

# ANALYSIS OF HOW ECOTOURISM IN PROTECTED AREAS INFLUENCES THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

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**Abstract:** *Tourism, which, by its specific, uses natural resources, is an important contribution to environmental damage. In this context, efforts to find and promote holiday forms that have a low environmental impact, forms known as ecotourism, ecological tourism, tourism in protected areas, green tourism.*

*Tourism industry stakeholders have become increasingly sensitive to environmental issues and few are those who now believe commercial activities have nothing to do with the development of ecological actions. Also many tour operators believe that the natural resources have economic value only if they are reasonably valued.*

**Keywords:** ecotourism, protected areas, sustainable tourism development, local community, green tourism

**JEL Classification:** Q26, Q27, Q56.

## 1. Introduction

In the last years of the twentieth century it can be seen through the tourism industry development trend of returning to nature and authentic cultural values.

Ecological tourism, which by its nature is a manifestation of sustainable development, involves protecting natural and built environment and historical and cultural heritage. From multiple points of view this new form of tourism aroused the interest of more and more groups of specialists just the new philosophy based on sustainability, continuity and not least greater concern for the environment.

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Developing a sustainable tourism should be integrated into sectorial and local or regional economy and requires level decision and execution and control, collaboration tour organizers, public bodies, private companies, environment protection agencies, nongovernmental associations, tourists and local people.

In the literature the term "responsible tourism" is circulated, and often used as the equivalent of sustainable tourism; the concept draws attention to the fact that most of the negative consequences of tourism activities present how to exploit natural and human resources, as it is necessary that all those involved in tourism activity to take a responsible attitude towards tourist destination. For tourists and the local population, it is important to explain the role and mode of implementation of sustainable tourism, and a progressive lifestyle compatible with international standards of environmental protection.

Ecotourism whose main manifestations are: rural holidays, those in protected areas - parks, reserves, contribute positively to the conservation of protected areas, as well as highlighting the cultural component of the area visited.

## ***2. Ecotourism - A way to exploit sustainable tourism resources***

Ecotourism industry is small but rapidly expanding, appearing in the tourism market as tourism in natural areas, while having strong links with cultural and rural tourism.

### *2.1. Ecotourism in protected areas - conceptual delimitations*

Under the title of ecotourism are included those forms of tourism, tourist activities without disturbing or destroying the natural and human environment, historic and cultural heritage, but rather ensuring the protection and conservation for sustainable development. Ecotourism component of sustainable development is known as travel "green" tourism "soft," meaning that this form of tourism with a wide range of activities (programs, tours, sports tourism development and installation), has implications lowest degradation and pollution of natural ecosystems and protected areas.

The concept of ecotourism has emerged since 1970 as an alternative to mass tourism. In 1988 the literature is found one of the first definitions of ecotourism in the Program in Belize initiated by Rio Bravo Conservation &

Management Area "Ecotourism is a form of tourism with low environmental impact, based on the appreciation it and where to submit a conscious effort to reinvest an appropriate share of income for conservation based on. It is a form of sustainable tourism and providing benefits local people".

Literature conveys a series of definitions of ecotourism, based on objective research. A comprehensive definition is that given by the World Tourism Organization, that ecotourism is a form of tourism in which the main motivation of the tourists is the observation and appreciation of nature and local traditions related to natural and must meet the following conditions: conservation and nature protection, use of local human resources, respect for nature, nature conservation awareness among tourists and the local community, minimizing negative impacts on the natural and socio-cultural.

Another definition is given by one of the leading organizations dealing with this form of tourism, "The Ecotourism Society," according to its ecotourism can be defined as "responsible travel to an area that contribute to preserving natural heritage natural and well-being of local people".

Definitions list could go on, because each organization or authority sought to impose its own version. Although specific details vary, most definitions of ecotourism reflects a distinct form of tourism that meets four basic criteria: conservation implies, takes place in natural areas and cultural support local welfare encourages the involvement of local communities. Ecotourism involves practicing his development as tourism activities and economic ones, related to it, in a pleasant environment, unpolluted, with scenic views. Practicing ecotourism requires protection zones and tourism resources, which are designed to study, admiration, recreation and physical psychical rebuilding and not destruction.

Tourism in protected areas is motivated essentially by the desire to spend time in nature and trying a number of specific experiences, simpler or more complex such as hiking or mountain climbing, nature photography, bird watching and animal knowledge, learning, adventure etc. Experts estimate that about 10% of tourists travelling outside their country of residence wish to buy holiday trips including visits to natural sites and cultural heritage, the fastest growing segment with global tourism sector. Domestic tourism is also extensively practiced in many of these sites. (Minciu R., Pădurean M., Smith D. & Hornoiu R., 2012, p. 83).

