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Common Approach
Towards Sustainable Tourism



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ECOTOURISM AS A TOOL FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN DESTINATIONS

**Ecotourism as an Instrument for Poverty Reduction and its Role in the Circular Economy.
Ecotourism Destinations - Protected Areas for Economic Development.**



COMMUNITY-BASED ECOTOURISM – SUPPORTING LOCAL PEOPLE AND THEIR ECONOMIES

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INTRODUCTION

More and more local communities across the globe are struggling to maintain the uniqueness of the places they live in and at the same time to balance this with their economic development. Ecotourism may serve as a tool for enhancing quality of life, increasing opportunities for environmentally responsible economic development, and conserving fragile natural resources, cultural heritage and landscapes. At the grassroots level ecotourism is a tool to foster economic development based on local resources, improve the livelihoods of local residents and at the same time strengthens cultural and social identity and sense of a place.

ECOTOURISM AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Ecotourism is the most environmentally friendly form of tourism and is at the core of the concept of sustainable tourism. It is organized in areas which are rich in natural as well as cultural resources, the people who are involved in it have a high level of appreciation for the environment and a strong 'desire' to discover and learn, **while the profit that comes from ecotourist enterprises goes directly to the local community and drives local economies.** The three most important features of ecotourism which make it distinct from all other forms of tourism are:

1. Ecotourism is a form of active and in-depth exploration of areas which have superior natural, landscape and cultural value;
2. Ecotourism actively contributes to the protection of natural and cultural heritage;
3. Ecotourism is a part of the sustainable development of a region in that it brings real economic as well as societal benefits to local communities and improves the quality of life of their inhabitants.

All definitions of ecotourism underline its crucial role in supporting the well-being of local people. Ecotourism is about local communities. Ecotourism developed in parallel with other forms of sustainable tourism and in combination with healthy food production, traditional and artistic crafts and other services can be a powerful impulse for reinforcing the strategy of environmentally-friendly economic growth. First of all it brings direct economic benefits for local communities in rural areas and improves the quality of life (tourist expenditures are invested directly in the local economy). Also it actively strengthens local identity and sense of place (ecotourism is about telling stories of a place and its people). Furthermore, ecotourism empowers different generations, especially young people and women, maintaining the social equity in the region. Therefore we could describe ecotourism using both parallel terms – nature (and heritage) -based tourism as well as community-based tourism. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) identifies several important characteristics of ecotourism related to its social dimension (see below). Richard Denman (UK) in a report published by WWF International

recognizes that ecotourism is community-based tourism “where the local community has substantial control over, and involvement in, its development and management, and a major proportion of the benefits remain within the community”.

ECOTOURISM AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES BY UNWTO

- Involving appreciation not only for nature, but also of indigenous cultures;
- Containing education and interpretation;
- Minimizing negative impact on the natural and socio-cultural environment;
- Providing alternative income and employment for local communities;
- Increasing local and visitor awareness of conservation.

Source: Denman Richard, “Guidelines for Community-based Ecotourism Development”, WWF International, 2001, The Tourist Company.

It is essential to refer to the special role of ecotourism in protected areas and their buffer zones. Economic objectives deal with building the case for sustainable economic development in the most fragile, pristine and valuable regions of the world, which helps boost the national economy, tackle unemployment and raise funds for nature and landscape protection. Town and local government authorities lying within the boundaries or in buffer zones surrounding protected areas increasingly see the benefits for the local economy and community that come from making the most of being in a unique location. According to the World Council of Protected Areas of the IUCN, protected areas as the basic tools essential for protecting biodiversity cannot be run in isolation from regional development strategies and broader policies supporting sustainable development and spatial development that impact regions where these areas are located. Managing protected spaces has to go hand in hand with creating opportunities for and meeting the needs of local communities and the society at large, which benefits indirectly from the existence of legally protected areas. It is the core idea of the document called “Parks for Life” (see below).

“PARKS FOR LIFE”

In 1994 the World Council of Protected Areas of the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) developed an action plan for protected areas in Europe called “Parks for Life”. The action plan, which was founded on the premise that protected areas can only properly function if their management is tied and interlinked with regional, national and international socio-economic and political developments. In the first part of the „Parks for Life” publication, one can read about the important piece of the puzzle represented by ecotourism, because it is this form of tourism which offers **„tangible benefits, if sensibly developed on or near protected areas, especially since it embraces widely recognized natural and cultural values. A healthy and attractive natural environment is essential for the sustainability in the long-term of any form of tourism”.**

When we speak about community-based ecotourism it is important to mention its role in strengthening social equity, especially in so far as it empowers women. Ecotourism is a brilliant opportunity for women to grow both professionally and personally, while remaining a part of the local community where they live and work. Ecotourism can empower women in many ways. Its multidisciplinary concept can engage women with different skills, interests and passions.

Working in an ecotourism setting can be an important added value to everyday life. Ecotourism is based on local resources, heritage, uniqueness of a place. That is why it allows women to find the sustainable livelihood that brings not only the economic benefits but also the *joie de vivre* and satisfaction. Ecotourism also links women with the place they live, which benefits the whole community and all its generations.

