

## Tourism and Sustainability

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### Abstract

*This opinion piece comes to perform a brief SWOT analysis on both conceptually and the realities in the field. The sustainability, the sustainable development and the sustainable tourism are not so new concepts as they are still in the process of defining their place, role and content, seen from a dual theory-practical perspective.*

*Without going into depth analysis, the opinion piece is dedicated to aspects that, if properly nuanced, can be of maximum interest and usefulness.*

**Key words:** sustainable tourism, complex systems, strategies, stability, chaos

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### 1. Introduction

The sustainability coordinates represent, in the authors' opinion, the answer of a general property of the paradigms in science, that is the adaptation and correlation with and to the new coordinates of reality and at the same time, to the rhythm imposed by the other sciences.

The issues of the transition from the sustainability approaches to the sustainable tourism development are a process that is not straightforward, raising a number of challenges but, as practice shows, the process has begun to run at different speeds and with greater or lesser success, but with success nevertheless.

The sustainability and impact of disruptive processes will be, from now on, essential coordinates for the development of tourism, on all its levels and forms.

When they are related to the impact of descriptive processes, we cannot fail to refer to the rapid computerization processes of more and more of the activities usually considered to be "external" to tourism (general, specific information, structured on various levels of tourist utility, integration in different data bases, update, communication, etc.). Communications also integrate the same area of approach, an increasingly sophisticated activity, with shorter response times and with or without a distinct organization, with consistent investments, etc.

It is becoming increasingly clear that tourism, as we have repeatedly shown, is becoming not only a beneficiary but also a catalyst for (global, continental, regional, national, local) development, in addition to the fact that, worldwide, it provides about 300 million jobs (between 9% and 10% of the total global workforce) (UNWTO, 2018).

Beyond the approaches that have become more or less classic, the authors' opinion is that sustainability is a sufficiently complex and difficult to optimize issue and due to the fact that it refers not only to relationships with the natural environment but also with the social environment, through a series of qualitative aspects that are intrinsically related to education, culture and traditions, the triptych which any civilized social construction is based upon.

That things are this way and not otherwise, is evidenced by the surrounding realities, which are not always pleasant, on the contrary. In these conditions, it is obvious that talking only about strategies in tourism is no longer enough.

## 2. Theoretical background

In this chapter we will add in discussions different conceptual challenges in tourism, sustainable development and how it manifests itself in practice, how these aspects interfere with the concept of complexity.

Beyond its pleasant and relaxing aspects (as absolutely necessary characteristics, intrinsic to the tourism activity, whatever it may be and wherever it is practiced), the tourism of the 21st century has among its concerns, the more and more "dense" and amplified negative aspects, extended on all levels of sustainability in tourism: the economic, social and ecological levels.

Objectively, tourism becomes the object of specific policies, with vast areas of coverage and time horizons beyond the medium term.

***We emphasize these aspects because the short-term, the seasonal tourism, the speculative tourism is not compatible in any form and at any way with the sustainable tourism*** (Robinson, 2004).

Alongside with the ecological and social sustainability, the economic sustainability must be taken into consideration as a sum of activities intended to ensure the resources and the continuity of the specific activities.

Also, in the hypothetical report of "hierarchy", of ecological sustainability versus the anthropocentric sustainability, the authors believe that the first has priority and that the priority that has been provided to the second, for centuries in a row, brought us in the threshold of the ecological catastrophes that we all live today, but that only some of us "deserve" (Gallopín, 2003).

Tourism, if the processes of modernization and exaggerated diversification of its forms continue beyond certain limits, tends to become an energetically active, highly polluting activity, with an ecological footprint difficult to estimate.

It is estimated that by 2050 world tourism will require the following (Cabrini, 2015):

- an increase in energy consumption by 55-60%;
- an increase in greenhouse gas emissions by 30-35%;
- an increase of water consumption by about 50-55% and
- an increase in the "production" of waste by over 250-260%.

It should be noted that these "increases" have nothing to do with certain characteristics of tourism (exclusive tourism versus mass tourism, urban tourism versus rural tourism, mountain tourism versus summery tourism, land tourism versus naval tourism, etc.).

