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## **CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES AND STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM**

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**Abstract:** The development of the tourist business on the base of the sustainable tourism is discussed in this paper. The application of managing approaches and strategies for optimal combination of economic interests of the tourist business with the necessity of protection and preservation of natural environment and social economic prosperity of the local population is of vital importance. The principles of sustainable tourism need a systematic, ecosystem and complex approach. Enterprise's integration and form of clusters play basic role for the creation of steady and competitive tourism. The practical application of the cluster strategy assumes the task of aiding the processes of cluster formation.

**Key words:** sustainable tourism; contemporary approaches and strategies; systematic, ecosystem and complex approach; integration, cluster strategy

### **INTRODUCTION**

Sustainable development is among the fundamental issues of our time and thrusts upon us the necessity of new thinking and actions, completely different from traditional ones.

The principles of sustainable development can only be applied by societies that have realized the interdependence and relations between the economic and social development of society and the condition of the environment as a factor for this development, and which have also accepted and perform their responsible role in the preservation of the natural resources.

Against this background the behaviour of the economic and social systems and the adoption of the environmental approach in solving society's economic and social problems assume vital significance. Consideration and care for the ideas of sustainable development concern every country, every region and every branch of the economy because of the global significance of the problem and its substance, setting it apart as a new-quality philosophy and practice, expressing the attitude to the interrelated existence of the elements and the entirety of the system

formed on the basis of the relations and dependencies between society and its activities, man, his needs and Nature.

The provision of the needed balance between the economic, environmental and socio-cultural systems impose the necessity of the search for and application of approaches and strategies that aid the processes in the attainment of the economic and social goals of society with such utilisation of natural resources that will preserve the environment and ecosystems.

This requirement is applicable to each branch of the national economy and is related to directing the efforts to an 'environmentalisation of economic theory, implementation of a new approach to the use of natural resources and discovery of mechanisms to ascertain compatibility between the market economy and the environment' (Kostov, 1999).

It is a well-known fact that the business of tourism closely relates to natural resources, this issue is therefore of highly topical significance to it. The existence of this business, both in our day and in future, relies directly on the condition of these resources, so any disturbance of environmental balance is a grave obstacle to its survival in time.

At the same time sustainable development of tourism is only possible on the grounds of the sustainable use of nature and human factor development as a valid factor for the organisation and management of the process of creation of a tourist product.

The purpose of the present paper is to substantiate certain approaches and strategies whose practical implementation by economic entities in the field of tourism can contribute to this industry's sustainable development.

### **OUTCOMES AND CONSIDERATION**

The principles of sustainable tourism introduce the necessity of applying management approaches and strategies which further the successful operation of this business and minimise its negative backlashes on the environment, they should also stimulate the socio-economic and cultural development of the local population (Madgerova, 2004).

As can be seen from the research carried out so far, a multifaceted consideration of the issue is needed and the following aspects have to be emphasised:

➤ First, in respect of the business, which nourishes purely economic interests and performs its economic function, it has to be borne in mind that its management 'is a complex process of production of high-quality services and marketing for their placement, as well as profit realisation by means of fullest satisfaction of the needs of tourists' (Bachvarov, Tonchev, 1996);

➤ Secondly, in respect of the natural environment, which determines the implementation of management practices that would further the preservation of the environment in the highest degree and serve as a medium for the nature preservation function of the tourism business (Madgerova, Dimitrova, 2004);

➤ Thirdly, in respect of the economic and socio-cultural development of local communities, determining that business

impacts be directed towards implementation of the social role of business (Madgerova, Dimitrova, 2004) by means of enhancement of the local population's standard of living and the sustainable development of municipalities;

Seeing the problem from this angle makes possible the differentiation between three basic subsystems within the system of management of tourism against the background of sustainable development. These subsystems relate to the economic, nature-preservation and social functions, described above (Madgerova, 2004). Furthermore, in the process of management one ought to consider that the goals of sustainable development of tourism cannot be achieved by ignoring any of these subsystems with the connections and relations among them. In other words, these subsystems need to be considered as elements from a whole that merges into a unified system for the management of sustainable tourism.

This view of the role business has, raises the issue of the approaches that the tourist business needs to apply in order to provide a response to the principles of sustainable development.

