

Long-term government responses to sustainable tourism development: principles and strategies

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Abstract: Tourism is one of the leading sectors in the world economy. Enhancing its well-known economic, social and environmental benefits while managing its negative impacts are highly important for the national governments in European Union. Strategic planning is essential to meet the long term requirements of sustainability. National sustainable development strategies and tourism strategies are fundamental means of strategic planning as they provide guidance for the decision-makers of the tourism sector.

The member states of the European Union have prepared their national sustainable development strategies, furthermore the Union's common strategy and the national strategies of some member states have already been revised and renewed by now. The Hungarian strategies – National Sustainable Development Strategy and National Tourism Development Strategy – were completed the World Tourism Organization published its twelve aims for an agenda for sustainable tourism in 2005. Consequently these strategies are expected to contain references to the sustainability requirements and environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development.

In the present study we analyse the issues of sustainable tourism development in the sustainable development strategies of the EU and Hungary and the National Tourism Development Strategy of Hungary 2005-2013 with special attention to the principles laid down by the WTO in 2005. Our aim is to investigate the cohesion between the principles of sustainable development and sustainable tourism, and their manifestations in some of the strategic documents influencing Hungarian tourism development.

Key words: sustainable tourism, national strategies, World Tourism Organization

1. Introduction

During the last ten years the strategic approach strengthened in the EU. National planning related to many different topics is significant in all of the member states. Preparing sustainable development strategies and national development plans are community requirements, while in most countries strategies regarding education, energy, transport, tourism, healthcare, research, competitiveness, etc. have also been prepared.

In Hungary the national tourism development strategy was completed by 2005, while the national sustainable development strategy was published in 2007. In this paper we confine our research area to the analysis of the strategic documents, as the actual impacts of these strategies can not be evaluated yet. Assessments is further complicated by the fact that the relevant set of indicators to measure progress towards sustainability is not specify in the above mentioned documents.

2. Material studied and Methods

First of all, we determine the strategic documents which may have a positive influence on tourism development in Hungary from the point of view of sustainable development.

Furthermore, we review the concept of sustainability, and we also demonstrate the growing demand for strategic planning at national and supranational level.

The results of our research are based on the former critical comparative analysis of the EU sustainable development strategies (EC 2001, CoEU 2006), the Hungarian sustainable development strategy and the national tourism development strategy (NFÜ-KvVM, 2007; Magyar Turisztikai Hivatal, 2005), as well as, our previously conducted researched concerning the issues of tourism in the national strategies for sustainable development in the European Union. (Vargáné – Gáthy, 2005)

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Sustainable tourism development

Sustainability has become a major issue in tourism policy in Europe. The Fifth Action Programme on the Environment of the European Union entitled "Towards Sustainability" emphasizes the role of tourism in achieving the targets of sustainable development. (CEC, 1993)

Following the publication of this document sustainable

tourism was put to the centre of scientific debates, which resulted in an increasing number of definitions and interpretations. The most commonly used definition is that of the World Tourism Organization (WTO), according to which "sustainable tourism should:

- 1) Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.
- 2) Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.
- 3) Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation." (WTO-UNEP, 2005, p. 11.)

This definition explicitly refers to the three main pillars of sustainable development that is the ecological, socio-cultural and economic aspects. This approach is adopted and further developed by several tourism researchers. For example, Coccossis' categorization gives a good overview of the various interpretations of sustainable tourism. Firstly, he describes the *economic sustainability of tourism*, which aims at the viability of tourist activity in economic terms. Secondly, he mentions interpretations largely based on ecology as a sociocultural and political view, which emphasizes the need for *ecologically sustainable tourism*. He notes that the so-called *sustainable tourist development* approach creates a link between the first two, recognizing the need to protect certain aspects of the environment in order to ensure long-term economic competitiveness. Finally, he cites another viewpoint according to which tourism is part of a *strategy for sustainable development*. This assumes that environmental conservation, economic efficiency and social equity are equally important. This integrated approach dominates the current scientific debate on tourism. (Coccossis, 1996)

The environmental, economic and social issues provide a framework, within which the WTO formulated twelve aims for the agenda for sustainable tourism. These are the following:

- 1) *Economic Viability*: To ensure the viability and competitiveness of tourism destinations and enterprises, so that they are able to continue to prosper and deliver benefits in the long term.
- 2) *Local Prosperity*: To maximize the contribution of tourism to the economic prosperity of the host destination, including the proportion of visitor spending that is retained locally.
- 3) *Employment Quality*: To strengthen the number and quality of local jobs created and supported by tourism, including the level of pay, conditions of service and availability to all without discrimination by gender, race, disability or in other ways.

