

TOURISM, PART OF EUROPEAN POLICY

Lect. Ph.D Gruescu Ramona
Assoc. Prof. Ph.D Mitrache Marius
Lect. Ph.D Nanu Roxana
University of Craiova
Faculty of Economics and Business
Administration

Abstract: Developing tourism has a direct impact on economic, social and environmental conditions; consequently, it can and must be an important means of enhancing European citizens' quality of life and must be used as such. However, in order to ensure that this potential is effectively harnessed in the longer term, tourism must meet sustainability requirements which all the players involved – public and private bodies, businesses and users – must in turn observe.

Keywords: employment, businesses, social cohesion, stability, the environment.

Tourism is widely recognized around the world – and especially by the European Union and its institutions – as an area of economic activity of strategic importance in achieving a range of objectives which lie at the very heart of the EU's existence, its policies, and its desire to create a better Europe for present and future generations.

It is important to point out that the only reference to tourism in the EC Treaty, as consolidated at Nice, and following the revision and expansion of certain protocols, is in Part One: Principles, Article 3(u), which reads as follows: "For the purposes set out in Article 2, the activities of the Community shall include, as provided in this Treaty and in accordance with the timetable set out therein:(...) measures in the sphere of energy, civil protection and tourism."

Several Commission and Council documents have attached importance to tourism as an instrument for generating employment, but it may readily be agreed that tourism nevertheless has a very low profile among European policies as a whole, and that it should perhaps be strengthened and expanded in line with the universally accepted strategic importance of tourism at present and, most probably, in the future. A higher profile for tourism in the activities of the EU and of its various institutions and, more clearly, the coordination of all Community policies affecting tourism have been both called for and predicted. For this to happen, more and better data on all aspects of tourism and the way it ties in with other sectors must be available in the future, so that tourism's contribution to the quality of life and social cohesion can be accurately evaluated in both economic and social terms.

Careful attention should also focus on determining the future role of tourism in shaping the Europe which will emerge from the European Convention. There must be initiatives to ensure that tourism and tourism policy are given full recognition in terms of their economic importance and capacity to create employment, their potential contribution to culture and mutual understanding among the peoples of the world, and as a tool for creating a Citizens' Europe.

New forms of tourism which are sustainable in economic, social and environmental terms, and which all parties seek, will be determined by this set of conditions. The special contribution made by sustainable tourism to achieving the strategic objective of the Lisbon summit – "to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion" – is generally recognized and must be emphasized.

Against a new, less dynamic economic backdrop in which fewer jobs are being created, the Brussels Council of 20 and 21 March 2003 sought to turn words into actions and ensure that the Union and the Member States live up to their undertakings – "we reaffirm our strong personal commitment to the timely and effective delivery of reforms across the three pillars of the Lisbon strategy – economic, social and environmental".

The Brussels Council established new priorities which, in practical terms, mean giving fresh impetus to entrepreneurship and innovation and strengthening the internal market as a means of enhancing competitiveness and placing it centre stage both within the economy in general and tourism in particular.

Tourism is widely agreed to be of great importance not only economically, but also socially and environmentally, in the European Union and worldwide. Where tourism is already well developed, people count on it to continue being what it has been in the past, a source of wealth creation, high employment and a high quality of life, while people in less-developed areas look to tourism as a potentially crucial means of escaping from poverty, securing economic progress and social development and meeting convergence objectives.

The tourism industry in the European Union comprises some two million businesses, mostly SMEs, which account for about 5% of both GDP and employment. This figure varies from 3% to 8% depending on the Member State. Tourism also generates a considerable amount of activity in other sectors, such as the retail trade and specialized equipment, to a level of around one and a half times that of tourism itself. In terms of turnover, over 80% of the tourism undertaken by Europeans concern to individuals or families. The remainder is business tourism, in the broad sense. It varies, depending on the country, from barely 15% to over 30% of the total volume, the highest proportion relating to Nordic Countries. EU households earmark around one eighth of their personal expenditure for tourism-related consumption, a figure which varies relatively little from country to country.