Tourism has been and is, even in the current global economic crisis, one of the fastest growing sectors in the world. In this regard, WTO statistics for 2010 recorded an increase of 6.6% of international tourist arrivals compared to 2009, a trend that continued in the first 7 months of 2011 ([www.unwto.org](http://www.unwto.org)).

A positive development has tourism in protected areas, registering a growth of interest in this kind of travel. Quantitative developments will be accompanied by a series of qualitative changes, the most important consist of:

- Increasing demand for tourism in protected areas, particularly motivated by increasing the role of these areas in conserving natural ecosystems in most countries;
- Diversification through protected areas that currently offers many opportunities for vacations, responding to the needs of tourists from increasingly diverse;
- Improving services in protected areas has become a goal that many tour organizers in these areas want to touch it because claims increasingly larger tourist arrivals in these areas;
- Active participation falls as one of the significant trends of tourism in protected areas, motivated by the fact that tourists feel the need to be actively involved in the preservation, awareness, promotion of these areas;
- Promoting ecotourism as the main tourist activity conducted in areas protected - their managers and organizers travel around the world see in organizing ecotourism main tourist activity taking place on the one hand, low-impact, almost minimal environmental impact and the other hand through its educational role.

Romania has a rich experience in organizing protected areas, supported, inter alia, the existence in 1930 of a law to protect the environment and that Retezat Mountains National Park was created in 1935. In this context, our country has shown a keen interest in exploitation through tourism potential protected areas currently total area of these areas is about 1.9 billion hectares representing 8% of the total area of the country, reaching in 2013 the EU average of 12%. Also, the structure stands typological diversity and alignment with international standards and categorical system of IUCN (Table no. 1). In terms of evolution, there is an increase, over time, more pronounced after 2002, both the number of protected areas and their surface.

Table no. 1. Global situation of protected areas in Romania

Categories of protected areas	Category IUCN	Number		Suprafață	
		Absolute value	% of total Romania	(ha)	% of Romania's total surface
Biosphere reserves	–	3	0,22	664446	7,49
National parks	II	13	0,96	315857	3,56
Parks	V	14	1,03	737428	8,32
Scientific reserves	I	79	5,84	100574	1,13
Nature reserves	IV	671	49,48	136537	1,54
Monuments	III	190	14,01	18220	0,21
Wetlands	–	5	0,37	616571	6,96
Special protection areas	–	108	7,96	2992798	33,75
Sites of community importance	–	273	20,13	3284092	37,04
Total	–	1356	100	8866523	100

Source: after INS, 2009 Statistical Yearbook of Romania 2008, Bucharest, National Institute of Statistics

Tourism activities carried out in a protected area should be based on a management plan prepared by the custodians of the park in consultation with all stakeholders. It requires a good cooperation and communication between all stakeholders involved: central administration, local communities and scientific community.

Currently, in order to restore health and vitality, every tourist needs more and better quality environment in which he chose to spend the holiday: fresh air, water and unpolluted places, beautiful landscapes etc.. Also, tourists began to appreciate ever more stays in places where natural resources are protected in an institutionalized.

There are many actors involved in the development of ecotourism in Romania. Some of them play a more important role than others, but each makes an important contribution to the development of ecotourism. Key actors can be classified as: government agencies, local governments, administrations of protected areas, members of the private tourism sector, NGOs, local communities, founders, academics, tourists.

### 2.2. Effects of ecotourism in protected areas

The fundamental idea of setting up parks (protected areas) is to conserve resources for the benefit of humans, therefore, key issues in the

management is to establish equilibrium, the optimal ratio between protection and recovery. This is the fundamental task of management in protected areas, requirement understood in the context of continuous dynamics phenomena. (Minciu R., Pădurean M., Smith D., Hornoiu R. & Băltărețu A., 2010, p. 89)

Natural areas have advantages for the development of recreational activities that can bring significant revenues, both of which it manages, books and local communities. In this context, ecotourism is travel form which can achieve the sustainable development of these areas and ecotourism is the most widely accepted form of sustainable tourism. Development of ecotourism activities in protected areas involves a series of socio-economic benefits such as (Nicula, V., Spânu, S. & Ciortea, G., 2011):

- generates local jobs (direct touristic sector or related sectors);
- stimulate the local economy through the development of hotels, restaurants, transport system, industry souvenirs, products and handmade services guide;
- generate economic exchanges with the outside of protected areas;
- determine diversify the local economy, particularly in rural areas where people work - in agriculture - only one season per year;
- stimulate especially the rural economy by creating or increasing demand for agricultural products necessary to ensure the integration of tourism and capital;
- encourage the development of infrastructure, which also benefits the local population;
- once developed tourism in a protected area, local / regional / national can be encouraged to contribute to the development of peripheral regions by insertions of capital;
- encourage increased agricultural productivity on small areas - intensive farming - to preserve an area of natural vegetation as possible;
- Can help improve intercultural relations in a region. Often tourists seeking to know the traditions and customs of an ethnographic regions and host community is thus stimulated to revive folk traditions;

- under normal tourism development can lead to the development of self-financing mechanisms that can benefit and park authorities as a tool for conservation of natural areas;
- create recreational facilities that can be used by local communities;
- Supports the aims of conservation, by persuading governments and the public on the importance of natural areas.