- 4) *Social Equity*: To seek a widespread and fair distribution of economic and social benefits from tourism throughout the recipient community, including improving opportunities, income and services available to the poor.
- 5) *Visitor Fulfilment*: To provide a safe, satisfying and fulfilling experience for visitors, available to all without discrimination by gender, race, disability or in other ways.
- 6) *Local Control*: To engage and empower local communities in planning and decision making about the management and future development of tourism in their area, in consultation with other stakeholders.
- 7) *Community Wellbeing*: To maintain and strengthen the quality of life in local communities, including social structures and access to resources, amenities and life support systems, avoiding any form of social degradation or exploitation.
- 8) *Cultural Richness*: To respect and enhance the historic heritage, authentic culture, traditions and distinctiveness of host communities.
- 9) *Physical Integrity*: To maintain and enhance the quality of landscapes, both urban and rural, and avoid the physical and visual degradation of the environment.
- 10) *Biological Diversity*: To support the conservation of natural areas, habitats and wildlife, and minimize damage to them.
- 11) *Resource Efficiency*: To minimize the use of scarce and non-renewable resources in the development and operation of tourism facilities and services.
- 12) *Environmental Purity*: To minimize the pollution of air, water and land and the generation of waste by tourism enterprises and visitors. (WTO-UNEP, 2005)

3.2. Sustainable tourism development and strategic planning

"A strategy determines a goal and outlines the direction and approaches needed to get there." (WTO-UNEP, 2005) Consequently, strategies should include the desired outcomes and define the stakeholders, whose responsibility is to work for those outcomes. Strategies also determine the actual policies that should be more precise and more specific. According to the WTO there are three basic types of strategy that have relevance to sustainable tourism. First, the overall tourism strategies embracing sustainability principles. Second, other relevant government strategies dealing with sustainable tourism and finally, strategies for sub-sectors of tourism.

The WTO claims that every country should have a strategy to serve as a framework for the development and management of tourism. It is also recommended that instead of having a separate strategy for sustainable tourism, the concept of sustainable development should penetrate the mainstream tourism strategy of a country. The tourism organization also warns that it is not adequate to discuss sustainability as a separate issue within a tourism strategy concentrating on impacts and their management only.

Consequently, a tourism strategy should reflect the consensus of the stakeholders, promote planning at the local level, and concentrate on the above mentioned aims of sustainable tourism specifying concrete objectives, policies and actions, as well. (WTO-UNEP, 2005)

Besides mentioning national tourism development strategies the WTO lays special emphasis on the various types of strategic documents which are necessary for ensuring sustainable tourism. National sustainable development strategies are listed in the first place, but the importance of local level strategies is also highlighted. Sustainable tourism requires strategy-making both at the national and the local level, the main difference being in their approach: national strategies should identify policies and instruments, while local documents are about the local objectives and priorities. (WTO-UNEP, 2005)

The number of the national strategies, regarding various topics (such as economy, transport, tourism, energy, education, etc.) definitely increased during the last decades. Strategy design could be considered a new framework for community planning. An important element of this phenomenon is the appearance of the national strategies for sustainable development, which respond to the most important challenge of our days: the global ecological crisis.

It could be surprising that none of the EU documents describes the criteria required for a strategy. In our opinion, the major – and mostly interrelated – characteristics of a strategy are the following: *a comprehensive and systematic view, fundamentally new objectives, a long-term approach, and interpretation as a learning process.* (Gáthy et al., 2006)

We are going to consider these requirements in our analysis.

3.3. The connection between sustainability principles and aims for sustainable tourism in strategic documents

The European Union adopted a sustainable development strategy in 2001, which was revised in 2005 and renewed in 2006. (EC, 2001; CoEU, 2006). This strategy and the Lisbon strategy can be considered as two fundamental documents of the EU.

Several EU documents emphasize that sustainable development is a concept encompassing the totality of social and economic life and necessarily influences all EU strategic ideas, policies, and activities, including tourism development policies. The principles of sustainable development also require that social and economic objectives should coincide with environmental-ecological constraints.

Consequently, the sectorial strategies including the tourism strategies should meet the requirements published in the sustainable development strategies. It implies that the twelve aims for an agenda for sustainable tourism elaborated by the WTO in 2005 should be coherent with the national sustainable development strategies. In the following part we shortly analyse whether such a connection exists among the above mentioned documents. However, it must be noted that

the sustainable development strategies do not have to specify the exact sectorial objectives.

The *Sustainable Development Strategy of the EU* emphasizes, that “...All policies must have sustainable development as their core concern.” (EC, 2001, p. 6.). The strategy focuses on a small number of problems which pose irreversible threats to the future well-being of the European society. References to these unsustainable trends can be found among the twelve aims for the agenda for sustainable tourism (e.g. social equity, global warming, bio-diversity, resource efficiency, transport congestion).

