

ECO-TRENDS IN MODERN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT*

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Abstract: *Some modern trends in the development of tourism appear, one related to environmental care, too. Environmental care is an important and indispensable condition for achieving sustainable development.*

The purpose of this publication is to define the environmental trends in tourism and to examine some of the aspects in their manifestation. Ecological trends in tourism have a variety of manifestations. This paper examines part of the manifestations of ecological trends in tourism in the world, Europe and Bulgaria. Their benefits are the focus of the study.

Keywords: *eco-trends, eco-innovations, sustainability*

1. INTRODUCTION

The environmental problem is one of the global problems of humankind. Tourism is an industry that uses significant natural tourism resources. It has long been considered that this is relatively harmless to the environment. But with increasing tourist consumption, conflicts are increasingly emerging between the tourist industry and the natural environment. The increasing interest in natural tourism resources poses risks from:

- exceeding their capacity - the number of visitors is greater than the capacity allowance (calculated on the basis of area, length, volume, etc.) of the respective resource;
- overload - the number of visitors is greater than the allowable capacity according to the capacity of the respective resource, as the visitors put pressure on the environment through their activities (household waste, harmful gases from the means of transport, soil leaching, crushing of the vegetation, etc.);
- demolition - e.g. the breakdown of stalactites and stalagmites may lead to disturbance of the ecological equilibrium associated with swamps of water basins, extinction of sensitive species of plants and animals;
- degradation - changes in the natural environment have led to permanent negative changes and often irreversible loss of tourist attractiveness; [2]

For the purposes of this study, general science methods such as analysis and synthesis are used. Through analysis, the object of the study is dissociated into constituent parts by abstracting the links between them. On this basis, the facts can be systematized. Synthesis is a process of identifying the links between the elements and signs to create an accurate idea and a complete picture of reality. Normative documents and literary sources have been analyzed. Other methods of theoretical knowledge such as induction, deduction, and generalization are also applied.

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2. THE ESSENCE OF ECO-TRENDS

Eco-trends are related to the pursuit of environmental friendliness and care for nature. So eco-trends in tourism are newly introduced and are aimed not only at a responsible attitude towards nature but also at improving the quality of the tourist product. They thus contribute to sustainable development through solutions that reduce the impact of tourism on the environment and exploited resources and ensure more effective use.

An important part of environmental trends is eco-innovation. Implementation of eco-innovations in industry is often associated with increased costs. However, the essence of such innovations requires the most cost-effective solutions to reduce the impact of tourism growth on resource use and the environment and seeks to use these resources more effectively. The aim of eco-innovations in tourism is to improve existing business models, which would benefit businesses, customers, state bodies and local communities through job creation, improved living conditions and ecosystems protection. With appropriate investment, tourism can become even more profitable, labor-intensive and environmentally friendly. Considering that the number of international tourists grows more and more important than ever, it is now necessary to justify and motivate eco-innovations as a catalyst for sustainable tourism and stable tourism growth.

Eco-innovations increase resource and energy **efficiency** by making available more sustainable sources, recycling more of the production waste and products and using more acceptable methods to deal with unnecessary waste materials and pollution. They are not limited to individual technologies, products, processes and equipment, systems, and know-how, but they also include certain behaviors and attitudes, organizational and managerial approaches.

3. THE NEED FOR ECO SOLUTIONS IN TOURISM

Competitiveness in tourism is closely linked to three main objectives - development, integration and conservation. It is difficult to talk about any economic growth without storing tourist resources and incentives for civil and corporate responsibility. Innovation in this respect brings significant benefits by helping to increase the sustainability of the tourism sector - meeting the needs of society in a way that can continue indefinitely in the future without harming or exhausting natural resources, meeting modern needs and exposing risk the right of present and future generations to live in a preserved and improved environment and nature.

Focusing on sustainable development and in particular on green innovations can reduce environmental damage, reduce costs and increase the competitive advantages of any tourist enterprise or tourist destination and, at the same time, improve their reputation - respectively the attitude of stakeholders.

The faster development of eco-technologies is unthinkable without innovation. Eco-innovations expand the possibilities and allow the production of new and/or sophisticated products and the achievement of environmental performance with less inbound operations. This ensures the independence of economic growth from natural exhaustion of capital and environmental pollution (for example, towards more and cleaner resource-efficient technologies). Some innovations can directly increase resilience to sudden environmental changes.