Community tourism is largely domestic. 87% of tourism activity recorded is attributed to its own citizens with only 13% to visitors from non-member countries. As for the tourism of EU citizens, three-quarters remain within the EU, the remaining quarter going to other parts of Europe and the world.

Tourism is one of the sectors of the European economy with the best outlook. Forecasts indicate a steady growth of tourism in Europe, stronger than the average economic growth. This is due to factors such as the increase in time for leisure activities and its social importance, together with global economic growth.

Over the past few years 100,000 jobs a year have been created in Europe in the hotel and restaurant sectors alone. Europe, with the greatest diversity and density of tourist attractions, is the most visited tourist region in the world. Despite having a lower growth rate than the world average and than certain up-and-coming overseas destinations in particular, the volume of European tourism is expected to double over

the next 20 to 25 years, with a net increase, in terms of expenditure and yield, of around 3% per year. Employment will rise by about 15% over the next ten years."

Although tourism is not directly part of common EU policy, a number of European institutions are engaged in measures and actions which affect tourism because of their horizontal nature, or which rely on tourism in order to achieve a range of major EU objectives, including sustainable development, employment, economic and social cohesion, etc.: in other words, a better quality of life for European citizens.

Tourism is a highly complex phenomenon on account of the wide variety of factors which determine its shape, organization and development. Some of the numerous factors interacting with tourism merit close attention: **tourists, employment, businesses, social cohesion, stability, culture and heritage, accessibility to persons with disabilities, the environment, peace and solidarity, and the roles of the various players.**

Tourism and tourists

Clearly all economic and social activity needs to focus on the individual. Tourism, like any economic activity involving personal, individual and collective relations between peoples, must above all meet the needs of people, as citizens of a nation, European citizens and, ultimately, citizens of the world.

The tourist, as consumer, must be both the beneficiary of services and the source of demand under conditions favorable to the sustainability of tourism and its availability to all. Various initiatives can be adopted with a view to designing a form of tourism for the future which will meet these requirements.

Tourism and employment

Various large-scale studies have repeatedly highlighted the enormous current impact and the extraordinary potential of tourism as a source of jobs. But in order to turn this into reality, in socially and economically sustainable terms, various conditions have to be met. The fact that tourism is an economic activity fundamentally based on personal services means that any new tourist activity generates new jobs, but tourism can only be high-quality and sustainable if it generates high-quality jobs.

Various initiatives could be adopted with a view to ensuring that in the future tourism is able to generate more and better jobs in tourist enterprises and areas.

Tourism and businesses: entrepreneurial competitiveness and social responsibility of businesses

Tourism is fundamentally a complex economic activity, a group of economic services and sectors governed by market rules and based on companies seeking competitiveness, wealth creation, and which ultimately create employment and quality of life for ordinary people, both as users and as workers in the sector. If this economic activity is to be sustainable, now and in the future, a number of conditions have to be met which can be underpinned by various initiatives.

Tourism and social cohesion: impact and social balance of tourist activity

Tourism is a powerful means of promoting contacts between different peoples, while at the same time generating economic and social well-being in tourist areas. Often, however, social relations in the local population have been affected by a

perceived loss of the traditional balance, in the face of an influx of visitors exceeding several times over the number of local residents, and a consequent trend to standardization in products, including tourism products, and in social relations. Developing the potential of tourism in a positive way and reducing the risk of social or cultural disruption is the basis of socially sustainable tourism.

Maintaining socially sustainable tourism, from the point of view of the social cohesion of local areas and people, requires that a number of conditions be met by means of various initiatives.

Tourism and stability: reducing seasonal bias

The seasonality of tourism has been described as the sector's major outstanding issue, in that it is the cause of serious imbalances because it does not continue throughout all the potentially effective periods, with serious consequences for businesses, people employed in tourism, tourist areas, and ultimately tourism's proven capacity to generate wealth and prosperity. Seasonality first and foremost means under-utilization of physical capital (equipment, buildings, infrastructure etc.) as well as human capital, which is idle for much of the year. The result is clear: if there is no tourism, sector workers do not get paid and have to seek other activities or else join the ranks of the unemployed during the off-season.

