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Ecological Tourism and Public Administration in Romania

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Abstract

This paper presents aspects of ecological tourism. Nowadays tourists are becoming aware of the importance of a clean environment and during their holidays they would like to return to a welcome nature, to enjoy the benefits of the well-preserved areas. Unfortunately the damage already done to nature by past tourists still shows its negative effects. We wonder if modern education or law can help prevent the damages. Our study presents some of the negative aspects the tourism had on the environment. We also look at the types of tourism and the Romanian laws that try to help us live in a better world.

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1. Introduction

Being an increasingly important economic and social activity, tourism amplifies and, at the same time, increases the negative impact on the environment. The simple reading of its legal definition – ‘a branch of the national economy, with complex features, bringing together a set of goods and services provided to travellers, people who travel outside their usual environment for less than one year and whose main reason is other than an activity remunerated within the place visited’ (art. 2a of the Government Ordinance no. 58/1998 on the organization and performance of tourism in Romania) – reveals sufficient links between the two areas. Moreover, according to the same law, the resources of tourism are part of the natural and human environment, which through their qualities and their specificity are recognized, recorded and recovered through tourism, to the extent that they are subject to an integrated protection system. The tourism resources can be: natural, geological elements, geomorphologic elements, climate, flora and fauna, deposits of minerals, and other anthropogenic factors: archaeological monuments, archaeological sites, monuments, memorial assemblies, technical and/or artistic monuments, museums, items of folklore and folk art and so on. All these constitute the touristic patrimony.

2. Global tourism

General trends and perceptions of tourism, both internationally and nationally, are obvious. Thus, as a reflection of the increased quality of life, tourists are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of a clean environment and during their holidays they would like to return to nature, to enjoy the benefits of the well-preserved areas. This

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phenomenon relates to an increased mobility and a great increase in the number of tourists, including those who practice international tourism. Moreover, the number of the latter has increased steadily from 180 million people in 1971 to over 600 million last year. In 1996 the sums from international tourism amounted to U.S. \$ 423 million and, according to the forecast of the World Tourism Organization (WTO), they will grow at a rate of 4% per year, so in 2010 will reach 1500 billion U.S. dollars.

At the same time it has been recorded an increase in the share of long journeys, especially in the developed countries, where the journey is part of the daily life of the individual and an important factor in defining his/her social status.

2.1. Negative effects of tourism

The most various types of travel and vacations affect more and more countries and natural regions. And this amplification and diversification of the worldwide tourism activity is reflected, not always positive, on the quality of the environment.

The examples cited by experts are unequivocal. So, for example, between 1900 and 1990, Europe has lost about 43% of its sand dunes, visited by tourists, of which 75-80% were located in the Mediterranean countries. Also, the land used for tourism is huge; according to the 'Blue Plan' for the Mediterranean region, on its north-western coast, not less than 4400 km² are given to the premises and infrastructure for tourism. Finally, in the Alps, visited annually by over 50 million tourists, some valuable natural areas were slaughtered for raising constructions for tourists and for the implementation of various development projects.

Unfortunately, the Romanian example may be added successfully. The different forms of tourism promoted chaotically, without the prospect of a national strategy in the field, with well defined objectives which were supposed to be consistently followed, are likely to become an important factor in environmental destruction. On the one hand, the damage of the Black Sea beach and its cliff in recent years by placing at random and without worrying about the impact on the marine environment of the infrastructure and the constructions for tourism and, on the other hand, the 'flooding' of the Danube Delta with economic activities and holiday buildings are two manifestations suggestive of the anti-ecological dimension of tourism.

3. Types of tourism and international law

The obvious impact of the tourism activities on the environment has led to a growing more rigorous concern compatibility between the two terms of the equation, i.e. mitigating the negative impacts of the tourism and, at the same time, recovering and developing the ecological functions of the tourism.

The direct expression of this phenomenon is the emergence and assertion, with some confusion and interference, of the concepts and practices such as: 'ecotourism', 'rural tourism', 'green tourism', 'sustainable tourism'.

A. Ecotourism was born, both as practice and concept, in North America, around the years 1984 – 1985, together with the development of tourism for the naturalists in the most remote and fragile ecological areas. The most widely accepted definition is given by the American Society of Ecotourism, characterizing it as being 'tourism in areas virtually undisturbed by humans and which should contribute to the conservation of nature and the welfare of the local people.'

Paradoxically, at least at the surface, after a short period of flowering, at the pressures of the environmental organizations, the authorities and the travel agents had to take additional measures to reduce the impact of these visits on natural environments and communities that live there and to ensure that at least a part of the money resulting from ecotourism is used to support the efforts of the conservation of the indigenous sites and cultures.

B. Rural tourism appeared and existed in significant proportions especially during the last two decades, at the beginning in the Western countries, and after 1990 also in Central and Eastern Europe, including Romania. It is rightly considered a 'meeting point' between ecotourism and sustainable tourism, being organized in relatively undisturbed natural areas inhabited by traditional communities. It would express a deliberate choice (based on the desire to leave, even temporarily, the urban lifestyle) to comply with the limitations and requirements of the rural

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