

Committee: Environmental Commission Sub-Commission 1

Issue: Ecotourism as a means towards sustainable development

Student Officer: Evangelia Katsoula

Position: Deputy President

INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism, also known as ecological tourism, is an alternative type of tourism that gives the traveler the opportunity to visit the natural heritage of a remote place with minimal or no impact to the environment and without spoiling the natural resources of this specific place. It was created in the 1980's, but became well-known in 2002 with the declaration of the International Year of Ecotourism by the United Nations.

Ecotourism usually combines travel, by people called ecotourists, and their participation in activities such as hiking, trekking, biking, observing native animals and exploring the area's natural history. Moreover, this type of tourism urges ecotourists to visit some interesting historical monuments and participate in cultural activities as well.

In order for a trip to be defined as "ecotourism" it must meet some principles, such as the building of respect and awareness for the environment and the cultural diversity, the certainty that the tourism provides both the hosts and the travelers pleasant and positive experiences and the rising of the traveler's awareness of the area's environmental, social and political atmosphere. If the trip doesn't meet these principles and the environment is not benefited, then both the trip and the activities are not "ecotourism".

Through the years, ecotourism has been considered as a way of solving many environmental, cultural and economic issues around the world. Also ecotourism offers locals an alternate routine and livelihood, which is more eco-friendly and sustainable. Furthermore, ecotourism is often viewed as a way of protecting the environment while creating benefits for the local communities. But, most

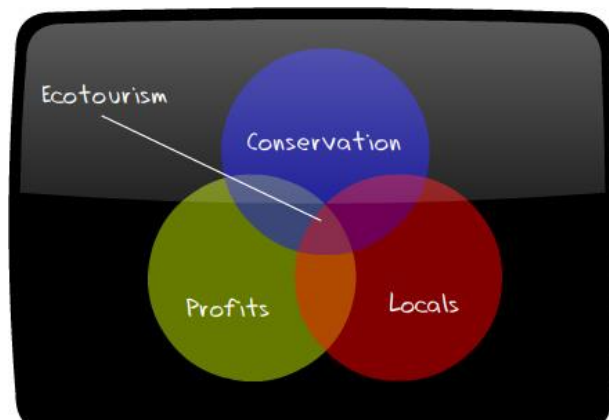


Figure 1: Ecotourism between conservation, profits and locals

importantly, ecotourism is regarded as a means to promote environmental sustainability and thus, sustainable development. So, ecotourism can be accepted as a way to promote sustainable development. As defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development's Brundtland report in 1987 "Ecotourism is rooted in the concept of sustainable development".

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Tourism

"The commercial organization and operation of holidays and visits to places of interest."¹

Also, tourism can be described as business that wants to provide service to people. Tourism focuses more on business and profit rather than saving the environment and it has a negative impact on the ecosystem, as it causes unsustainable construction and environmental destruction.

Ecotourism

"Environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy, study and appreciate nature and any accompanying cultural features that promote conservation, has a negative visitation impact and provides for substantial beneficial active socio-economic involvement of local populations."²

Ecotourism activities

"Activities included in a tour that are designed to entertain clients and are coordinated by a professional guide or interpreter."³

There are over 80 activities for ecotourism, including hiking, diving and participating in cultural events.

Ecotourism resources

"Natural and cultural features that attract visitors, such as landscapes, endemic or rare flora and fauna, cultural festivals, and historical monuments."⁴

¹ <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/tourism>

² <http://www.borneo.com.au/general/ecotourism>

³ <https://www.gdrc.org/uem/eco-tour/ecotour-terms.html>

⁴ <https://www.gdrc.org/uem/eco-tour/ecotour-terms.html>

Stakeholders

“Individuals who have a vested interest in development, including community members.”⁵

This category includes environmental and social Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO’s), government officials, hotel owners and representatives from the private sector.

Sustainable development

“Economic development that is conducted without depletion of natural resources.”⁶

Sustainable development is really important for today’s environment and for the world in general because some of its goals are to end poverty and hunger, achieve gender equality, promote economic growth and reduce the effects of climate change.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The characteristics of ecotourism

As mentioned before, ecotourism is an alternative method to the use of natural resources without destroying and wasting these resources. Nowadays, in many countries, the ecotourism industry is developed and its importance is well-known globally.