Implementing innovations that promote wider dissemination of existing technologies by adapting them to local conditions is extremely important for all countries. This usually leads to a reduction in production costs and an increase in the competitiveness of enterprises and is at a lower risk than other innovations. The introduction of changes and the use of novelties in the form of upgraded technologies, products and services, production, service and management naturally contribute to expanding existing markets and creating new ones.

The tourism industry is vigorously developing, using obvious, surface-based development reserves, and needs a new impetus in seeking innovation to defend its own positions in competitive struggle. The ability to attract the attention of stakeholders provides stable income and business progress. It is entirely possible to achieve this by applying eco-innovations to distinguish the particular organization from others. The eco-innovations in tourism can provide significant economic, social and environmental benefits. They contribute to sustainable development by reducing costs, increasing income, creating jobs and increasing resource efficiency.

The arguments for such an assertion lie in the essence of the tourism industry, whose development is directly dependent on the factors of the environment and the quality of natural resources. The constant pressure on the environment by both the industry and the other economic sectors is a serious threat to themselves, to global public production and to society as a whole. The overbuilding, waste water generation and solid household waste, irresponsible use of natural resources (relief, climate, water, biodiversity and landscape) affect environmental components and lead to serious environmental problems that either endanger the tourist site itself or reach a larger scale and reflect on the reputation of the whole destination.

The modern concept of sustainable tourism development requires maintaining a balance between five important elements without giving priority to any of them. These are: economy, pleasure from tourism, society, culture and the environment. The distinctive elements of this activity are: compliance with the permissible environmental load within which human activity should be sustained; awareness of the interdependence between economic activity and the environment; long-term planning and policy [3]. Surveys and analyzes of modern ecotourism policies and green innovations are seen as a new recreational opportunity, combining economic and social benefits with environmental responsibility in tourism [4]. Environmental responsibility is one of the main factors influencing global competitiveness of tourism.

The number of visitors to ecologically sensitive sites is constantly increasing due to the growing interest in tourist attractions. The main problems arising from this fact are related to the use of a large number of motor vehicles and the concentration of people during the peak periods, and this is particularly true for the attractive places to visit in the contiguity of the cities. Natural parks and other protected areas are endangered by the unending human flow, from the pursuit of more outdoor activities in them, as well as from the construction of new tourist sites on their periphery. Wildlife attracts tourists irresistibly, and this often leads to irreversible damage - erosion and soil destruction, threatening the natural population of animals and plant species in these areas etc.

4. ECO PRACTICES

The processes related to the sustainable development of tourist destinations correspond to the identification of good environmental practices and the sustainability of their territories and products. It is necessary to study and draw up such practices to be more widely applied in

tourist areas. An example of this is the eco-movement that has begun to create new marketing approaches to gain a larger eco market share. In recent years, this trend has been widespread in the hospitality industry - more and more hotels become greener and offer eco-variants of service and accommodation. This is usually related to certification and eco-labels.

There are several voluntary regional national and international eco-labeling programs in the tourism industry. Some of them are verified and others act on the principle of good repute without any certificates. Certified programs include the US Green Seal program and the Danish Green Key; the US Green Building Program (LEED) (Environmental and Energy Guide); the application of ISO 14 001 in tourism related to the policy of sustainable and responsible tourism at local and national level, etc.

The introduction of the Environmental Management System according to the requirements of ISO 14 001 allows tourist complexes to control adverse impacts on the following environmental aspects that affect customer preferences:

- air cleanness - improvement of its quality within the respective tourist site;
- pollution of the environment caused by transport - providing environmentally friendly transport;
- noise reduction;
- reducing water consumption and improving its quality by controlling the pollution of natural water sources;
- recycling of waste;
- reducing excessive electricity consumption;
- use of cleaning and laundry detergents that less pollute the environment and so on.

Certificates are also being developed under the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the Convention on Biological Diversity and the General Agreement on Trade in Services. There are also private schemes introduced by international hotel chains to provide the same quality service throughout the chain across the world. For different types of organizations in the field of tourism different specifications apply:

- for beach equipment, yacht marinas and yachts - Blue Flag Campaign
- for hotels - ECOTEL Certification;
- for camping sites - Eco-Picto;
- for tour operators, hotels and tourist destinations - Green Globe Certification;
- for nature tourism areas - PAN Parks Initiative and others.