It is evident that certain management impacts require the application of the systematic, respectively the ecosystem approach, ensuring the application of the three functions of the tourist company, pointed out above. The use of these approaches corresponds to the nature, goals and tasks of sustainable tourism and relates immediately to setting tourist business on the firm foundations of science and obtaining a strongly felt management effect. This enables management decisions that achieve the linkage between the narrow economic interests of the business community with preservation of the ecosystems and development of local communities, and also serves to pinpoint the balance in between.

For this purpose the application of appropriate methodologies, development of models for the creation of a sustainable

tourist product and for preservation of environment on a regional level are needed that would bring together elements from the three systems, namely the ecological, the economic and the social one. On these grounds an opportunity is provided to comprehensively consider the issues of the organisation and management of business and to apply the complex approach simultaneously with the systematic and the ecosystem approaches.

At the same time the application of the three approaches is most closely linked to the study and investment of a certain territory's resources in the organisation and launch of the business of tourism. The complex approach has a special role and significance when applied to tourism as it can provide a multi-aspectual analysis and evaluation of all production factors with a view to their optimal harnessing for business purposes, in case the requirement for their sustainable use is fulfilled.

In our opinion the complex approach (similarly to the systematic and ecosystem ones) is directly related to the management decisions concerning the enterprise's activities as a whole, and determines their nature as decisions conducive to the conditions for sustainable tourism. This approach is related to the attitude towards the natural, socio-historical, human and capital resources (material base) and their use as a vital element of the tourist product, which has to feature a variety of qualities that create its consumer value for the tourist (Madgerova, 2004).

As can be seen from the exposition, the identification of the goals and tools to achieve the quality of 'sustainability' of the business of tourism determine the necessity of considering the described approaches in their interrelation.

This applies especially to the forms of alternative tourism. It is requisite to point out that sustainable tourism, both in research and on a number of international and global forums on tourism has most often been related to alternative tourism for

a number of essential reasons, among which are:

- the peculiar nature of alternative tourism and its ability to satisfy the tourists' demand for recreation and amusement in a preserved natural environment;
- the contribution of alternative tourism to providing a solution to the important economic and social problems of settlements by means of the local population's participation in the organisation and servicing of the tourist activities;
- the possibilities provided by this type of tourism towards attainment of sustainable regional development;
- the immediate connection between tourism and Nature, predetermining the dependence of business on the condition of the natural resources and the necessity of business's active participation in preserving the latter.

The new role of tourism raises also the issue of the tourist companies' strategies for effective performance. When considering the issues of effective management we have to give their due to the strategies for consolidation of the efforts of individual companies in the production and placement of their products.

Together with strategies such as product differentiation, focussing, total leadership in costs and others, with highlight on the product, markets and reduction of production costs, of significance is the implementation of the various forms of integration that assist the processes of innovations, enhancement of labour productivity, thus aiding the enhancement of competitiveness.

In the context of contemporary development and the new trends it imposes on the operation of tourism as business, prevalence is gradually gained by the strategy catering to the formation of clusters. Clusters are defined by the originator of the cluster concept M. Porter as geographical concentrations of interrelated companies (Porter, 2000). In this sense the practical application of the

cluster strategy assumes the task of aiding the processes of cluster formation by means of its research-derived conclusions and implications. It can support the structure-building of the multifaceted integrative connections and relations between the various subjects from the unified entity and the development of skills to manage such a complex system as the cluster is and thus be able catalyse the solutions to the above-listed issues and problems.

Irrespective of the fact that the concept of clusters originated in the context of industry, it plays its own significant role in tourism, too. D. Hall and G. Richards point out in this connection that the cluster concept ensures a good opportunity for economic growth, high level of innovations and enhancement of competitiveness not only of industry, but of the service sector and in particular that of tourism (Hall, Richards, 2000). Research literature considers the role of clusters as providing possibilities to prevent the decline of tourism (Lafferty, Fossen, 2005).

With its substance and contents the cluster strategy can to a very high degree aid the origination of sustainable tourism, due to the very nature of tourism and because implementation of this strategy provides the possibility to apply the systematic, the ecosystem and the comprehensive approaches. In our opinion the cluster development model bears a potential for an especially successful application in the alternative forms of tourism. The cluster permits the formation of unions between companies of the same sphere of activities and broader ones, for example if agricultural tourism is organised in such a cluster network, the companies that readily fit in will come from the hotel- and restaurant-keeper businesses, and tourist agencies, as will agricultural companies providing the ecological products that naturally attract tourists.

Such interrelations between tourist companies and enterprises from other economic sectors bring out opportunities for

effective application also of the product- and market-related strategies, especially as regards the development of a comprehensive tourist product, possessing the necessary unique character and usefulness that are essential to tourists.