Ecotourism can be considered important because of its variety of advantages. Firstly, it has a low impact on the environment. Its activities, such as trekking, hiking and biking do not pollute it, but on the contrary they help to achieve sustainable development. Another benefit of ecotourism is that it can be a tool for raising awareness about environmental issues and it can also inform people about biodiversity and the conservation of the natural resources.

Moreover, it is remarked by scientists and environmentalists that ecotourism can eliminate poverty. For example, recent researches have shown that protected areas in Costa Rica eliminated poverty by 16 percent in local communities by practicing ecotourism. Also, in 2012, a resolution was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly acknowledging ecotourism as a key towards the eradication of poverty, the conservation of the environment and the promotion of sustainable development. This resolution, with the title “Promotion of ecotourism for poverty eradication and environment protection” urges UN Member States to

⁵ <https://www.gdrc.org/uem/eco-tour/ecotour-terms.html>

⁶ https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/sustainable_development

affiliate policies that advance ecotourism underlining its positive effects on job formation and education and this way on the struggle against poverty and world hunger.

It is a fact that ecotourism has many benefits, but it also has some drawbacks. Firstly, undeveloped land, for example local parks, might be compromised by the arrival of tourists. Additionally, local people may leave either because they cannot stay or because they are forced by developers. Another disadvantage is the cultural insensitivity because ecotourism attracts urban tourists who may not be culturally sensitive and might annoy the locals.

Nevertheless, even if ecotourism has some negative effects, its role towards environmental and cultural sustainability cannot be denied.

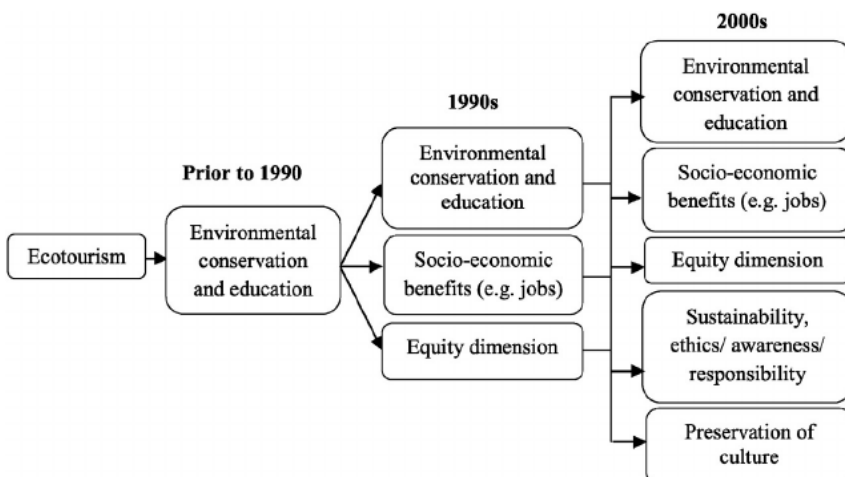
The origins and development of tourism

Travel had always been one of man’s basic needs. With travel, people gain experience and get to know the culture of the place they visit. Today, the present travelers are provided with food and shelter, which are the basic necessities of a man, and also accommodation, by hotels.

Tourism is one of the world’s fastest developing industries and its role is enhancing the economic growth of a country. In every country, the role of tourism is well recognized and deeply appreciated. Over the past 20 years, tourism is characterized as one of the largest industries worldwide. For example in 1992, the number of world travelers was approximately 476 million who spent over 279 billion dollars.

It is a fact that two decades ago, tourism was a luxurious product that only people who had the money and time could enjoy. But, today tourism exists in developed and developing countries and it is available to almost all people.