In some cases this period of inactivity is long, in others short; in some cases it is during the winter and in others during the summer, but in almost all cases it will have damaging consequences throughout the year. In all cases the stability of employment, which is a precondition for the quality of employment, is under threat, and in other cases companies' profitability and competitiveness will be compromised by seasonality and consequent loss of revenue, which is a grave threat to the sustainability of employment and to the whole of tourist activity.

Tourism, culture and heritage

The rich cultural heritage of towns and rural areas throughout Europe is undoubtedly a major attraction for tourists and travelers. The diversity of customs and traditions of Europe's rural areas is also a source of intangible, but very real wealth, which tourism can help preserve and exploit. Some of these intangible cultural values such as craftsmanship, music, oral traditions, customs, languages, dances, rituals, festivals, traditional medicine and remedies, cuisine etc. can form an integral part of some new forms of socially sustainable tourism. Similarly, sporting events are ideally suited to tourism and to the exchange of different values between peoples. There are two possible approaches to the relationship between tourism on the one hand and culture and heritage on the other: 1) exploiting the various aspects of this culture and heritage, with tourism as a means of maintaining, preserving and improving them, or 2) destroying these assets through irresponsible consumption. The first option is sustainable, and the second is socially unsustainable.

Tourism and accessibility for people with disabilities

Tourism has become an extremely important social phenomenon involving millions of people throughout the world, especially in Europe; not only is it an unprecedented force for wealth creation and economic progress, but also a crucial factor in improving knowledge, communication, human relations and mutual respect between different peoples. Tourism is of major benefit to society and should be within

everyone's reach, with no sector of the community being excluded whatever their personal, social, economic or other circumstances. People with disabilities – 10% of the total EU population – are becoming more integrated socially and economically and hence participating more and more in tourist activities despite all the impediments and difficulties which continue to prevent them from accessing tourist facilities and services on a regular and normal basis.

Removing and lessening these barriers is not only a must on grounds of equal rights and opportunities and non-discrimination, as championed by the EU and its Member States, but is also an effective way of including new groups of people in tourism-related activities, thus contributing to the growth of an economic sector which, especially in the southern European countries, has a direct impact on the creation of wealth and jobs in the interests of society as a whole.

Tourism and the environment

In the recent past tourism and the environment have been seen as mutually antagonistic: the wealth generated by tourism was at the expense of the environment, exploitation of the best sites, preferably by the coast or in the mountains, without consideration for such factors as biodiversity, the resources already there, scale or the capacity to absorb development. Faced with a difficult choice between two factors which were – wrongly – presented as mutually exclusive, the general response can be clearly seen from the situation we find ourselves in today: we opted for growth, wealth-creation, even if it meant damaging the environment. And this, paradoxically, in an activity which is based on preserving the attractiveness of nature. This undoubtedly stems from two different ways of looking at things: the short-term vision of immediate real estate profits and the long-term vision of a sustainable and competitive industry. Once again we face the need to establish conditions and initiatives conducive to new forms of environmentally sustainable tourism.

Tourism, peace and solidarity

Tourism is just the opposite of war. War means the invasion of one country by another, aggression, the destruction of nature and heritage, the humiliation and even death of human beings. Tourism on the other hand means a welcome, interaction, getting to know a place, conserving the environment, wealth – in short, peace and friendship between people. If we only love what we know, tourism, as a means of bringing people closer together, is a force for harmony and peace between nations, cultures, religions and individuals. Democracy and political and socio-economic stability must certainly contribute to this objective, in the countries tourists come from and those they visit.

Understanding between peoples and the promotion of ethical values are at the root of sustainable and responsible tourism; solidarity between peoples can grow from acquaintance as tourists.

Tourism and the players in the sector

The vast range of stakeholders involved in tourism makes it advisable to differentiate the role each plays in this complex task of defining new forms of sustainable tourism. It is the responsibility of political and institutional policymakers to define the appropriate framework in which new forms of sustainable tourism are possible and can be promoted by means of the full range of instruments at the disposal

of the public authorities. The political priorities of this strategy of accessible and sustainable tourism must be geared towards ensuring that tourism is taken into account in all horizontal policies and in all relevant common policy areas.

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