WOMEN AND ECOTOURISM

Women are very often the natural leaders in their local society, they are very sensitive to the issues related to the environment, society, heritage, and sense of place. Ecotourism in a broad context, connected with other activities (such as sustainable farming, handicraft, art, education, etc.), can provide opportunities for women to find a sustainable way of living. Participation of women in the development of sustainable tourism industry at the local level is very diverse – from running accommodation services, cafes, restaurants, and shops, to working with handicraft, art and food processing, guiding and interpretation. Apart from running small businesses, many are involved in tourism development while working for cultural centers, municipalities, NGOs, and schools. Ecotourism can be a perfect tool to initiate women's active participation in sustainable community development. Building international networks and projects is one of the best ways to overcome the challenges that women encounter, as it allows them to have access to more information, as well as the opportunity to show their work to broader audiences outside their local community.

Sustainable tourism, including ecotourism and heritage tourism, can mobilize local communities – encouraging enterprise, creating green jobs and additional revenue streams, restoring and protecting traditional vocations and styles of life. The aim is to improve the livelihoods of local residents, spreading the principles and support for sustainable tourism and making sure that various groups in the community and society at large can reap the benefits.

Promoting local products, art, handicraft and local traditions; landscape stewardship initiatives preserving the unique natural heritage; creating educational farms, thematic villages and festivals; building an offer based on storytelling and poetry, folk culture, music and deliciously varied cuisine – these are just a few of the many examples and creative ideas on how ecotourism, implemented in synergy with other forms of entrepreneurship in rural areas, can involve and support local communities while contributing to long-term economic development.

LOCAL COMMUNITY-BASED STORIES

Several examples below explain how local communities across Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) over last two decades have been trying to link sustainable tourism development with protection of the uniqueness of the places where they live. Case studies of community-based initiatives illustrate the grassroots movement based on cross-sector partnership of community leaders, NGOs, governments, entrepreneurs, schools, cultural centres, protected areas administrations and other stakeholders.

WHITE STORK TRAIL – THE ECOTOURISM PRODUCT OF NORTHEASTERN POLAND

Northeastern Poland may be viewed as the “cradle” of Polish ecotourism, with the Podlasie White Stork Trail as a magnificent example of a supra-regional ecotourism product. The

412.15 km long heritage trail, which forms part of the Greenways routes, links four spectacular national parks (Białowieża, Narew, Biebrza and Wigry NP) and is distinguished by the huge stork populations nesting in the valleys of the Narew and Biebrza rivers as well as over 270 other species of wetland birds. The idea behind the trail is to build a cross-sector partnership between the tourism sector (agrotourism farms, local restaurants, travel and active tourism agencies), local governments, NGOs and administration of protected areas in order to build the ecotourism and active tourism offer based not only on the well-known attractions presented in and around protected areas but especially on the heritage of small (undiscovered) towns and villages outside main tourism destinations. The trail's main axis is marked as a bicycle route, but in many places it is also possible to rent kayaks, swim a traditional row boat (called "pychówka"), ride on horseback or watch and take pictures of birds and other animals (such as elk, beavers etc.). The heart of the trail is in the European Stork Village – Pentowo, where as many as 36 occupied stork nests can be found in a single agrotourism farm with a hundred-year-old wooden manor house on the bank of the Narew river. (more: <http://www.podlaskiszlakbociani.pl/en>).

RAILROAD BIKES IN BIESZCZADY MOUNTAINS, THE CARPATHIANS, POLAND

In 2000, local partnership group from southeastern Poland (Bieszczady Mountains) started a program called Green Bicycle in order to support local community green tourism and heritage initiatives around the Eastern Carpathians Biosphere Reserve. The project was a vehicle for activating local people and entrepreneurs to build a sustainable brand of the region and animate small centers and villages in the Carpathians outside the the Bieszczady National Park (main tourism destination). One of many successful examples is the village of Uherce Mineralne located far from main tourism routes. Brave and imaginative local entrepreneur (owner of the art-eco farm and hotel, Janusz Demkowicz) – thanks to the strong support of local municipality – started the project on railroad bikes that were created on the unused railway track – line no 108. The old railway building was renovated and turned into a cultural center and railroad bikes rental. The project animates and continues to animate and inspire other forms of local community entrepreneurship – such as cafes, open-air bars and souvenir shops around the railway. (more: <http://drezynyrowerowe.pl>).

WINE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN SOUTH MORAVIA, CZECH REPUBLIC

Rolling hills with patchworks of fields, vineyards and orchards, picturesque streets lined with historical wine cellars, quaint villages and small towns with a vibrant musical heritage, especially the music of cymbals and fiddles, wine festivals and unending wine tasting at local wineries. There are over 10,000 family-owned wineries in the Southern Moravia region. Thanks to the initiative of environmental NGO – Nadace Partnerství – the region became the model example of a sustainable tourism destination in Central and Eastern Europe. This initiative began in 1999 as a collaborative effort on the part of 280 wine towns & villages led by environmental NGO (main leaders were a tandem of the mayor of Vlčkov village Anna Čarková and Greenways Manager Juraj Flamik). They started by creating the network of 18 wine routes and building quality products around them combined with professional marketing strategy. At the height of the season, half a million tourists a year go biking on the Moravian Wine Trails, staying at family-owned B&Bs (often run by wine makers), taking part in wine tasting workshops and cultural events (concerts, festivals, handicraft workshops etc.). A major draw to the region outside the holiday season is a festival of open wine cellars, which takes place twice a year – in late autumn and early spring. (more: www.stezky.cz).