It is estimated that not the quality of tourism services will be decisive word but the "quality" of tourism, i.e. what is already known and included under the concept of "education" of the tourist (both the natural, normal and necessary education for the responsible acquisition of the tourist act and service).

***Tourism will no longer be just relaxation and pleasure but also education and responsibility on the part of the client.***

Therefore (and this is not big news), the field of tourism will simply be assailed by a series of challenges whose overcoming will require new ways of thinking and behaving and also new specifications on the final payment invoice. We bring to your attention only a few of these challenges that will experience a diversification and an explosion in a variety of forms of manifestation that should not take us by surprise:

- The diminishing and/or canceling, as the case may be, of the negative effects of the tourist activities. Perhaps this idea should be emphasized in the sense of drawing up lists of general and specific benchmarks of such effects (and activities) so that each type of tourism (or class of tourist services) has and observes a "guideline" that is made available free of charge to tourists. Necessarily, the "guidelines" or restrictions will be specific content for the mountain tourism, for the naval tourism, or for cruise ships and obviously, they will differ from the recommendations for the urban or sports tourism.
- Maintaining a desirable balance between the demands and the (perhaps sometimes exaggerated) claims of tourists and the possibilities of tourist units seen precisely in terms of ecological and social sustainability. For example, tourists come to the mountains not only to enjoy the landscapes but also to breathe (at least theoretically) cleaner air. And if, out of

the blue, 30 motorcyclists show up and want to "scrape" routes through the woods, after 2-3 hours of this type of having "fun", the dream of cleaner air must obviously be postponed sine die.

- The prevalence of financial criteria in relation to any other criteria is a challenge, in a euphemistic expression, in the idea of achieving and maintaining the balance between the three levels of sustainability. Perhaps in this area, analyzes targeting *different tax systems for different degrees of implementation and compliance with the requirements of sustainable tourism* should be detailed.
- Last but not least, intensifying the transfer of knowledge and experiences on the promotion and development of sustainable tourism would be if not part of the solution, at least an important catalyst in the attempt to expand the forms and practices of sustainable tourism.

We believe that a legally supported attitude which considers climate change, the energy crisis and the irreplaceable resource as factors of stress, pressure on decision-makers and strategic and operational decisions specific to tourism activities (this is in fact the vision of the transatlantic school) – is at least inappropriate. If even when the hotel is ravaged by hurricanes and the hailstone breaks the lens of your glasses, one does not realize the true size of the problems, it is very clear that we no longer have to wonder why space of solutions narrows with a dizzying speed.

We mentioned earlier that for sustainable tourism, the usefulness and effectiveness of strategies must be complemented by well-founded policies, for at least two major reasons:

- The sustainable tourism is the result of the composition of the interference of strategies in five major areas: the ecological, economic, social, cultural and political and administrative area. However, the preoccupation of the economic agents from the dominant tourism is known and obvious in the areas regarding the financial component of the economic field, on the legislative component of the political and administrative field and, if there is time left, also on some elements from the social field. The rest of the fields, with their dynamic and very difficult issues, if are not taken over by the academic environment, remain abandoned in an area of forgotten statements and commitments. *The need for closer collaboration, for cooperation that does not begin and end in conferences and symposia* is one of the main coordinates of future strategies in this field.
- As we pointed out above, as a result of the composition and interaction between five major areas of activity, willingly or unwillingly the sustainable tourism is moving rapidly towards the area of analysis of the sciences of complexity, a science whose paradigm is based upon concepts such as evolution, the boundaries of transition phases, the chaos theory, the (positive and negative) feedback, the nonlinearity, etc.

### 3. Research methodology

In order to achieve the research objectives, in this article we used a qualitative analysis of the general conceptual framework starting from well-defined elements such as: sustainable tourism, complex systems, strategies, stability, chaos.

Therefore, in an inductive manner, we aim to discuss convergent aspects of the concepts outlined above with an emphasis on the practical dimension of sustainable tourism.

From the perspective of complexity theory, the environment and organization are nonlinear processes, which makes it very difficult to analyze the cause-effect chain. Therefore, the simplistic approaches must be replaced by behavioral (nonlinear) models of the analyzed systems (ethnographic approaches, diagnosis, etc.). Without going into details, let us recall the essence of the concepts stated above, as these concepts are specific to the theory of complexity.

