

OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS TO LOCAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: INTRODUCING THE CASE STUDY OF THE SPECIAL NATURE RESERVE DELIBLATO SANDS

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ABSTRACT

The importance of sustainability for protected areas in Europe and for their potential development in the context of tourism has been recognized and supported by many political and social institutions. Nowadays, a wide range of European funds and programs (SEA, SEE etc.) actively encourage and finance projects that cover environmental conservation and proper tourism development for many natural assets. One of the most important projects in the Alpe-Adria-Pannonia region is the NATREG Project. This project connects six protected areas in Italy, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia, and establishes an international and multisectoral cooperation network for development of a Joint Strategy for Integrated Management of Protected Areas. The Autonomous province of Vojvodina, Republic of Serbia, has been recognized as a target area due to its well known nature reserve Deliblato sands, which can achieve both sustainability and commercialization through tourism development. This paper analyzes possible opportunities for and threats to supply factors, and it gives the recovery guidelines to secure an attractive and safe ambiance for tourists and visitors.

Keywords: tourist destination's supply factors, environmental development, special nature reserve Deliblato sands

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development is a pattern of resource use that aims to meet human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also for generations to come. The goal of sustainable development is to enable all people throughout the world to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life without compromising the quality of life of future generations. The term was first used by the Brundtland Commission which coined what has become the most often-quoted definition of sustainable development as development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (*Smith et al.*, 1998).

During the 60s, especially 70s and as well 80s of the last century, attention of many countries and tourist industry was directed strictly on the economic aspects of tourism development and its direct, indirect and multiplier effects of domestic and foreign tourists spending. During the 80s at the latest, impact of mass tourism were seen as being threatening for the industry's viability itself. This has produced a

strong wave of criticism and made focus on issues of tourism development impacts on society, locals, and tourists themselves. Ever since the Brundtland report, sustainability has been a central theme in discussions on tourism. The arguments for new, alternatives forms of tourism, such as eco tourism, were strongly supported by the rhetoric of sustainability.

SUSTAINABILITY OF PROTECTED AREAS OF SERBIA

The global economic crisis is present in almost all countries of the world and has hit most of economic sectors including tourism. Consequences of the crisis led to a decrease in revenues, rising unemployment, growth of population distrust and uncertainty in terms of further layoffs. Analysis of economic situation in protected natural areas of the Republic of Serbia shows even worse situation. Long-term adverse economic backwardness and social structure (primarily because of unused or inappropriately used the natural resources of exceptional value), are making them one of the most undeveloped areas in Serbia, and the global economic crisis is even more emphasized that situation.

Tourism has the status of a very important component in the national economy of many countries because it contributes to the improvement of all activities that are associated with it (such as transport, industry, agriculture, utilities, cultural facilities, handicrafts, catering, etc...), and therefore and the employment of the population. Therefore, the development of tourism in protected areas play an important role for total income for promoting long term sustainability of conservation of natural resources. Tourism of protected areas is often used as a link between protected areas and economic initiatives to promote nature conservation, particularly in developing countries. At the same time, the protected area is becoming increasingly significant component of tourist products. On the other hand, tourism can bring many damages as well. However, if the development and changes are inevitable in a specific location, tourism could be much less harmful alternative from many other activities, especially if tourism is well regulated, planned and based on the principle of sustainable development.

Sustainable tourism development is a concept based on a broader concept of sustainable development (Sustainable Development) and it is based on three major principles (*McIntyre, 1993*):

- Environmental Sustainability
- Socio-cultural sustainability
- Economic sustainability

More detailed these principals can be described as:

1. Being different - The key to successful and sustainable tourism is achieving a clear sense of difference from other competing destinations. This can be achieved by basing development and marketing on the attributes and strengths of the destination.
2. Achieving authenticity - The attractions most likely to be successful, and those with the greatest enduring appeal, are those which are genuinely relevant to the history, industry, culture lifestyle and natural resources of the district.

