco World Heritage List. It covers more than 932 km² and is home to several endangered animal species, such as the Indian Rhinoceros, the Bengal tiger or the Ganges gharial. The presence of the Clouded Panther is also confirmed there.

The Park is located in south-central Nepal, in the lower region of the country, the Terai, at the foot of the Himalayas in the districts of Nawalpur, Parasi, Chitwan and Makwanpur. Its altitude varies from 100 meters in the river valleys to 815 meters in the hills of Churia in Siwalik

Romania case

In the Apuseni Mountains region, Romania, forms of tourism that may be suitable and more suited to this area are such as ecotourism, voluntary tourism and slow tourism. This kind of tourism could have a big impact in promoting this region. Thus, the best development of all the Apuseni mountains as an important destination for sustainable tourism. In contrast to traditional tourism, ecotourism took into account natural resources, socio-economic development, protected areas, gastronomic traditions, etc.

The presence of the many natural tourist resources such as caves, gorges, forests and wildlife favor ecotourism in this area. There are many trails that could be useful as an ecological circuit for walking and cycling for slow tourism. There are also several foods, mainly based on milk and wild berries, which could be valued and sold as slow foods [27].

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the difference between tourism and ecotourism lies in the five aforementioned criteria: principle, services, materials / infrastructure, economic benefits, objectives. In fact, an ecotourism project is implemented by and for the local community with the aim of conserving biodiversity because its preservation is currently one of the main challenges facing humanity.

In addition, ecotourism is the product of global recognition for sustainable ecological practices. This type of tourism is identified as a tool that should contribute to development and conservation in its setting. Ecotourism is starting to gain ground around the world.

Several countries have started to exploit and develop the richness of its biodiversity as well as its historical and cultural heritages. However, as in many other sectors, rapid and unplanned growth is often synonymous with the emergence and multiplication of harmful impacts on the natural, cultural and social environments concerned. Ecotourism has continued to expand and is considered by many to be the branch of the tourism industry which has, for many years now, been experiencing one of the most notable growths.

Finally, sustainable ecotourism is one that makes it possible to meet the needs of current tourists and host communities while preserving and increasing the future potential for future generations. In other words, sustainable ecotourism is based on the process of interaction with the environment and cultural exchanges with host communities. It is by applying this process that ecotourism can be used as an ecosystem management tool in its own right.

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