There are several voluntary systems in Bulgaria to certify the sustainable development of tourism enterprises. Some of them belong to already mentioned large-scale international certification programs and/or specialized eco-labels. The National Ecolabel scheme is also one of the possibilities for obtaining eco-label for hotels in our country. (The Bulgarian mark is a stylized leaf, the handle of which depicts a small handwritten letter „e”). The specific requirements are defined by an order of the Minister of Environment and Waters. They are identical to the EU award criteria laid down in decision 273 of 2003.

The Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism (BAAT) works with the Green House certificate. By mid-2018, nearly 50 guest houses and family hotels have been awarded, which have successfully passed an assessment of compatibility with European criteria for quality accommodation where the negative impact on nature is minimized. The hosts are often families of the local community who know their end and are able to present to the guests the beauty of

the surrounding nature, the charm of the traditional lifestyle and the peculiarities of the local cuisine. They strive to save their natural resources, not to pollute the environment, and encourage guests to travel in a responsible manner with respect for nature. For the fans of a healthy and sustainable way of life, BAAT also publishes a club card „Guest in a Green House”, which grants concessions to the bearer and his family in sites with the brand, as well as in commercial outlets and institutions with a policy of responsibility towards the nature and health of people.

One of the major consumers of resources and products in tourism branch is the accommodation sector. Consumption includes land, building materials (paint, wood, textiles, etc.), installations and furnishings, cleaners, food and equipment (air conditioners, computers, elevators, ovens, etc.). It follows daily electricity and water consumption. The hotels are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, year after year and use electricity every day for general cleaning and guest services. Such large-scale current consumption of products and resources requires environmental action to be taken to protect the environment and preserve resources for future generations [5].

The implementation of a variety of eco-innovations in the hotel industry began as early as the end of the twentieth century. Gradually their use is gaining popularity and is expanding. Today, this is a widespread practice which is a carrier of modern trends in the development of the hotel industry. New technologies are introduced not only because of nature care, but also for relieving and reducing manual labor as well as lowering costs. Innovative solutions are important for increasing the uniqueness of the hotel as well as competitiveness. The most cost-effective innovations that meet consumer demand are at the same time sources of additional income and/or cost-cutting too. Hospitality savings are an important prerequisite for increasing profits. They are not synonymous with low category and low quality. On the contrary, more and more high-class hotels use a number of savings (photocells, solar correctors, room cards, etc.). Even many of the high-tech innovations are available only on high-class hotel chains. Economical hotel management is being applied carefully. It is not at the expense of the luxury offered.

In connection with these trends appear so-called eco-hotels (green hotels, bio hotels). The accent in their product is on environmental friendliness and nature conservation. They are built from environmentally friendly materials, use extensive raw materials and recycling technologies and fit harmoniously into the environment. They are particularly valuable for untapped tourism resources. Their offer is related to various forms of alternative tourism and above all ecotourism.

Eco-hospitality is already a fact on a global scale. Nilsson-Andersen and Andersen [12] are looking at examples of green practices of hospitality in Austria, Portugal, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Russia, Korea, Mexico. These authors also provide digital data about the growing popularity of green innovations. Carlsen, Liburd, Edwards, Forde [11], except on Scandinavia, also focus on Western Australia, Sri Lanka, Ghana, and the United States (Arizona and Colorado).

In connection with these trends is the creation of the Green Hotels Association (GHA), which has been based in Houston since 1995, which unites all hotels around the world that have decided to accept the ecocase and be part of environmental protection (the list includes over 500 hotels and continues to grow). GHA does not certify or recommend certification: „Certification is very expensive and time consuming. The Certification Organization wants to re-register each year or two years - spending thousands of dollars and spending many hours again. There are over 800 different green certifications worldwide. If the guest does not understand what the particular certification logo or sheet of paper displayed in the lobby is, what does it mean?”[14]. Part of the

initiatives of the Association are the introduction of energy-saving measures (energy management systems, energy saving lights, ceiling fans, lighting cards, motion sensors in public places, etc.), water saving techniques (showers and toilets with low level of flow, cards that guests leave on the bed if they do not want their sheets to be changed or towels collected, etc.), recycling of waste, cooperation with innovative suppliers offering green goods and services, etc. GHA seeks to attract more hotel organizations and familiarize them with the good practices already in place around the world. „Being green is already number one. Being green means automatically higher value of the service. Being green means the doors open wide in front of guests who come back and forth. Being green means retention of staff for longer because people realize that management takes care of their health and well-being.” With this address, the Association calls on hoteliers to think about the ecocase. Upon joining, members receive a 161-page guidebook with comprehensive guidelines and ideas, capabilities and techniques to conserve natural resources, reduce costs, information on the impact of a hotel on the tourist destination, and so on.