ECOTOURISM IN THE BELARUSSIAN VILLAGE

Belarus is a land made for ecotourism. The Belarussian village has stayed practically unchanged over the past hundred years. More than half of the villages are hamlets with no more than 50 residents. A particularly impressive feature is the traditional wooden architecture, painted window shutters and fences, a rich and authentic folklore, but first and foremost – Slavic hospitality and Belarussian openness. The Belarussian Association Country Escape led by Valeria Klitsounova, was founded with the express mission of building a professional ecotourism offer based on a network of family-owned guest houses from across the entire country. Today, the network consists of over 500 accommodations which offer also healthy food, heritage interpretation, art and culinary workshops, rent kayaks and organize local events and active green tourism trips. Theme villages, ecomuseums, cultural festivals are organized by local community leaders who emerged thanks to this impressive initiative (more: www.ruralbelarus.by).

FINAL CONCLUSIONS

Most of the ecotourism community-based initiatives all around the world are still small-scale, grassroots efforts, based oftentimes on local initiatives of individual environmentally-conscious entrepreneurs, active citizen groups and NGOs, protected areas administrations or local governments who realized that only a clean natural environment may attract tourists in the long run. It is crucial to build cross-sector partnerships and quality tourism products. Community-based ecotourism initiatives should be linked to a broader strategy at the local, national and regional level. For this we need to set out national and trans-national guidelines, standards and policies for long-term development of tourism that will help balance out economic, ecological, social and spatial priorities. Ecotourism - implemented in synergy with other forms of sustainable tourism and entrepreneurship in rural areas - may become our important contribution to the preservation of heritage and landscapes, enhancing the quality of life as well as assuring a more equitable share of benefits among local communities across Europe and the world.

Taleb Rifai, former UNWTO Secretary, once said: Sustainable tourism can contribute to combating poverty, climate change and environmental problems as well as to supporting local communities. Your culture is your story. Travel, Enjoy, Respect... (Krakow, 3rd International Congress on Ethics and Tourism, 2017).

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ECOTOURISM IN THE CONTEXT OF CIRCULAR ECONOMY, IN LINE WITH SDG 1 AND 12 OF UN AGENDA 2030: INDICATORS FOR MEASUREMENT AND MONITORING

Author: Cinzia De Marzo¹

Things do not happen.
Things are made to happen.

John F. Kennedy

INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism represents a great challenge for making a better place to leave, better place to visit and for developing the local economy at community level!

According to **The International Ecotourism Society –TIES**, ecotourism, is about **conservation** of bio-cultural diversity and protection of natural and cultural heritage, **community** in terms of empowering local communities around the world to fight against poverty, and **interpretation** with an emphasis of environmental awareness.

Beyond the definition of ecotourism², what are the main challenges and how to ensure the respect of ecotourism principles, such as Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect, Minimize physical, social, behavioral, and psychological impacts and Generate financial benefits for both local people and private industry?

As starting point, the international umbrella of the **UN Agenda 2030 and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals**, provides guidelines and recommendations for monitoring sustainable development impacts for tourism (**SDG 12 - Responsible Consumption and Production**), and fostering responsible local investments for more growth and jobs (**SDG 1 -No poverty**).

In line with the **circular economy principles and approach**, how to address the key challenges of **waste generation (food and plastic impact)** generated in huge quantity from the tourism industry, such as hotels, restaurants, catering and services of the tourist value chain, which is damaging especially sea basins destinations?

Taking into account the following inputs, how will be possible to turn vision into reality?

- By implementing concrete tools like GSTC³, ETIS⁴, BEMP⁵s and specific indicators, in order to measure the impacts caused by **waste generation (food and plastics)**, and to increase entrepreneurship at community level (investing in capacity building, skills and competences).

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2 Ecotourism is now defined as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education” (TIES, 2015). Education is meant to be inclusive of both staff and guests.

3 Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria

4 Europe an Tourism Indicator System

5 Best Environmental Management and practices

- By encouraging responsible management behaviors of the DMO⁶s, tourist SMEs and other public and private tourist stakeholders (i.e. recycling, waste treatment, pollution reduction, Corporate Social Responsibility-CSR);
- By gathering practices and examples/projects/initiatives with a transnational dimension;
- By taking concrete actions together, in cooperation and through public-private partnerships.

Finally, to what extent the **European tourism policy framework and sustainable development commitments at EU level**, will turn those challenges into opportunities, especially from the perspective of the Blue Economy and Coastal and Maritime strategy for more growth and jobs, which aims at enhancing the sector's sustainability and competitiveness, promoting skills and innovation and strengthening sustainability?