Table 1.: The connection between the principles of the renewed EU SSD and the aims of sustainable tourism

Environmental protection	Social equity and cohesion	Economic prosperity	International responsibility
Physical Integrity	Social Equity	Economic Viability	Cultural Richness
Biological Diversity	Visitor Fulfilment	Local Prosperity	
Resource Efficiency	Local Control	Employment Quality	
Environmental Purity	Community Wellbeing		

Source: CoEU, 2006 and WTO-UNEP, 2005

The *Renewed EU Strategy for Sustainable Development* mentions that however unsustainable trends still persist, there are some new challenges arising. The main challenge is to gradually change our current unsustainable consumption and production patterns and the non-integrated approach to policy-making. We could find a link between principles of Renewed EU SDS and twelve aims for the agenda for sustainable tourism. (CoEU, 2006)The four key objectives are in close connection with the aims of sustainable tourism. (Table 1)

The *Hungarian sustainable development strategy* does not discuss the issue of tourism separately, which cannot be considered as a weakness because it is the task of sectorial strategies, policies and plans. However, it includes the principles which were also specified by the WTO. (NFÜ-KvVM, 2007) Therefore the Hungarian national sustainable development strategy provides a suitable background for the tourism development strategies and policies.

In the following part we intend to analyse the connection between the principles of Hungarian national strategy for sustainable development and the aims for the agenda for sustainable tourism formulated by WTO.

The *National Tourism Development Strategy of Hungary 2005–2013* was published in 2005 following a two-year-old preparatory period. Its major objective is to improve the citizens’ quality of life in the country through tourism.

The strategy starts with a situation analysis based on five pillars (competitiveness and quality of life, supply of tourism, conditions of tourist reception, human resource, and finally the institutional background), while “sustainable development” is discussed as a separate issue among the so-called horizontal topics. Although the WTO recommends

that sustainability should not be treated as a separate section of a strategy but the principles reappear all throughout the document, as we will see. According to the situation analysis sustainable tourism development exists only theoretically in Hungary, as long as there is no set of indicators to assess whether a tourism product or a destination operates in a sustainable way. Other topics of the analysis, like social equity and competitiveness are also in close connection with the requirements of sustainable development.

Obviously, the most significant parts of the strategy deal with the future vision and the strategic objectives for tourism development. In these two parts we can find references to all of the aims specified by the WTO. As far as the future vision of tourism is concerned, in the section entitled “Possibility and responsibility” quality is highly emphasized. On the one hand quality is related to the tourism product, which entails the introduction of a reliable quality assurance system and a widely accepted quality label. On the other hand, quality should be a major characteristic of people’s life. Quality of life is ensured by the local communities, who participate in the decision making processes and take advantage of the benefits of tourism. The future vision includes references to other issues that are milestones on the way to sustainable development, such as carrying capacity of the environment, partnership among the stakeholders, decision-making at the most appropriate level complying with the principle of subsidiarity, the government’s role in regulating the industry, etc.

The document defines the strategic directions of tourism development as well, which definitely correspond to the aims of sustainability. Firstly, it is noted that the measures to achieve sustainable development have not been taken yet so the strategy has a great significance. The impacts of tourism on the quality of life is discussed in connection with sustainability, and it is divided into three main parts. First, the social impacts are mentioned: the local control is encouraged in tourism planning, and social equity is promoted by the participation of disadvantaged social groups in tourism activities. The aims of local prosperity and economic viability are related to the topics of rural development, creation of job opportunities and retention of the local population. Secondly, contribution to the conservation of the Hungarian cultural heritage is discussed, which contains references to the aims of cultural richness and physical integrity. The third part deals with the environmental impacts of tourism. The aims of biological diversity, resource efficiency and environmental purity are clearly related to this part of the strategic directions.

The aim of visitor fulfilment appears in another chapter of the strategy, which discusses the possibilities for improving the conditions of tourist reception. Finally, the issue of employment quality is closely related to the chapter on human resource development.

4. Conclusion

First of all, we could find a strong link between the principles of the Renewed EU SDS and the twelve aims for the agenda for sustainable tourism. (CoEU, 2006, WTO-UNEP, 2005) The four key objectives are in close connection with the aims of sustainable tourism.

Secondly, the Hungarian sustainable development strategy does not discuss the issue of tourism separately, however it includes the principles which were also specified by the WTO. (NFÜ-KvVM, 2007) Therefore the Hungarian national sustainable development strategy provides a suitable background for the tourism development strategies and policies.

Finally, it can be concluded that the Hungarian National Tourism Development Strategy reflects the aims of sustainable tourism specified by the WTO. However, further investigation is required to decide whether monitoring the implementation of the strategies could be efficient without a set of universally accepted indicators.

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