The self-organization refers to the quality of systems to spontaneously form structures (associations, civic groups, etc.) that group the interested parties to dynamically optimize relations with the environment (given the property of open systems to reorganize when they reach critical points of instability, whose behavior is independent of the stimuli coming from the economical, social and ecological environment) (Berian, 2010).

*The resilience and stability: the resilience* is a measure of the probability of survival of a system in hostile environmental conditions, while *the stability* is the property of the system not to destructure and to fulfill its functionality in given environmental conditions.

***The emergence and the co-evolution:*** the emergence is a sum of properties of a system that cannot be found in any of its components/subsystems. For example, we could consider an association made up of several economic agents in tourism and which obtained an investment loan, which could not have been achieved separately by any of those entities considered separately. ***The emergence is therefore a property of complex systems that allows them to reduce entropy.***

The co-evolution may occur in the presence of the emergency, as the example above indicates.

***The frontier of chaos*** comes in response, in a way, to the denial of the positive qualities of the emergency. For example, tourism specialists, especially among practitioners, know that there was a time with a lot of investment in the accommodation capacity (especially in the mountains) which subsequently generated collapses not only in prices but also in the degree of occupation of each capacity, followed by many bankruptcies.

***The positive feedback*** generates change while the negative feedback contributes to maintaining the stability of complex systems. The positive feedback describes the widening gap between results and expectations (forecasts).

Such behaviors may occur, for example, in the tourism workforce where, initially, through specialized programs, many young people were attracted to this field of activity, who later on emigrated to the West in large numbers, which created a great gap and which was perpetuated between forecasts (expectations) and realities.

#### 4. Findings

The sustainable development has moved out of the declarative zone into the realm of current practices and everyday realities, even if in some areas of the planet (such as North America but also South America) it is still neglected or maintained in the area of (political and theoretical) declarations.

The sustainable development also has the attribute that it does not preferentially address one field or another but has imposed itself as a last minute necessity for all human actions and activities, and therefore in tourism.

And as in any other field, the contradictions induced by the "sustainable" concept also manifested themselves in the activity of tourism.

- ***The outsourcing*** of any kind can no longer be tolerated and should never be tolerated again. The rule according to which "the polluter pays and the one who destroys, compensates" is being implemented and generalized at a fast pace. The age according to which "the profit is mine and the costs are yours" has diluted a harmful practice of irresponsible and unsanctioned outsourcing in any way. It goes without saying that here is still much to be done, at least at the level of financial payments that do not yet inhibit enough the abusive behaviors of the big players, with huge financial resources on the tourism market (and not only).
- The speculation, which in a form of academic expression would favor the motivation of short-term actions over long-term ones, the maximization of profit based upon outsourcing and not the optimization of costs, would seem to go through hard times, taking into account the irreconcilable opposition with the principles and rules of the sustainable tourism development.

In view of the above, we will try to develop and state our own definition of ***sustainable tourism as that form of tourism in which speculative actions and outsourcing are minimized and in addition, the ecological and social factors prevail over the other specified*** (financial, administrative, political) ***factors***.

The realistic question is this: is it possible to practice such a form of tourism on a large scale in the context of globalization and the pursuit of profit at any cost that it has encouraged, supported and promoted? The obvious answer is: No! ***Here are also the consequences: the solutions should have been applied if not yesterday, they should be applied today, at the latest. There is no tomorrow!***

There would also be a set of (not necessarily generally applicable) rules and principles that legislators and operators should integrate into the current regulations and practices under the auspices of severe sanctions in case of assumption and non-compliance. Among these rules we

could state the rule of partnership, impact management, the principles of complexity, flexibility, monitoring, sustainability, the "polluter-pays" principle, the "fair" payments in case of non-compliance with the rules and principles, the self-sustainability, the principle of quality practices in tourism.

It is obvious that without concrete contents, the sustainable tourism also becomes a theme of already trivial symposia and conferences and, in addition, there is a risk of turning from tourism into an organized form of "regulated" looting.

These clarifications are made because the differences between sustainability and sustainable development, that is between concept and action exist and must be known.