Strengthening the synergies and complementarities between ecotourism, the SDG 12 of the UN Agenda 2030, the EU circular economy strategy and the EU tourism policy framework, by implementing concrete monitoring tools and indicators in order to measure the environmental impact of waste generation (food and plastic), it is possible to turn vision into reality only if the key stakeholders/players in the tourism sector, will be strongly committed at all levels (public and private).

ECONOMIC TOURISM WORLDWIDE FIGURES

Tourism secured 313 million jobs in the global economy and it remains a key driver of global development. It represents one of the fastest growing economic activities with extensive impact on growth, social development and employment.

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), travel and tourism attracted 143 billion EUR of investments in 2017. This is expected to rise by 3.5% during the 2018 and forecasted to rise by 2.8% over the next ten years to 194.9 billion EUR in 2027. Travel and tourism's share of total national investment is predicted to rise from 5.0% in 2018 to 5.4% in 2027⁷.

However, it can also entail long-term negative transformations on local economies, societies, resource management and ecosystems, especially in view of the growing challenges of international arrival of tourist in the world (from 1,32 billion in 2017 up to 2 billion in 2030⁸).

For this reason, it is crucial to **foster sustainability of tourism** as a means of strengthening the economies in particular of structurally weak areas, while at the same time conserving biological diversity and other natural capital and supporting cultural heritage, resource and energy efficiency.

INTERNATIONAL GUIDELINES AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT JOB CREATION AND MEASUREMENT

Tourism is far more than an economical factor: it drives social development, education, cultural identity and solidarity (it creates mutual understanding).

⁶ Destination Management Organisation,

⁷ <https://www.wttc.org>

⁸ Source UNWTO provisional forecasts

Tourism is about hospitality and welcoming visitors who travel to enjoy unique environmental and cultural heritage, as well as the lifestyle of a specific place.

In the tourism sector **public-private partnerships and cooperation between different government levels** and along the travel and tourism value chain already prevail and are fundamental for the functioning of the sector. It is due to the implications of tourism as an economic activity on the destination's environment and population, as well as the transversal nature of spill-over effects of tourism on the sectors, but also to the evolving travelers' expectations and increasing interest in tourism experiences beyond the borders of a single destinations.

A well-designed and managed tourism sector can help preserve the natural and cultural heritage assets upon which it depends, empower host communities, generate trade opportunities and foster peace and intercultural understanding.

In this respect, the United Nations General Assembly adopted in September 2015 the **UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development**, containing **17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** and its **169 indicators**. The SDGs combine the goals for promoting development in poor countries with global goals for sustainable development, and comprehensively describe the shared responsibilities of all countries, in a single framework, significantly strengthened when sustainable development moves to the core of policies and business decision-making in the tourism sector.

The tourism sector needs also at national and sub-national level to adopt sustainable consumption and production modes, timing and systematic measurement, accelerating the shift towards sustainability.

Due to the **lack of common frameworks**, is fundamental to **capture, aggregate and report on the full economic, social and environmental impacts of tourism**.

In particular tourism business can play a more significant role in realizing the SDGs, if they would be **able to measure their progress**, benchmark themselves against comparable businesses criteria and indicators, and incrementally improve their performances.

Also socio-cultural benefits to communities can be very difficult to measure. It may be simpler to measure economic benefits as an indicator of community socio-cultural benefits.



Dealing with this issue, **SDG 12** specifies that **sustainable consumption and production patterns should be ensured, while Goal 12b refers specifically to tourism** : *‘Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for tourism, including for energy, water, waste, biodiversity, that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products’*.

Furthermore, **SDG 1** aims at achieving the **End of poverty in all forms everywhere**, because *‘Tourism provide income through job creation and community levels. It can be linked with national poverty reduction strategies and entrepreneurship. Low skills requirement and local recruitment can empower less favored groups, particularly youth and women’*.

The tourism policy should therefore increase local purchasing of goods and services along the tourism value-chain to prevent ‘leakage’ and to enhance competitiveness and maximize local impact, aiming at strengthening inclusive growth opportunities, removing barriers to trade, shaping sound investment policies and building the capacity and incentives for SMEs.

The UNWTO International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories (INSTO)

The **International Network of tourism Observatories** – INSTO, focuses on **monitoring the economic, environmental and social impact of tourism** at the destination level. The initiative is based on UNWTO’s long-standing commitment to the sustainable and resilient growth of the sector through measurement and monitoring, supporting the evidence-based management of tourism.

INSTO seeks to support and connect destinations that are committed to regular monitoring of economic, environmental and social impacts of tourism, to unlock the power of evidence based decision making at the destination-level, fostering sustainable tourism practices locally and globally.

INSTO key objectives are:

Integrated approach: To provide a framework for the systematic, timely and regular monitoring of resource-use and a better understanding of tourism impacts.

Evidence: To establish a strong foundation of tangible information for well-informed decision making.

Stakeholder empowerment: To actively engage local stakeholders in the measurement of risks, costs, impacts, limits and opportunities through an inclusive and participatory approach.