According to some authors the cluster networks can significantly contribute to rural areas management, and a typical example of success in cluster development is provided by wine-tourism (Pender, Sharpley, 2005). Californian, French, Italian and Spanish clusters, comprising interconnected wine producers, vine-growers, suppliers, service-providers and institutions related to the wine industry and tourist companies are models of success. This form of integration provides the possibility of developing rural and wine tourism in regions with suitable climatic conditions.

In his work "On Competition" M. Porter reveals the importance of the cluster formation for economic development and points out that this form of co-operation assigns new roles to business, the government and institutions, as well as new ways in which to structure the connections and relations between business and government, and business and institutions (Porter, 1998).

In this sense in the field of tourism, too, the cluster concept relegates a new role to the state institutions, represented by local authorities, cultural and scientific institutions (such as universities and research centres), some state organs and organisations directly related to sustainable use of Nature, and non-governmental organisations, related to the business of tourism and preservation of the environment. They can be an important part of the tourist cluster and support it functioning with information, consultations, innovative developments, provision of amusements and otherwise. Practice shows that it is necessary to look for approaches and forms of horizontal and vertical integration and co-operation of tourism business with various organs, organisations

and institutions, which further the enhancement of its competitiveness.

The entrepreneurs' activities are a significant factor for the organisation of horizontal and vertical cluster unions and in the implementation of the cluster strategy.

In support of this view are cited data from research on the entrepreneurship development possibilities in alternative tourism in the territory of the Rila National Park (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Outcomes from the Study of the Possibilities for Development of Alternative Tourism in the Territory of RILA National Park (2004)**

| <b>Ascertained needs</b>   | Relative share of positive answers | Relative share of negative answers                     | Relative share of no-answer returns | Total |
|--|------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|-------|
| Integration of tourist agencies  | 90,14                              | 9,86   | -                                   | 100,0 |
| Participation of municipal authorities in business development   | 88,57                              | 10,0<br>(Municipal authorities cannot assist business) | 1,43                                |       |
| Enhancement of management knowledge and skills   | 81,69                              | 18,31  | -                                   | 100,0 |
| Consultations  | 81,69                              | 18,31  | -                                   | 100,0 |
| Enhancement of information provision on development opportunities for business in field of alternative tourism | 98,73                              | 1,27   | -                                   | 100,0 |
| Improvement of advertising provision to alternative tourism  | 80,28                              | 18,31  | 1,41                                | 100,0 |

Source: results from a study, carried out as part from a research project entitled "Entrepreneurship in alternative tourism-organisation and management of its sustainable development in the territory of RILA National Park ", 2004, V. Pehlivanov, R. Madgherova, R. Dimitrova

The obtained results reveal the necessity of bringing together the efforts of the small-sized hotel-keeper businesses, tourist agencies, state organs and institutions, non-governmental tourist organisations and universities with regard to such important issues of sustainable business development, such as integration with tourist agencies, participation of municipalities, enhancement of management knowledge and skills, consultancy support, information provision and advertising of tourist products. We consider that all these and any other problems of sustainable tourism can be successfully solved by means of building clusters on such a wide basis. The participation of universities and other research institutes in clusters can be useful

with the research provision for business and especially with development of innovative solutions, methodologies for the study of the tourist and recreational resources and models of regional development, based on tourism, implementation of the systematic, ecosystem and comprehensive approaches in management, marketing research and development of attractive tourist products and others.

Clusters cannot perform their role without strategic and operational plans on the national and regional level, co-ordinated among institutions, with a view to ensuring a consistent and comprehensive character of activities. These programmes are a very good prerequisite for the establishment in the future of the cluster strategy as a strategy for sustainable regional

development, all the more so as it is comparatively uncomplicated in application because clusters are created on the principle of voluntary participation, thus avoiding expenditures of financial resources.

### CONCLUSIONS

The general analysis and evaluations prove that the implementation of the systematic, ecosystem and complex approaches is an obligatory condition for the sustainable development of tourism. Knowledge of these approaches provides opportunities for horizontal and vertical

integration of the economic, social and nature-preserving functions of the tourist enterprises.

The cluster strategy has to be considered as a complex functional system for sustainable development and management for which our economy is going to find wide application in future.

In this connection, clusters are a contemporary economic form of integration and co-operation at whose base must lie integration models and research-based programmes with clear priorities, goals and measures.

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