If the economic and social interests to increase tourism in protected areas is beneficial in terms ecological tourism can become a negative factor for the destruction of protected natural heritage. This depends largely on the typology of tourists visiting the protected area as well as management areas.

In the literature they encounter several ways to structure Visitor protected areas. One of these, with the main classification criterion motivation holiday in nature operates with categories: hard-core nature tourists, dedicated nature tourists, mainstream nature tourists, casual nature tourists (Minciu, R., Pădurean, M., Smith, D., Hornoiu, R. & Băltărețu, A., 2010, p. 89).

Each of the categories of tourists mentioned meets a number of features that are reflected in their behaviour and must be considered in management activities in protected areas programs promote the development of standards to ensure sustainable development of tourism.

Originally tourism industry was considered as an activity with less impact on the environment, but in reality, many tourist destinations have suffered numerous decay time and space. Desire for high earnings, overexploitation of natural and cultural resources, creating the risk of chaotic development in these sensitive areas, causing numerous problems, such as (see following table):

*Table no. 2. Analysis of the negative effects of ecotourism in protected areas*

<b>Factors action</b>	<b>Impact on the quality of the natural environment</b>	<b>Observations</b>
Increased tourist flow	Environmental disruptions, changes in animal behaviour	Irritation, loss of environmental quality tourism services, it is necessary to reduce the access of visitors
Excessive development	Environmental disruptions, changes in animal behaviour	Irritation, loss of environmental quality tourism services, it is necessary to reduce the access of visitors
Recreational activities: - border protected	Emergence of rural housing, improper urban agglomerations of population	Massive urban-type facilities

<b>Factors action</b>	<b>Impact on the quality of the natural environment</b>	<b>Observations</b>
areas	and infrastructure	
- fishing	Disturbance on wild life	Undesired influence nesting period san dareas, noise pollution
fishingin protected areas	Of any kind	Unwanted competition for natural predators
Safaripedestrian	Disruption son flora and fauna	Overfishing, damage to trails and access roads
Pollution: -sound	Voluntary coverage natural sound	Irritation on wildlife
-waste	Degradation of landscape residues familiar fauna	Aesthetic disturbance, wildlife health risk, residents, visitors
- vandalism	Destructionof facilities, panels, existing facilities, natural elements	Loss of quality elements natural. Destruction of existing equipment
Vehicles: speeding	Accidents and death son wild life	Profound ecological changes
off-road driving	Degradation onsoil, vegetation	Disruption son flora, fauna
Introduction plants and animals native, exotic	Competition for flora and fauna, wild life	Confusion for the public, disturbance in natural tropic chains

Source: Bran, F., 1997, "Economy and environment", Economic Publishing House, Bucharest

In the context of ecotourism is a form of niche tourism, yet very dynamic, given the environmental regulations adopted in our country, the benefits of economic, social and cultural tourism can bring to local communities, but also negative effects on growth chaotic, uncontrolled tourism can generate, place increasingly frequently issue of achieving ecotourism development strategy, strategy should be closely connected with tourism development strategy at national level - National Tourism Development Master Plan - the local development strategies - strategies of tourism development in protected areas - and the National Strategy for Sustainable Development.

Once recognized the importance of this sector to protect and preserve natural and cultural heritage, economic and social development of local communities in natural areas and increase tourism experience, every effort should be made efficiently exploitation of the rich heritage that our country has.

### **3. Conclusions**

Worldwide, population expresses more intense concern about social injustice and environmental issues. Be aware, the more acute the needs for low-impact environmental activities, people are increasingly involved in supporting environmental conservation and local community development initiatives. It also notes a shift of focus to activities less resource intensive, with low environmental impact. All this leads to increased interest in sustainable tourism forms. A protected area is therefore ideal places to concrete concerns of protecting and preserving the natural and human environment.

Through ecotourism can provide wider choice of traditional economic activities without marginalize or replace them because the local economy is not subject to external and internal changes and influences. Tourism activities conducted under the emblem ecotourism opportunities specific local population and tourism industry being forced to use natural resources in a sustainable manner and appreciate the valuable natural and cultural objectives.

Ecotourism sector development and prosperity will bring together other economic sectors: food industry, trade, transport etc. As the demand for ecotourism is constantly and steadily growing - globally - as a trend keeping this influence on the tourism market and local communities of interest up to promote sustainable development models.

Ecotourism activity is in step with economic integration and development generates structures needed to support the transition. This is because ecotourism activities include: the modernization of infrastructure, rural development - sustainable urban use of unconventional forms of energy and clean technologies.

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