The beginning and the evolution of ecotourism



Ecotourism became well-known after the declaration of the International Year of Ecotourism in 2002, but its origins are on the 1980’s. Specifically, during this decade, criticism about the negative effects of tourism started to increase. People realized that travelling and tourism in general

Figure 2: The evolution of the meaning of ecotourism

had negative impacts on the environment. As a result, the idea of “soft” tourism was developed.

In 1990, the International Ecotourism Society is established, and in the 1990’s all major ecotourism initiatives are beginning to grow. These initiatives led to the declaration of the International Year of Ecotourism in 2002 and to the World Ecotourism Summit in Quebec as well, also taken place in 2002.

After these two events, all countries involved in the tourism industry started promoting ecotourism. They present the positive effects of this type of tourism, which are the economic growth, conservation and raising awareness on the importance of conservation and biodiversity because ecotourism includes the protection of biodiversity. Moreover, ecotourism tries to improve the positive effects and reduce the negative effects of tourism through careful planning and with measures to control sensitive and protected areas from tourism growth and development.

International Year of Ecotourism

In July 1998, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) recommended to the members of the United Nations General Assembly to decide 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism (IYE). The members of ECOSOC considered that designating 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism, in cooperation with the governments and Non Governmental Organizations (NGO’s), could achieve the promotion of development and growth and the protection of the environment, as well.



Figure 3: The logo of the International Year of Ecotourism 2002

After recognizing the importance of ecotourism, the UN General Assembly in December 1998 accepted the recommendation and declared 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism. The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) was responsible to implement the Year. Within the UN system, the CSD’s Interagency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD) instructed the World Tourism Organization (WTO) to prepare activities during the Year.

The IYE offered the opportunity to reconsider the ecotourism activities in order to solidify the tools to guarantee its sustainable development in the future. This means increasing the economic, environmental and social benefits of ecotourism, while minimizing the negative effects on the environment.

The goals of the activities around the IYE were the following:

- Create greater awareness among the public, the private sector and consumers concerning ecotourism's ability to contribute on environmental sustainability, on the long-term conservation of the natural and cultural heritage, on the preservation of biodiversity and on the enhancement of living standards in protected areas;
- Spread methods and techniques for the planning, administration, controlling and monitoring of ecotourism in order to ensure its long-term sustainability;
- Advance exchanges of experiences in the frame of ecotourism.

World Ecotourism Summit

The World Ecotourism Summit (WES) served as a forum for a critical review of ecotourism and was a key event of the International Year of Ecotourism. It was organized by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Tourism Organization and took place in Quebec City, in Canada, in May 2002. Nearly 1300 delegates participated from over 100 countries.

WES was the major landmark of the International Year of Ecotourism and brought together governments, representatives and NGO's. Also, WES wasn't an official UN meeting and ministerial attendance was not authoritative.

The main purposes of the Summit were:

- Reinforce the ability of governments and the private sector to efficiently use ecotourism as a tool for sustainable development and conservation of the natural resources;
- Systematic reconsideration of ecotourism activities and junction to sustainable development;
- Evaluate the efficiency of regulatory mechanisms and schemes for adjusting the effects of ecotourism.

UNEP and WES in collaboration with the governments and local stakeholders have decided four themes to be discussed for IYE. These themes were:

- **THEME A: "ECOTOURISM POLICY AND PLANNING: THE SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGE"**

This theme included sustainable tourism plans and programs at local, national and international level. Also sustainable development schemes and conservation of the natural resources were discussed.

- **THEME B: “REGULATION OF ECOTOURISM: INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND FRAMEWORKS”**

Legislation, voluntary schemes and guidelines were discussed in this theme.

- **THEME C: “PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT, MARKETING AND PROMOTION OF ECOTOURISM: FOSTERING SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTS AND CONSUMERS”**

Marketing strategies and ways to promote ecotourism were included in this theme.

- **THEME D: “MONITORING COSTS AND BENEFITS OF ECOTOURISM: ENSURING EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION AMONG ALL STAKEHOLDERS”**

Research requirements and adaptive administration systems were debated.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

United States of America (USA)

Ecotourism in the USA represents a large percentage of the tourism industry. Generally, tourism in America is a crucial and harmful industry concerning the environment, so ecotourism initiatives are very important for the country’s environmental sustainability.