Engagement: To network and exchange information for improved collaboration, communication and greater public accountability.

Performance measurement: To monitor the implementation of sustainable development plans, policies and management actions.

Continuity: To foster long-term commitment for regular monitoring, thus contributing to the sustainable growth of the sector at the destination-level;

Knowledge building: To highlight and share good practices and lessons learned

□ Manila Declaration 2017: A call for action on measuring sustainable tourism

The **Manila Declaration**, launched during the 6th UNWTO International Conference on Tourism Statistics, the 21-23 June 2017, advocate for the development of a **Statistical Framework for Measuring Sustainable Tourism (MST)** Initiative⁹, which extends the current frameworks beyond their primarily economic focus, in order to incorporate environmental, social and cultural dimensions, across commonly agreed spatial levels (global, national and sub-national) and paying attention to temporal considerations.

It calls upon all actors to facilitate the necessary means and resources for the development and subsequent in-country implementation of an MST Framework, noting the opportunities to tap into the richness of data currently available and identifying gaps for producing any additional data that may be needed.

Key recommendations for adopting a 'Glo-cal Sustainability strategy'

- **Step lightly and slowly**, despite the globalizations trends in Information Technologies ;
- **Make a difference** (positive example, learning by doing, storytelling, emphasizing local identity, genius loci,);
- **Lead the way forward** (in our own daily life with a clear vision and resilient approach) ;
- **Care more about the environment and the community** (socio-cultural and natural assets, investing in people, preventing leakage).

THE EUROPEAN TOURISM POLICY FRAMEWORK, BLUE GROWTH AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainability constitutes one of the main challenges for tourism. Massive tourism may also lead the deterioration of natural resources, destruction of biodiversity or noise pollution.

In terms of spatial development, it may lead to the construction of large resorts that significantly alter the landscape. Global warming, just like massive tourism, may render certain tourist destinations less attractive (for instance due to the plastic's impact along the coastal destinations) and, in the long term, rising sea levels could be a threat to insular and coastal territories.

To tackle this issue in the blue growth context, **the European Commission adopted the Communication**¹⁰ – '*Initiative for the sustainable development of the blue economy in the western Mediterranean*', which aims at increasing safety and security, promoting sustainable blue growth and jobs and preserving ecosystem and biodiversity in the Western Mediterranean Region.

Three main goals should be carried out in short term perspective :

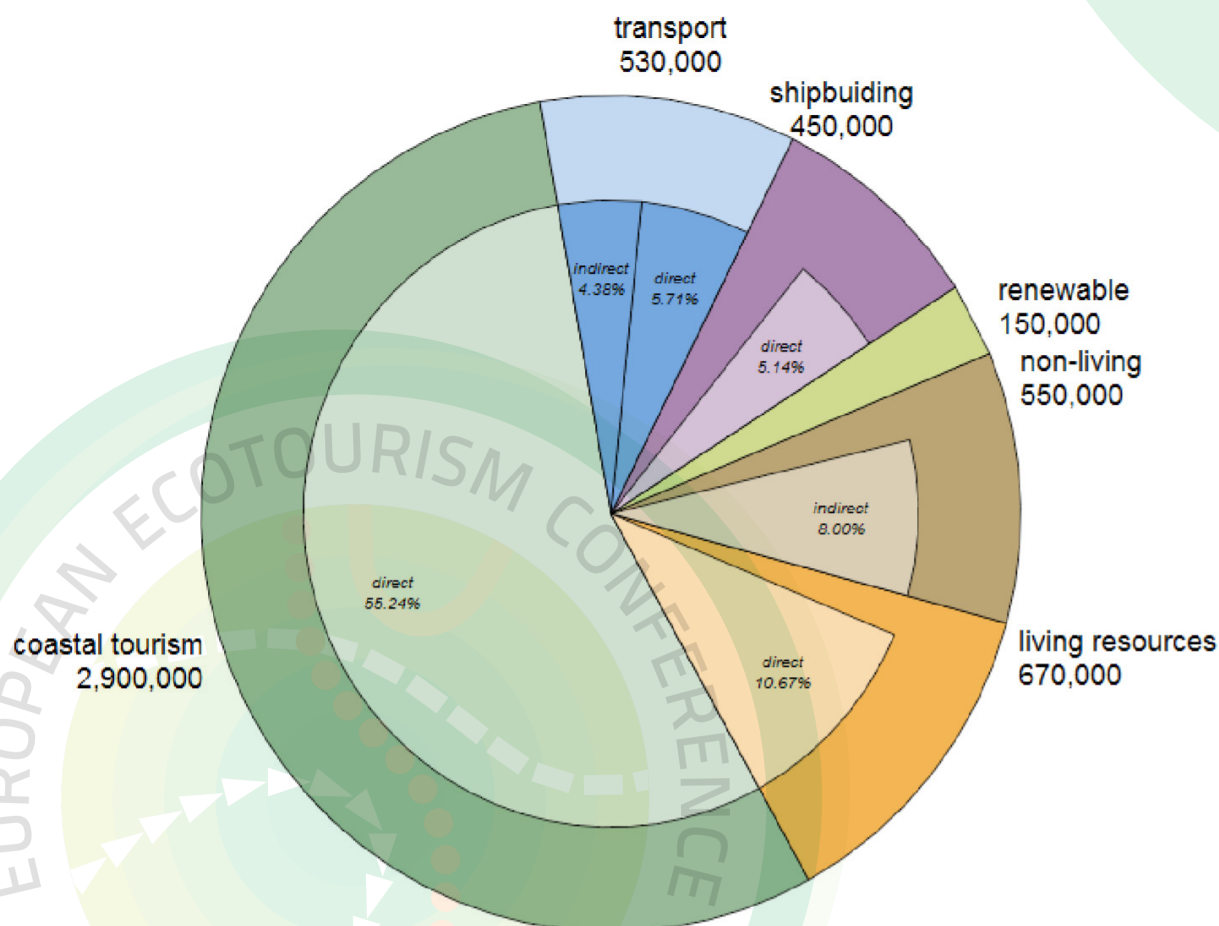
1. Safer and more secure maritime space
2. Smart and resilient blue economy
3. Better governance of the sea