Greece, Italy, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Great Britain, Portugal are part of the Greens Association in Europe, but many hotels and restaurants from other countries are also included in the ecocase, though are not members of the organization. For example, the French hotel industry is increasingly focusing on ecology - from the luxury hotel to the country cottage. AFP (Agence France Presse) reports some of the measures taken by hoteliers and restaurateurs: wood heating; buckets for separate garbage collection in the rooms; a kitchen made up of local products only; fountains with regulated flow rate; thermal dehumidifier for waste treatment (the technology allows the production of floor washing water as well as the dry substance used for fertilizing), etc. The number of green homes in the „Gîtes de France“ chain has doubled for a year and they are already a hundred, while at the same time 200 more environmental projects are being built. „Le Fouquet’s” chic restaurant in Paris has set itself the goal of reducing its carbon dioxide emissions by 20% by 2020. Its customers can use hybrid cars or an electric-powered moped to move to the restaurant.

An expression of the growing greening in tourism is the promotion of a variety of activities practiced in a natural environment. This quest is reflected in ecotourism. The **ecotourism** is increasingly popular with its annual growth of between 10% and 30% for different parts of the world (UNWTO). But because it is too good to be fashionable, there are cases of misuse of this concept in the world practice. Ecotourism is already perceived as an alternative to mass tourism - it uses the natural resources without respecting them and without taking care of their preservation. In ecotourism, environmental protection is a conscious need that guarantees the conservation of resources and their use by future generations. This is why it is often referred to as sustainable tourism, but this is not quite accurate. Sustainable tourism is a wider concept covering all types of tourism where the environment is not destroyed but protected.

The International Ecotourism Association describes it as „a responsible journey to natural areas that preserves the natural environment and contributes to the well-being of local people.” These natural areas are usually unaffected or affected to a very limited extent by humans. In addition to contributing to the well-being of local people, ecotourism also has a positive impact on visitors. Together with his recreational significance, he also has a cognitive and educational value. Visitors typically have a high educational status and show increased interest in local nature and local communities, respecting differences and seeking to preserve their authenticity.

Ecotourism places are typically protected areas such as national and nature parks, protected local areas, natural landmarks, and specially designed ecopaths. These places are preferred be-

cause of the fact that their natural environment is the least changed. The ecopath is a walkway including „highly attractive natural resources and has a very strong presence of biotic component” [13]. The purpose of eco-paths is to reveal inaccessible natural beauties. The construction of tourism infrastructure for ecotourism must meet a number of requirements. It should fit harmoniously into the natural environment, be made of natural materials (e.g. wood) and not disturb the natural equilibrium in the assimilated territories. Apart from eco-paths, there are also hiking trails, bike paths, extreme trails, shelters, bivouacs, black roads and parking spaces. Infrastructural elements accompanying the eco-paths are railings and fences, ladders and bridges that provide access and safety to visitors as well as information and signboards and signs. There are also arbors, sheds, benches, picnic tables, fireplaces, fountains, quays, rope structures, children’s and sports facilities. Waste collection is organized through bins, which may be separate. Some eco-paths also have toilets that can be compost.

Innovative solutions have a wide scope for building observation sites. There are a wide variety of architectural solutions and designs worldwide. It is extremely important to select materials that have to ensure safety on the edge of rock wreaths and slopes, waterfalls, water courses, etc. In connection with this, the preferred materials are metal (for strength) and glass (for visibility). Not only the places that are being promoted, but also the observation sites themselves become a tourist attraction.

As a good example of eco-innovations, other modern infrastructure such as rope gardens, cable trolleys, rope routes, hanging bridges, tree-walking facilities are also considered [9]. All of them are an expression of the desire to include tourist attractions in the natural environment. They provide exciting experiences for visitors and do not disturb the natural balance.