New York, one of the most popular tourist destinations, has already recommended new measures of supporting and maintaining the tourist attractions. The Green Certified Restaurants are present and visitors also have the opportunity to use eco-friendly transportation.



Figure 4: Hiking in New York

Furthermore, the state of California has developed the ecotourism industry. Many cities, such as San Francisco, give visitors the chance to experience an alternative type of tourism in an urban setting. Some of the related activities taking place in California are cycling along the city or in the mountains of the area, hiking, rock-climbing and kayaking.

The states of Texas, Maine, Montana, Oregon, Washington, Colorado, Hawaii and Alaska offer ecotourism opportunities and activities resulting in environmental sustainability.

European Union

European countries have also developed ecotourism industry, especially the ones in the European Union. Scandinavian countries, such as Sweden and Estonia, have wealthy fauna and flora, for example many forests and woods which include eagles, wolves and bears. Specifically, ecotourism in Sweden is taken very seriously and it benefits not only the society, but the people as well.

Austria, located in Central Europe, is also one of the most well-known ecotourism destinations in Europe. The country has magnificent culture and landscapes, so activities pertaining to ecotourism, such as skiing and sight-seeing famous monuments, are available.

Countries located in South Europe develop ecotourism industry as well. Greece is one of them. Ecotourism excursions and guided tours are organized in Greece and the plethora of historical monuments, attract many ecotourists every year with their numbers still increasing.

Costa Rica



Figure 5: Bird watching in Costa Rica

Costa Rica has a well-established ecotourism market and a certification program for voluntary ecotourism. The majority of the tourist attractions are nature and wildlife and focus on family ecotourism activities, for example bird watching that are run by locals. Generally, the country has a dignified environmental record except for some deforestation activities.

Ecuador

Ecuador has the fortune of being the easiest gateway to the Galapagos Islands, also popular for its rare and distinct wildlife. Its community is based on tourism trade and the ecotourism certification program draws the attention on environmental education, even though deforestation issues exist.

Nepal

Although Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world, it is a very famous tourist destination for trekking expeditions. Nepal, due to its rich wildlife can attract many tourists, but the natural resources of the country should be used properly in order to achieve the socio-economic improvement of rural areas.

Kenya



Figure 6: Safari in Kenya

Kenya was showing increasing ecotourism with a thriving safari tourism industry until pirate activities on Somalia, a country that is neighbor to Kenya, and other violence in the region made their appearance and as a result the tourists were distributed in other African countries. Kenya has developed an ecotourism certification program, but environmental issues including

deforestation, soil degradation and erosion and water quality still exist.

Madagascar

Since Madagascar is the fifth largest island worldwide, it develops tourism and ecotourism industry due to its fauna, flora, culture and food. So the government has developed a certification program in order to combat environmental problems, such as soil erosion and deforestation in order to attract more tourists.

Antarctica

In Antarctica, tourism is developing in order to become the dominant commercial activity in the continent. Even though there is no eco-certification program, there are tour operators which intend to promote environmentally responsible travel to the continent and thus sustainable development.

World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

“The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is the United Nations agency responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism.”⁷

UNWTO is the dominant organization concerning tourism and promotes tourism as the key towards economic growth and sustainable development. It is also responsible for:

- proposing tourism policies
- encouraging tourism education and training
- working in order to make tourism an efficient tool for development

⁷ <http://www2.unwto.org/content/who-we-are-0>

UNWTO has been implicated in the field of ecotourism since the 1990's and developed a number of guidelines emphasizing on the bond between tourism and the protected area, with the purpose of ensuring that tourism does not affect negatively the protected area.