Making **Blue growth strategy** fit for future challenges –today's trends in the blue economy¹¹

9 World Tourism Organization (2017), Measuring Sustainable Tourism : A call for action – Report of the 6th International conference on Tourism Statistics, Manila, Philippines ; 21-23 June 2017, UNWTO, Madrid

10 COM (2017) 183 final

11 Commission Report on the blue growth strategy SWD (2017) 128 final. .



The EU is fully committed to **sustainable development** and to be a frontrunner in implementing the **UN Agenda 2030 and its 17 SDGs**, together with Member States and in line with the **principle of subsidiarity**¹².

Sustainable development is an issue of **governance** and requires the **right instruments** to ensure policy coherence across thematic areas, as well as between the EU's external action and its other policies.

The European Council¹³ states that **URGES** the Commission to elaborate, **by mid-2018**, an **implementation strategy** outlining timelines, objectives and concrete measures to reflect the 2030 Agenda in all relevant EU internal and external policies, taking into account the global impacts of the EU's domestic actions. The Council **UNDERLINES** that an effective combination of the full range of resources (financial and non-financial, domestic and international, public and private) will be needed for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda in all relevant policy areas.

In line with **European Union's competences in tourism** (artt 6 and 195 of the Treaty of Lisbon, TFEU), the Commission has presented **two Communications** that are directly linked to tourism : *'Europe, the world's N.1 tourist destination – a new political framework for tourism in*

¹² Commission Communication (2016) 769 final, A sustainable European future : The EU response to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

¹³ Council Conclusions (2017) 1038/17

*Europe*¹⁴, and 'A European Strategy for more growth and jobs in coastal and maritime tourism'¹⁵.

The **2010 Communication** identifies several priorities, which sum up the main challenges facing EU tourism:

- To stimulate competitiveness in the European tourism sector;
 - To promote the development of sustainable, responsible and high quality tourism;
 - To consolidate the image and profile of Europe as a collection of sustainable and high-quality destinations;
 - To maximize the potential of EU financial policies and instruments for developing tourism.
- To help implement the above priorities, the Communication set out 21 actions.

By contrast, the **2014 Communication** focuses on issues of growth and jobs in coastal and maritime areas. It includes **14 actions** that the Commission is undertaking, aiming at stimulating performance and competitiveness, promoting skills and innovation and maximizing available EU funding in the field of tourism.

In order to strengthen sustainability, the Commission support the implementation of action 10, focuses on 'promote strategies on waste prevention, management and marine litter', by inviting industry and other stakeholders to actively participate in projects that reduce waste emission, marine litter, natural resource use in water and waste recovery/recycling.

Ecotourism with circular economy approach, to minimize waste food and plastic impact and to increase jobs opportunities

The circular economy represents an alternative, more sustainable model to the traditional linear economy and also offers a way to improve Europe's competitiveness and resource efficiency. A linear model follows the path of make, use, and then dispose.

In developing a **roadmap for a circular economy**, it is important to ensure that decisions around appropriate solutions are based on sustainability considered across the entire life cycle, rather than simply considering resource efficiency aspects only at the end of life of a product.

The European Commission adopted in December 2015 the **EU Circular economy package**, which includes commitments in eco-design, waste prevention and reuse, ambitious quantitative targets on increasing recycling and reducing landfilling, obligations, to improve to separate collection of waste, as well as promotion of efficient use of bio-based resources.

In the transition to a circular economy, **monitoring is the key trends and patterns is key** to understand how the various elements of the circular economy are developing over time and it will also help to meet the objectives of the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**.

The **ten indicators of the Monitoring framework on circular economy**¹⁶, provide a broad picture of the key leverage points to increase the circularity of the EU's economy, which is meaningful to start by establishing baselines.

This will help to monitor future developments and inform policy making processes.