5. PLACE OF ECO-TRENDS IN EUROPEAN AND BULGARIAN TOURISM

The promotion of green innovations and the realization of their economic and environmental potential is one of the main objectives of the **Europe 2020** strategy, where green growth is at the heart of the European Commission’s Competitiveness Development Plan. The recovery of European economies from the crisis has delayed legislation in this other priority area, but in the long run, the intentions to ensure higher standards of environmental protection and the promotion of environmental behavior in industry and society are confirmed.

Developing the concept of eco-innovations in the European Union and developing policies for its implementation stems from their economic significance. The value of public procurement engaged in these investments amounts to 19% of the EU’s gross domestic product per year, mainly in sectors with relatively high environmental impact (office equipment, building components, means of transport) and services (maintenance of buildings, transport services, cleaning and catering services and construction) [10]. Green Public Procurement, in times of economic crisis and budget cuts, has come to the fore as a panacea for many problems, or as a promising policy instrument whose benefits have been neglected or not sufficiently taken into account in the past. This type of procedures is expected to reduce pollution and damage to the environment as well as to reduce the costs that society needs to address these detrimental effects and their consequences. The reasons for this are clear and measurable. The award of eco-contracts creates prerequisites for increasing energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, recycling packaging waste, controlling the use of hazardous chemicals, sustainable forest management and farmland. In the long run, expectations are to reach a „critical mass” in the demand for end-to-end and intermediate markets for more sustainable goods and services, for example in

the use of electric vehicles, environmentally friendly public transport, organic food, renewable energy, air conditioning, tailored to the most modern environmental solutions, etc. Green Public Procurement can also act as a strong incentive for eco-innovation [1].

The Bulgarian government is committed to promoting so-called green growth in order to achieve the EU's energy and climate goals too. Green growth requires either a reduction in the use of natural resources, or the maintenance of the same level of resource consumption and, at the same time, an increase in economic growth. To achieve this, it is necessary to develop and adopt new and advanced technologies, processes, methods and practices [6]. „Governors need to adopt a holistic approach that is consistent with the long-term economic and environmental goals of the state and is based on the current state of the economy. Each identified priority must be pursued through a variety of policies with ambitious but realistic objectives - subject to systematic monitoring to monitor progress and, accordingly, adjust the measures. Competent authorities should provide widely-accessible information on the benefits of green technology to both consumers and businesses.”[7]

Eco-innovations have great potential for increasing the competitiveness of the Bulgarian business. They are a sure way to keep economic growth out of the depletion of natural resources and the worsening of the state of the environment. Through the production of environmentally friendly products and the application of environmental technologies in their production cycles, companies can increase their competitiveness and enter new international value chains. Promoting and implementing green innovations in different economic sectors can also improve people's health, reduce resource use and environmental degradation, and increase security of energy supply. [8]

Given the comparatively lower level of economic development in Bulgaria compared to other EU Member States, this transformation requires serious social and political innovations in the country over a longer period.

Despite the significant progress, the innovative activities in Bulgarian tourism continue to face different obstacles: lack of awareness among tourists; insufficient awareness of the expected investment of entrepreneurs; limited access of micro and medium enterprises to finance; poor integration of policies with key sectors such as transport, energy and the environment. Wider adoption of strategic approaches to stimulate eco-innovations in tourism requires large horizontal and vertically coordinated policies.

6. CONCLUSION

The tourism industry is increasingly striving for a responsible attitude towards the environment. Environmental friendliness is realized through the introduction, promotion and application of green innovations. Their use is among the modern trends in the development of tourism. Eco-innovations in tourism are of a varied nature and include not only the high technology applied in, for example, economical hospitality but also architectural and landscape solutions for the harmonious co-existence of tourist sites and activities with the natural environment. Their application is associated with a number of benefits such as:

- tourist sites become more preferred and attractive;
- tourism businesses reduce their costs, making them more efficient and more cost-effective;
- real environmental care and the concept of sustainable tourism development;
- tourists are more satisfied with their responsible tourist experience.

The leading role in the introduction and application of eco-innovations in tourism belongs to the well-developed tourist destinations where there is a conscious need to preserve the natural environment as a necessary and indispensable condition for a sustainable tourism development. Many of them are in Europe, so it can be argued that “the old continent” has good practices in this respect. The tourism industry in Bulgaria is also increasingly striving for environmental friendliness. This is reflected not only in the application of new technologies but also in the use of natural materials, the desire to harmonize the new entities in the environment, etc.

In connection with the above-mentioned benefits, eco-innovations in tourism can be expected to expand and their nature to be diversified.

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