In principle, the concept of sustainable development has come to complement an older concept aimed at protecting the environment and is, as we know, an agreed vision of using the natural, human and financial resources to respond optimally to both the intergenerational equity issues, as well as those of an ecological nature in the conditions of rational economic efficiency.

Why did we define this concept after that of sustainable tourism? For two reasons:

- The first reason relates to those emphasis made on reducing the speculative behavior as well as the outsourcing practices, thus resulting in a rational and "clean" behavior of the economic agents and the result can only be a rational profit obtained as an effect of a rational efficiency.
- Secondly, we had in mind the fact that although it is far from an excessively high degree of complexity, this paper is intended for specialists and connoisseurs.
- From the concept of sustainability to sustainable development, the road is both long and difficult because:
- If sustainability is a quality of the aggregate functioning of several interacting domains, the sustainable development is a process in itself, a projection of a beautiful theory into an ugly reality. The sustainability can be defined and imagined far from the specifics of one activity or another. The sustainable development, beyond a few common practical aspects, will be defined in a peculiar way for the extractive industry, in a very different other way for the petrochemical industry and completely differently for the tourism and services industry.
- Conceptually, sustainability can last as formulations, definitions and theoretical elaborations for a longer time, thus having a sufficiently long stability, which one cannot state about the sustainable development, which is subject to continuous changes and permanent innovative processes.
- Both the concept of sustainability and the concept of sustainable development are seen by the authorities and the dominant private sector as stressors, which usually lead them to short-term actions, while the academic and civic environment address it, but as compulsory, strictly necessary anthropic regulatory factors, which are decisive in defining the perspectives of the capacity of the human civilization to resist within the boundaries defined by a "living" biosphere...
- In principle, sustainability gives priority to ecological issues, to the issues related to maintaining the accessibility of scarce and irreplaceable resources necessary for the existence of life in general (air, water, soil, forests, etc.), while the sustainable development emphasizes the anthropocentric vision and the role of increasing the collaboration of different categories of activities and communities; it is not being able to satisfactorily answer the question whether money is a means or a goal or both, and if so, who ultimately has the decisive role?
- Although far from provoking emotions that are proportionate to the size and severity of the problems, the sustainable development has also taken a decisive step in the political arena, becoming a weapon of attack for some and a weapon of defense for others, which will certainly lead to if not to the delay in the adoption of decisions and solutions, at least to an unacceptable slowdown in the development of projects and programs in the context in which, as days go by, nature is increasingly aggressive, showing us relentlessly that the time for solutions has expired.

On the other hand, sustainability essentially aims at addressing the system and problems of a social and ecological nature more, if not exclusively, theoretically and perhaps methodologically (by the bravest and most involved parties).

## 5. Conclusions

Undoubtedly, tourism is still, unjustly, marginalized amongst other research activities and scientific approaches, perhaps also because tourism suffers from a relative conceptual inconsistency. Let us remember that on certain segments of theoretical approaches there is, for example, an inflation of terms (such as green tourism, geotourism, ecological tourism, sustainable tourism, etc.).

Thus the lack of rigor makes its presence felt and from a random presence becomes a permanent... presence.

Also, the divergence of opinions at any cost has more than once taken the place of freedom of thought and the creation of elaborate theoretical substance, original and with application potential benefit. Therefore the marginalization of tourism is not accidental both in scientific approaches and in the support that can come from the political world.

The heterogeneous nature of the activities, the fragmentation and atomization of the field both practically and from the perspective of academic approaches generate situations of irrational antagonism in the sense that often, most can confuse even those who claim to be supporters of tourism in general and those of the sustainable tourism in particular.

We end this short journey through the opportunities and difficulties of sustainable tourism, emphasizing once again that:

- The sustainable mountain tourism can be a vector, a pivot of sustainable tourism in general, both theoretically, methodologically and in terms of concrete achievements.
- The conceptual and methodological road is not easier than a difficult mountain route in severe winter conditions but there are scientific resources and institutional openness so that, systematically, remarkable progress can be made, both at the department and in the field.
- The sciences of complexity will be the foundation of any theoretical and practical construction in the field of sustainable tourism.

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