14 COM (2010) 352 final

15 COM (2014) 86 final

16 COM (2018) 29 final

Circular economy monitoring framework

1 EU self-sufficiency for raw materials

The share of a selection of key materials (including critical raw materials) used in the EU that are produced within the EU

2 Green public procurement

The share of major public procurements in the EU that include environmental requirements

3a-c Waste generation

Generation of municipal waste per capita; total waste generation (excluding major mineral waste) per GDP unit and in relation to domestic material consumption

4 Food waste

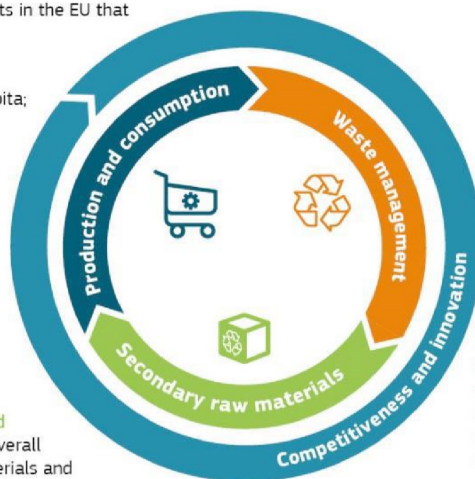
Amount of food waste generated

7a-b Contribution of recycled materials to raw materials demand

Secondary raw materials' share of overall materials demand - for specific materials and for the whole economy

8 Trade in recyclable raw materials

Imports and exports of selected recyclable raw materials



5a-b Overall recycling rates

Recycling rate of municipal waste and of all waste except major mineral waste

6a-f Recycling rates for specific waste streams

Recycling rate of overall packaging waste, plastic packaging, wood packaging, waste electrical and electronic equipment, recycled biowaste per capita and recovery rate of construction and demolition waste

9a-c Private investments, jobs and gross value added

Private investments, number of persons employed and gross value added in the circular economy sectors

10 Patents

Number of patents related to waste management and recycling

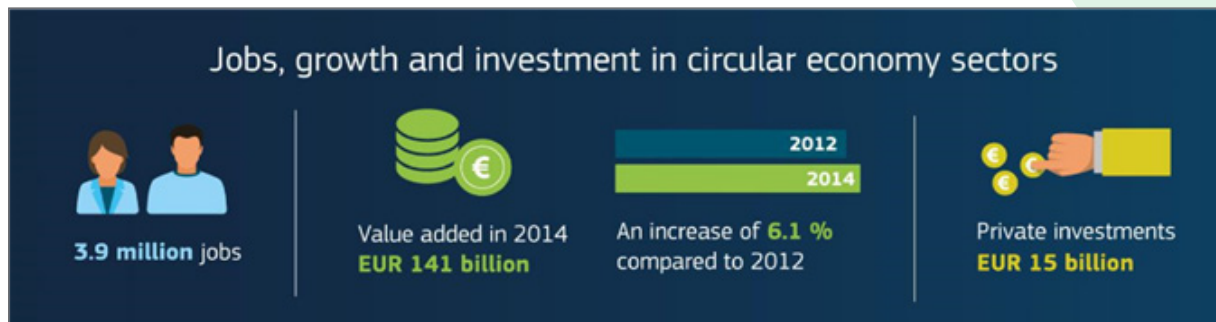
The Commission also launched in 2017 a **multi-stakeholder Platform on food waste** (i.e. **restaurants** are the **second largest source of food waste**, after households, generating approximately up to 20% of total food waste per year), in order to foster exchanges of best practices at Member State, Regional, local and EU Level, mobilizing expertise of key sectors (including tourism) and to examine how to achieve the SDGs Goals on food waste and evaluate progress.

The transition to a circular economy **increases investments, value added and jobs**, and stimulates innovation.

In 2014, private investments in a subset of economic sectors relevant to the circular economy are estimated to have been around EUR 15 billion in the EU (i.e. 0.1 % GDP). The same year there were more than **3.9 million jobs in these sectors, an increase of 2.3 % compared to 2012**. In spite of the economic and financial crisis, those circular economy sectors created around EUR 141 billion of value added in 2014, which represents an increase of 6.1 % compared to 2012.

Many **restaurants and food services make use of technologies** that have created new business opportunities elsewhere in the world.

For **patents on recycling** and secondary raw materials, the data show an increase of 35 % between 2000 and 2013. EU patents for glass recycling represent 44 % of the world total for such patents, while the EU's share is 18 % for plastics and 23 % for paper.



Plastic make a significant contribution to a circular economy and minimizing our use of plastic mean looking for all the ways plastics have infiltrated our daily lives. From shopping bags to food packaging to bottled drinks, there are opportunities in many areas of our life and travels to limit our use of disposable plastics.

Despite the fact that plastics applications in packaging can help reduce food waste, to improve circularity of plastics, it is essential to make sure that more and more plastic waste is recovered and doesn't end up in landfill or in the environment. The unique characteristic of plastics enable them to play a major role on the road to a more sustainable and resource efficient future. Lightweight, versatile and durable plastics can help save key resources such as energy and water in strategic sectors that include building, packaging, **ecotourism**, to name but a few.