3. Reflecting community values - This means representing the past, present and future aspirations of the local community in a living and dynamic way rather than embalming the past. This involves listening to and responding to the community.
4. Understanding and targeting the market - Understanding the broad market trends and the needs of specific segments is critical. This involves the development of specialized products based on the inherent attributes of an area.
5. Enhancing the experience - Peoples motivation for travel is to seek something they cannot experience at home. The 'bundling' of attributes enhances the appeal of a place, and the likelihood of visitation.
6. Adding value - Adding value to existing attributes achieves a richer tourism experience and helps to diversify the local economy. This can include accommodation, sales outlets, conference facilities and dining in association with established industries.
7. Respecting natural and cultural values - Sustainable tourism development derives its form and appeals from these qualities, and adds to the special nature of the destination and in particular respects ecological processes.
8. Achieving conservation outcomes - A mutually beneficial alliance can be achieved between tourism and conservation. That is, through understanding and enjoyment come greater appreciation and empathy, advocacy and protection for the resource.
9. Having good 'content' ('telling the story') - Tourism development can interpret (present and explain) natural, social, historic and ecological features. 'Telling the story' provides a more rewarding experience and helps conserve the destination.
10. Achieving excellence and innovation in design - Good design respects the resource, achieves conservation outcomes, reflects community values, and is instrumental in telling the story. It is not just about form and function but also about invoking an emotional response from the visitor.
11. Providing mutual benefits to visitors and hosts - Tourism is not encouraged for its own sake. It is an economic and community development tool and must take into account the benefits that both the host community and the visitor seek.
12. Building local capacity - Good tourism businesses do not stand isolated from the communities they operate in. They get involved with the community and collaborate with other businesses and stakeholders to build a positive and self-sufficient capacity.

EUROPEAN INICIATIVES

Program Natura 2000

The process of EU integration has provided a large number of obligations, and in the context of nature that relates to the establishment of Natura 2000. New EU member states are obliged (on the date of accession of the EU) to submit a list of proposed areas for Natura 2000 with a corresponding database of each individual area. Each new member state brings their special characteristics to this area, and the lists of Natura 2000 species and habitat types increases. Areas must be chosen so as to ensure the sustainability of certain species and habitat types listed in the annexes.

During selection of areas, beside scientific, the entrepreneurial, social and cultural requirements are taken into account, as well as regional and local characteristics.

Natura 2000 is ecological network of the European Union which covers areas important for conservation of endangered species and habitat types. This network was created with the intention of preserving more than a thousand of rare, endangered and endemic species of wild animals and plants, and some 230 natural and semi-natural habitats that are listed in the Annexes of the two directives of the European Union (EU) on the protection of nature. So far, the ecological network Natura 2000 included about 30,000 area and they cover almost 20% of EU territory. Establishment and expansion of the Natura 2000 network is crucial for stopping the continuous process of natural extinction of species and biotopes, and depletion of natural resources (*Natura 2000 Networking Programme*).

It is important to emphasize that the Natura 2000 program does not pretend to strict and rigid conservation of nature but, in contrast, focuses on sustainable development that see human as an integral part of nature. This encourages additional financing of protected natural areas through limited economic activities such as development of sustainable tourism. Specifically, it is responsible tourism, friendly with the natural and cultural heritage and, at the same time, contributes to generating additional income for protected areas.

NATREG Project

The NATREG Project is designed to develop all potentials of protected areas and to present it as an important instrument of biodiversity conservation and a great potential for social and economic development. It relies on the fact that the connection between nature conservation and development of protected areas is too weak in many EU countries. Therefore, the project's main aim is to acknowledge and promote the potentials of natural assets and protected areas as drivers of sustainable regional development, and to increase the perception of preserved natural environment as a key characteristic of sustainability.

The Project is connecting six protected areas in the Alpe-Adria-Pannonia region including Italy, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia. The project's main objective is to establish a trans-national and multi sector cooperation network and to develop the *Joint Strategy for Integrated Management of Protected Areas*. Numerous trainings and knowledge transfer events are organized in order to achieve the project's main goal. Furthermore, by using the participatory approach, all relevant stakeholders from various sectors such as regional development, spatial planning, nature protection, civil society, etc. are involved in the development of integrated management plans for protected areas. In addition, the Strategy for Development of Ecological Corridors will be prepared before the conclusion of the Project, which is due on July 2011.

