

## The impact of cultural diversity on ecotourism – an opportunity for regional development

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### Abstract

*In Culture matter time, space, location, possibilities, needs, scarcity of goods, technologies, destination and the scope.*

*By this article, authors begin from the hypothesis: how culture is linked to environment and ecology? As a result, key-point ideas of the work suppose that this link (Ecotourism) defines a contribution to mutual understanding and respect between peoples and societies, a vehicle for individual and collective fulfillment, a user of the cultural heritage of mankind and contributor to its enhancement, a beneficial activity for host countries and communities obligations of stakeholders in tourism development.*

*Likewise, "The International Ecotourism Society" states that Ecotourism activities imply the fulfillment of the following principles, to name some:*

- *Minimize environmental negative impact, protecting the regional culture and environment.*
- *Provide positive experience to visitors and hotel owners.*
- *Economically benefit local inhabitants by enhancing their self-esteem.*
- *Support human rights and labor agreements.*

*Finally, main expectation from work are some proposals as matter to promote heritage conservation and environmental sustainability, to create an intellectually challenging and stimulating environment and provide educational benefits to local community. Such aim addresses to Republic of Moldova too. Also, authors notice that ecotourism development in Moldova is possible and would promote its easier and better integration in Euro-zones.*

**Keywords:** cultural diversity, ecotourism, regional development

**JEL Classification:** L83, R58

### 1.Introduction

Tourism is a relatively new social activity that has recently emerged as a global phenomenon. Long before tourists began traipsing all over the world, social interactions involving different cultures usually occurred in the context of commercial trading, wars or migrations. As a result, cultural exchanges were relatively restricted, occurring in specific geographical regions or within the expanding limits of political and military empires.

However, with the advent of technological advances in communications and transportation came a shift in people's attitudes towards travel. People (namely westerners) began to travel for the sake of traveling, which launched a process of cultural globalization. This process has accelerated in recent decades as a result of further technological breakthroughs in the airplane and information industries.

According to the "World Commission on Environment and Development a sustainable development implies **"meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"**. Eco tourism can have many definitions and we can apply this one: *Ideally, ecotourism satisfies several general criteria, including the conservation of biological diversity and cultural diversity through ecosystem protection, promotion of sustainable use of biodiversity, share of socio-economic benefits with local communities through informed consent and participation, increase in environmental and cultural knowledge, affordability and reduced waste, and minimization of its own environmental impact. In such ways, it contributes to the long term benefits to both the environment and local communities."*

Actually Eco tourism creates a triangle of criteria:

1. conservation - conserve biological (and cultural) diversity, by strengthening protected area management systems (public or private) and increasing the value of sound ecosystems;
2. sustainability - promote the sustainable use of biodiversity, by generating income, jobs and business opportunities in ecotourism and related business networks
3. biological diversity - share the benefits of ecotourism developments equitably with local communities and indigenous people, by obtaining their informed consent and full participation in planning and management of ecotourism businesses.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Mobility and cultural diversity

Agenda 21 of Culture ("We, cities and local governments of the world, committed to human rights, cultural diversity, sustainability, participatory democracy and the creation of the conditions for peace, assembled in Barcelona on 7 and 8 May 2004, at the IV Porto Alegre Forum of Local Authorities for Social Inclusion, in the framework of the Universal Forum of Cultures – Barcelona 2004, agree on this Agenda 21 for Culture as a guiding document for our public cultural policies and as a contribution to the cultural development of humanity.") with its principles 1 and 2 is a real reflection on cultural diversity though mobility issue and its relationship with environment.

*Second principle of Agenda (Clear political analogies exist between cultural and ecological questions, as both culture and the environment are common assets of all humanity. The current economic development models, which prey excessively on natural resources and common goods of humanity, are the cause of increasing concern for the environment. Rio de Janeiro 1992, Aalborg 1994, and Johannesburg 2002, have been the milestones in a process of answering one of the most important challenges facing humanity: environmental sustainability. The current situation also provides sufficient evidence that*

*cultural diversity in the world is in danger due to a globalization that standardizes and excludes. UNESCO says: "A source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature" (UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, article 1))* reflects the relation between culture and environment. And it is very important to note that even this issue should be seen through anthropological point of view, where it stars and which the limitations are. Maybe, environment is not always seen as determining factor for culture but rather as limiting factor. Environment influences the social and cultural process and determine individuals to act in such manner to be satisfied, to confront, or to change given environment.

For instance a real example could be Mark Q. Sutton and Eugene Newton Anderson work: *Introduction to Cultural Ecology* with its relevant ideas that the culture is that one that could make a choice of which of possibilities to employ and not environment. An example could be building a house. Culture chooses materials like wood, iron, stone and other materials and it has a direct impact on the ecology.