When the United Nations declared the International Year of Ecotourism in 2002, the UNWTO took over the organization of conferences, for example the World Ecotourism Summit and prepared a number of activities and market studies in order to raise awareness on ecotourism and to research countries which could become generating markets of ecotourism.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of Event
June 1980	Costa Rica becomes an ecotourism cradle. Europe creates her first Green Tourism manifestations.
September 1987	The United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development launches the campaign "Our Common Future".
February 1990	The International Ecotourism Organization (TIES) is founded.
November 1990	The first definition for "Ecotourism" is decided.
June 1992	The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development takes place.
2002	Declaration of the International Year of Ecotourism by the United Nations.
May 2002	World Ecotourism Summit in Quebec, Canada
September 2017	International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development 2017

UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

- The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution “Promotion of ecotourism for poverty eradication and environment protection” (2012)

As stated before, in 2012 the UNGA adopted a resolution concerning means of promoting ecotourism in order to decrease and if possible eliminate poverty while protecting the environment. The resolution highlights the positive influence of ecotourism as a source of income as well as creating jobs and developing education. In this way poverty and hunger are minimized. It also recognizes the impact that ecotourism has on the preservation, protection and eco-friendly use of biodiversity.

- International Year of Ecotourism(2002)

As previously mentioned, the International Year of Ecotourism was one of the most important events concerning ecotourism. With the IYE taken place, people learned more things about ecotourism, its activities and its role towards sustainable development. Also, the preservation of natural and cultural heritage of an area and the preservation of biodiversity were recognized. In addition, the ecological aspect of tourism was acknowledged and many people were interested in the activities of ecotourism.

- World Ecotourism Summit in Canada(2002)

The World Ecotourism Summit was a key event of the IYE, as stated on the above. With the participation of nearly 1300 delegates from 100 countries and the discussions about policies, legislation, planning, management, monitoring and ways of promoting ecotourism and, thus sustainable development, made sustainable tourism even more popular and many people showed their interest on its activities.

- World Tourism Day 2017

Every year, on September 27th, the World Tourism Day is celebrated, by the UNWTO. Each year has a different theme and meetings and conferences are organized around this theme. The World Tourism Day on 2017 was celebrated in Doha, capital of Qatar and the theme was “Sustainable Tourism-a Tool for Development” which took place during the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. Speeches, events and discussions took place during this day trying to convey the message of the day, which was how tourism affects social, political, cultural and economic

values worldwide. The importance of responsible travel, ecotourism and sustainable development was also underlined.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), a non-profit partnership with the aim to promote sustainable tourism practices with benefits to local communities, has organized many ecotourism master classes with the aim to promote sustainable and responsible tourism and thus, sustainable development. These classes are also present today and expert presenters try to promote ecotourism worldwide. For example, Albert Salman, the leader of "Global Sustainable Tourism Review" (GSTR) and administrator of the international Seminar series "Green Destinations" that started in September 2014, has created more attractive destination concepts by performing principles of ecotourism and sustainable travel.

Additionally, in September 2005, the Bar Harbor Declaration on Ecotourism in the USA took place. This declaration urged the government of the USA to affiliate policies in order to promote sustainable and responsible tourism.

Subsequently, in October 2013, the European Ecotourism Conference was held in Romania. During this conference, participants discussed about the ecotourism challenges and opportunities of Europe in the future as well as the destinations and standards of ecotourism concerning the continent.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

As it has been stated many times before, ecotourism has a great role towards sustainable development. So, it is essential that every country along with tourism develop ecotourism and countries that have ecotourism industries, promote even more the sustainable and responsible travel. First of all, governments in collaboration with business operators should increase environmental and cultural awareness on ecotourism. This can be done via marketing strategy, i.e advertisements, campaigns and internet websites.

Furthermore, lectures can be organized by environmentalists about sustainable development and its great role towards the future generations. This way it is possible that people show interest on ecotourism and start taking into consideration the future progress of their descendants. Another important measure in order to promote and develop ecotourism is the contribution of NGO's. Non-Governmental Organizations can act as facilitators between societies and the tourism industry and help them collaborate for a better tourism administration.

Another step in order to develop sustainable travel is to support of indigenous and local groups. An ecotourism industry cannot grow if the native people are hesitant about their participation towards these acts. The ecotourism industry can be developed only if the locals work and care about tourists and the industry in general. Finally, the ecotourism development requires a good management and planning by community participants, tour operators, NGO's and specialists.

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