However, the following specific objectives of NATREG project can bring more effective long-term plans and activities for each country included:

- to develop the "Joint Strategy for Integrated Management of Protected Areas" (JSIMPA) through the established transnational and multisectoral network, in order to enable both protection of natural assets and sustainable regional development;

- to build knowledge capacity of project partners and stakeholders on integrated management and inclusive governance of PAs on project and pilot-area levels;
- to implement the “JSIMPA” through the preparation of “Integrated Management Plans of Pas” and “Integrated Development Strategies for Green Networks of Pas” in six pilot areas using the multisectoral participatory method and flexible (site related) approach in order to assure the Eurosite SMART management objectives;
- to prepare at least 18 follow-up project concepts for the further implementation of the concrete measures of management plans and development opportunities. Long term financing of protection measures will be planned and ensured through follow-up sustainable investments in PAs, which will preserve natural assets and biodiversity as natural capital; to raise public awareness on nature potentials as development factors; to build positive perception of nature protection measures and to enhance public participation in managing PAs;
- to enhance best practice and know-how exchange and to disseminate project results within and outside the project territory;
- to assist in effective implementation of EU legislation in managing natural assets and PAs in Croatia and Serbia.

When it comes to tourism development and sustainability in protected areas, NATREG indicated an aspect of its implementation that considered the development of specific tourism studies which can be applied to particular asset. Such studies are particularly suitable for making the right market conditions for priority environmental areas and presenting them as tourist destinations, which are nowadays extremely popular on international market.

CASE STUDY OF SPECIAL NATURE RESERVE DELIBLATO SANDS, SERBIA

Protected areas in Serbia - Special nature reserve Deliblato sands

Serbia had 6.59% of protected territories in 2009, while by the existing strategic plans (*Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia, National Environmental Protection Program*) and Spatial Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia, it is envisaged to expand this network to 10% of the territory. Also future preliminary plan is that the area of environmental network will be up to 20% of the territory of the Republic (*Institute for nature conservation of Serbia*).

Deliblato sand is the Spatial natural reserve which is one of the last and the largest oasis of sand, steppe, forest and wetland vegetation on the Pannonian Plain. This spacious area, with a total area of 35,000 hectares, consists of numerous ellipsoidal sandy masses surrounded by fertile agricultural land. The reserve is adorned by natural rarities, especially the imperial eagle and the steppe falcon. The Ramsar site “Labudovo okno” is a habitat of swamp birds as well as the largest migratory area in this part of Europe. The richness of flora is reflected in 900 plant species, some of them relicts and rarities. Natural characteristics and uniqueness of this region make “Deliblato sands” suitable for recreation, hunting and fishing,

nautical and ecological tourism. Thick forests, sands and prairies are criss-crossed by a dense network of roads, trails and paths (www.vojvodinasume.rs, 2011).

Analysis of micro and macro environment

Today, people are exposed to stress, bad nutritive habits and it can be said that the urbanization and environmental pollution brought a lot of negative consequences that affects lifestyle of population. On the other hand, higher level of standard and division of working hours indicated that more individuals are prefer spending time in nature. This affected the society by increasing awareness of the ecology and interest of saving the planet.

Forms of leisure time became more different than in mass tourism conditions so modern tourists are focused on specific supply conditions on destinations. They expect ecologically clean areas for the purpose of relaxation, education, entertainment, sports etc. Vacations are becoming shorter, more frequent and the tourists expectations are much higher and related to attractive factors which are framed by solid infrastructure, accommodation facilities and quality service.

According to some research in Europe, about 30% of modern tourist demand especially appreciates tourism offer based on the needs and values of sustainable tourism development, while 20% of demand is seeking for “green” destinations for their holiday. For example, Germany, which represents one of the largest market, 65% of tourists (39 million), expect ecological correctness on chosen holiday destination (*The International Ecotourism Society, Global Ecotourism Fact Sheet, 2006*).

Relying on the expressed tendencies about the eco friendly destinations, world tourism dynamics brought the phenomena of ecotourism, the new model of tourist activity which indicates strong connections between tourism and environment. It further affected tourist supply by developing the marketing concept intended to promote and inform consumers about the “green” tourism. Yet, the marketing management frame of each destination is based on more complex business concepts and principles which are related to differentiation process, careful approach to market segmentation and the improving quality of products and services, in accordance to sustainable development idea. The importance of sustainability is reflected in reducing the negative consequences of tourist traffic by using the potential of representing the tourism as an industry that does not harm the environment and the local culture of destinations. Instead of that, tourism can be put in function of preserving the local eco-system.