So, if we talk about choice then we already mean the relation between culture and possibilism and technology. So culture is not accidental, but is subject of choice. The best choice implies best environment, best ecology. But these choices are available in the environment that can be limited by the capabilities of culture.

Or, environment is the nature; the increasing level of pollution directly is connected to the used technology. Technology is a result and same time a promoter of cultural diversity.

As a result the interplay between environment and culture increase the mobility, technical process and diversity of economic patterns.

Now let's think why do we need cultural diversity for human being as biodiversity for living? First, we could say that the level of ecology is related to multi-linear evolution of culture. This evolution is the result of mobility. Meantime, mobility is the result of technology expression as universal, creativity, specialty and diversity. Technology as it was said before is an expression of miniaturization and portability, people increasingly interacts and form communities: real and virtual. So, culture

<sup>1</sup>

<http://www.travelwebdir.com/travelarticles/Ecotourism---The-Must-be-Principles-1015.html>

becomes more and more sophisticated and we already have virtual issue despite of performing arts (selective idea from: *Mobilities, immobilities and moorings*, by Kevin Hannam, Mimi Sheller and John Urry).

This performance of mobility and technology, increase the opportunity cost of cultural diversity and its multi-linear evolution, that directly or indirect has an impact upon environment and its state. Of course cultural development is linked to economic patterns and the risk increase in a very modern pattern, but also is very discussed as a possibilism of materials chose to less affect the environment.

Even human body is considered as material culture. Demonstrative point could be the passage from *Introduction to Cultural Ecology* by Mark Q. Sutton and Eugene Newton Anderson: "Biological evolution and natural selection are the forces that shape organism. Beginning sometime in the distant past, culture began to influence human development, changing the relationship of humans to their environment from one of strict biology to a mixture of biology and culture." Continuing with same idea, in *Visions of Culture*, by Jerry D. Moore, Bronislaw Malinowski comes to conclusion that "culture is utilitarian, and functionally integrated", it means that culture is that determines which set of solutions will be utilized. In addition to meet biological needs, culture impose other needs, thus increase the search, the look for and the most important the mobility towards satisfaction from consumption. An instrument is technologies which impact upon environment in a positive or negative manner. So, practically human being is forced by his needs to perform technologies to be satisfied. And here we are again confronting the parallelism among cultural diversity, performing technologies, environment and our needs.

To conclude directly with the second principle and its meaning about how culture is linked to environment and ecology we could mention a very important result of this relationship that aims world high level of ecology – ECOTOURISM, which is linked also to mobility. Finally, the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism enacted by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) defines the concept of Ecotourism (Ecological Tourism) as follows:

- A contribution to mutual understanding and respect between peoples and societies
- A vehicle for individual and collective fulfillment
- A user of the cultural heritage of mankind and contributor to its enhancement
- A beneficial activity for host countries and communities obligations of stakeholders in tourism development.

### 3.Sustainable Tourism Strategies

For these reasons, the development of a sustainable approach to tourism must be based on strategies that protect and strengthen both natural and cultural diversities. It should avoid the clash of conservation-versus-people — which has become particularly common in Africa. It needs to integrate the rights of local communities to use and manage natural resources. And it should ensure that any profits from tourism are used by the local populations as well as for the conservation of natural resources.

Ecotourism has the potential to help preserve and enrich local indigenous cultures not only in the short term, but also from a transgenerational long-term perspective. Indeed, the development of a sustainable tourism model could play a valuable role in the development of more sustainable societies worldwide. There are, however, significant risks involved in any tourism or ecotourism initiative. When developing an ecotourism strategy, the vulnerability of the natural or cultural resource being promoted must be carefully assessed to ensure that any planned activities do not threaten or undermine it. Furthermore, it is absolutely critical that local communities, in their struggle for sustainable livelihoods, be involved in integrating ecotourism activities into self-reliance projects that benefit both the community and the natural environment.

"The participants to the World Ecotourism Summit from August-September, 2002 in Johannesburg, aware of the limitations of this consultative process to incorporate the input of the large variety of ecotourism stakeholders, particularly non-governmental organizations and local and indigenous communities:

- Acknowledge that tourism has significant and complex social, economic and environmental implications;
- Consider the growing interest of people in traveling to natural areas;
- Emphasize that ecotourism should contribute to make the overall tourism industry more sustainable, by increasing economic benefits for host communities, actively contributing to the conservation of natural resources and the cultural integrity of host

communities, and by increasing awareness of travelers towards the conservation of natural and cultural heritage;

- Recognize the cultural diversity associated with natural areas, particularly because of the historical presence of local communities, of which some have maintained their traditional knowledge, uses and practices many of which have proven to be sustainable over the centuries;

- Reiterate that funding for the conservation and management of biodiverse and culturally rich protected areas has been documented to be inadequate worldwide;

- Recognize further that many of these areas are home to rural peoples often living in poverty, who frequently lack adequate healthcare, education facilities, communications systems, and other infrastructure required for genuine development opportunity;

- Affirm that different forms of tourism, especially ecotourism, if managed in a sustainable manner can represent a valuable economic opportunity for local populations and their cultures and for the conservation and sustainable use of nature for future generations;

- Emphasize that at the same time, wherever and wherever tourism in natural and rural areas is not properly planned, developed and managed, it contributes to the deterioration of natural landscapes, threats to wildlife and biodiversity, poor water quality, poverty, displacement of indigenous and local communities, and the erosion of cultural traditions;

- Acknowledge that ecotourism must recognize and respect the land rights of indigenous and local communities, including their protected, sensitive and sacred sites;

- Stress that to achieve equitable social, economic and environmental benefits from ecotourism and other forms of tourism in natural areas, and to minimize or avoid potential negative impacts, participative planning impacts, participative planning mechanisms are needed that allow local and indigenous communities, in a transparent way, to define and regulate the use their areas at the local level, including the right to opt out of tourism development;

- Note that small and micro business seeking to meet social and environmental objectives are often operating in a development climate that does not provide suitable financial and

marketing support for this specialized new market, and that to achieve this goal farther understanding for the ecotourism market will be required through market research at the destination level, specialized credit instruments for tourism businesses, grants for external costs, incentives for the use of sustainable energy and innovative technical solutions, and an emphasis on developing skills not only in business but within government and those seeking to support business solutions.”<sup>2</sup>

#### **4. Some benefits of tourism' development in Moldova**

All the above are true for Moldova also, because the tourism industry is not fully recovered. Especially, it is necessary in conditions where in our country lack natural resources on the one hand, but on the other hand, it has a very important resource - both favorable natural environment and its human potential. Unfortunately, ecotourism is still little practiced in our country. But already are developing other types of tourism - rural tourism, cultural tourism, historical, etc., that promote important values, including environmental conservation. On the base of these types of tourism already in place, there may be special programs that would specifically protect certain areas, such as, natural reserves. Notorious advantage of such tourism is the fact that it can be done in specific natural environment, contributing to its sustainable development.

Another important advantage is that ecotourism is focused mainly in rural areas, traditionally disadvantaged in Moldova, where the standard of living of the population is substantially lower and, moreover, holds about 60 percent of national habitat. But the massive exodus of population from the country's large majority occurs on account of the rural population (which, according to assessments, tend to figure about 1 million people).

Also important is the impact and cultural exchange offered by tourism for a country like our, which has set as its primary objective - the European Union integration. And the exchange of tourists leads to the imminent intensification of interpersonal communication and in the longer time

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<sup>2</sup> FENNELL, David A. “Ecotourism”, Third edition, 2007, 282 pages

perspective between peoples. As a result, it is achieved a complex process of system of values' homogenization, perceptions of the reality between local people and outsiders. And finally, it is logical to expect homogenization of mentality, influenced in particular and quite inadequate by the former economic system (central planned and command system) and, why not ideological.

Nowadays, types of tourism that allows the environment support and contribute to rural areal development, become those alternative avocations that allow diversifying the rural habitat, to retain young people in the area and provide opportunities to the native self-assertion. Important fact it is especially in times of crisis, when it is among the few susceptible areas likely to support the economy through the importation of foreign currency and eventual occupation that they can provide to labor resources in the country.

## 5. Conclusion

It is from this perspective that one can begin to comprehend the cultural impact of international tourism. When tourists arrive at their destination, they bring with them different beliefs and behaviors, which to some extent influence the host culture. At the same time, tourists are changed by their experiences. In short, tourism is an interactive phenomenon, affecting both the hosts and the visitors.

But this effect is lopsided. The influence of tourists on the societies they visit is generally more pronounced than vice versa. The majority of global tourists come from a few affluent countries (dominant cultures), which are relatively unaffected by visitors from smaller local cultures. On the other hand, tourism increases the risk of irreversible cultural and eco-systemic disruptions in smaller societies.

Generally, the formulation of ecotourism implies by itself the problem of cultural interaction, as well of cultural impact and vice versa. Sometimes this impact could be positive, because it enhances the role of ecotourism, its meaning and development. On

the other hand its impact could be negative, because it could create the situation when meanings and values are misunderstood.

With regard to Republic of Moldova we would like to mention that a substantial contribution for solving problems on ecotourism development can bring financial and information opportunities that it offers the Euro-region creation, which have the potential to lead to the widening tourism sphere development, including those ecological in Republic of Moldova. But for this aim, the respectively field needs to become a state priority, which will elaborate concrete economic policies and mechanisms to support it (creating a favorable economic environment through incentive tax, preferential credit, proper training of personnel to be involved, advertising, etc. ).

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