Given the increasing popularity of ecotourism on international tourist market and all the benefits of countries that represent it as a standard in their tourist supply, it can be concluded that the investment in development of products that are aimed on niche demand markets, could be profitable economic and political move for the country that tends to achieve successful position. According to the strategic marketing plans and activities, presented in *Serbia Tourism Development Strategy until 2015* and in *Marketing Strategy of tourism in Vojvodina*, great significance is given to developing all potentials in order to form the ecotourism products. According to these documents, the implementation of “green” vision can long-term improves the local environment and at the same time, makes representative profit from tourism.

Possibilities for economic development and recovery

Funding of majority of protected area comes from the public sector. Unfortunately, the funds of majority protected areas are not sufficiently to cover all needs, focused on the development of tourism and nature conservation. Government funding is not enough to fully cover the financing of protected areas. This problem has been actively discussed in the nineties of last century when it was estimated that the reserves have an average of only 24% of funds in relation to total needed to mitigate all costs of maintenance (*Lindberg, 2001*). Even developed countries with a long history of protection of natural attraction cannot provide full funding by the state. The average government spending on protected areas in developed countries is \$ 2,058 per km², while in developing countries this number is much lower, \$ 157 per km² due to the protection of nature is not taken as one of the priority issues of developing countries.

These facts indicate the necessity of securing additional income from the management of park, which therefore must be creative and flexible when it comes to finding ways of obtaining incomes. One of the most common ways is to generate additional revenue through the development of sustainable tourism. However, it should stress that revenue that come from tourism in protected area is only supplemental, which means that the state could not reduce the amount of funds intended for this purpose.

Potential sources of revenue in protected areas (*Buckley, 2003; Sickle and Eagles, 1998*):

- Government funding (mandatory or discretionary)
- Public investments
- Multilateral and bilateral donor funding,
- Donations from philanthropic foundations, corporations and individuals
- Revenue-raising methods:
 - Protected area entrance fees
 - Recreation service fees, special events and special services
 - Accommodation, transportation and guiding
 - Parking
 - Equipment rental
 - Food sales (restaurant and store)
 - Merchandise sales (equipment, clothing, souvenirs)
 - Licences, permits, and taxes
 - Licensing of intellectual property
 - Sale or rental of image rights (e.g. for taking photographs)
- Cross-product marketing
- Private sector initiatives
- Cause-related marketing
- Biodiversity prospecting
- Commercial and bilateral debt-for-nature swaps
- Trust funds
- Carbon offset projects

The financing of special nature reserves in Vojvodina comes from Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning, which covers the cost of labour and training of management services, purchasing equipment, acquisition of fixed assets, putting up boards, identifying boundaries, establishing information systems, waste-remediation of illegal dumps and landfills. Provincial Secretariat for Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development covers the costs of active measures of protection, education, and monitoring of the situation of rare and endangered species. However, as is the case in the world, funds are hereby provided are not sufficient to cover all the costs of maintaining the reserve. *Table 1* shows the current situation in terms of potential income sources for protected area Deliblato sand, Vojvodina and give guidelines of some income that could be better used.

Table 1

**Potential income sources for protected areas -
Example of SNR Deliblato sand**

Potential income source	Applied	Partially applied	Not applied
Government funding programmes (mandatory or discretionary)	X		
Park entrance fees		X	
Recreation service fees, special events and special services		X	
Accommodation		X	
Equipment rental		X	
Food Sales (restaurant and store)		X	
Merchandise sales (equipment, clothing, souvenirs)			X
Donations, foreign aid		X	
Licensing of intellectual property		X	
Sale or rental of image rights		X	
Parking			X
Cross product marketing			X
Public investments		X	
Private sector initiatives		X	

Source: *Data obtained from representatives of "Vojvodinašume"*

CONCLUSIONS

Natural (ecological) environment is becoming a “target” of modern marketing and management in tourism. Negative impacts of mass tourism are increasingly manifesting through the environmental pollution, violation of biodiversity, underestimation of local customs and culture etc. Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, Serbia, with its natural resources (23 preserved and natural areas) can be

considered as a destination of great potential for developing and bringing the positive examples to international ecotourism market.

Since the Deliblato sands, as a key destination is already been recognized by representative EU programs and funds, it can be expected that further implementation of these projects will bring ecological prosperity and popularity of Vojvodina and Serbia in international tourist market.

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