Also there are exciting innovation way aimed at undoing some of the damage from plastics in the environment, **eco-travelers still play a very important role** in limiting the amount of plastic consumption in Travel and Tourism.

- Bring your own water bottle
- Carry your own collapsible tote
- Refuse small shampoo bottles from hotels
- Recycle when possible
- Waste component generated (tonnes) food waste and plastic- re-cycling and re-use We need to educate and influence people to change our daily habit !

The **EU Strategy on plastics in the circular economy**¹⁷ (2017), proposes concrete actions designed to make the vision for a more circular plastics economy a reality, based on **4 main pillars**:

1. Drive investments and innovation towards circular solutions
2. Improve the economics and quality of plastics recycling
3. Harness global action
4. Curb plastic waste and littering

Growing plastic waste generation and its leakage into our environment must be tackled if we are to achieve a truly **circular lifecycle for plastics**. Today, littering and leakage of plastic waste harm the environment, cause economic damage to activities such as **tourism, fisheries and shipping**, and may affect human health through the **food chain**.

This phenomenon is exacerbated by the **increasing amount of plastic waste generated each year**, and is also fuelled by the growing consumption of 'single-use' plastics, i.e. packaging or

¹⁷ COM (2018) 28 final

other consumer products that are thrown away after one brief use, are rarely recycled and prone to being littered. These include small packaging, bags, disposable cups, lids, straws and cutlery, for which plastic is widely used due to its lightness, low cost, and practical features. Growing use of plastics for a wide range of short-lived applications gives rise to large quantities of plastic waste. Single-use plastics items are a major source of plastic leakage into the environment, as they can be difficult to recycle, are often used away from home and littered.

They are among the items most commonly found on beaches, and represent an estimated **50% of marine litter sea-based**, which is also significant. Fishing gear abandoned at sea can have particularly harmful impacts through entanglement of marine animals.



Very large quantities of **plastic waste leak into the environment from sources both on land and at sea**, generating significant economic and environmental damage. Globally, 5 to 13 million tonnes of plastics — 1.5 to 4 % of global plastics production — end up in the oceans every year. It is estimated that plastic accounts for over 80 % of marine litter. Plastic debris is then transported by marine currents, sometimes over very long distances. It can be washed up on land, degrade into microplastics or form dense areas of marine litter trapped in ocean gyres. UNEP estimates that damage to marine environments is at least USD 8 billion per year globally.

According to a **Study Foundation of Ellen Mac Artur**, until 2050, will have more plastic than fishes in all world's seas. After China, Europe is the second plastic producer in the world, pouring between 150.000 and 500.000 tonnes of plastic macro-waste and between 70.000 and 130.000 tonnes of micro-plastic in the sea every year.

This represents a small proportion of global marine litter. Yet, plastic waste from European sources ends up in particularly vulnerable marine areas, such as the Mediterranean Sea and parts of the Arctic Ocean. Plastic directly entering in the oceans account for a massive percentage of marine pollution and plastics also play a role in climate change, warming the

world's ocean. Travel and tourism, the world oceans are inextricably intertwined, as much as 80% of tourism relates to the coastal areas, and the state of the world's oceans can no longer handle the amount of plastic pollution entering the water each day.

Recent studies show **plastics accumulate in the Mediterranean** at a density comparable to the areas of highest plastic accumulation in the oceans. Plastic pollution also affects areas of the European Exclusive Economic Zone, in the outermost regions along the Caribbean Sea, the Indian, Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. In addition to harming the environment, marine litter causes economic damage to activities such as tourism, fisheries and shipping.

Plastic pollution of the **Bulgarian Black Sea** is similar to that of the **Baltic Sea and the Northwest Mediterranean**, some of the world's most polluted water basins (Study of Institute of Biodiversity and Eco System-Research at the Bulgaria Academy of Sciences, together with Greenpeace activists).

New sources of plastic leakage are also on the rise, posing additional potential threats to both the environment and human health. **Microplastics**, tiny fragments of plastic below 5mm in size, accumulate in the sea, where their small size makes it easy for marine life to ingest them. They can also enter the food chain. Recent studies also found microplastics in the air, drinking water and foods like salt or honey, with yet unknown impacts on human health.

While a large amount of **microplastics result** from the fragmentation of larger pieces of plastic waste, significant quantities also enter the environment directly, making it more challenging to track and prevent them.

In addition, due to the **environmental impact of cruise tourism** (waste impacts from ships, oils, garbage, plastics, sewages, decision makers in cruise tourism destinations need to work closely with operators to facilitate both integrated waste management and intra-societal and intergenerational equity, rather than merely accept the prospect of short-term economic growth.

Major **impact on coastal and maritime destinations**, effecting the sea basins environment (waste prevention and management in accommodation), which has to take into account four main waste types : ordinary (residual) waste, bottles and other glasses jars, organic waste and cardboard packaging.

Curbing plastic waste and pollution (Pillar 4 of the EU strategy for plastic in the circular economy) is a complex problem, given its diffuse nature and the link with social trends and individual behavior. There is no clear incentive for consumers and producers to switch to solutions that would generate less waste or litter.

Pressure resulting from waste disposal probably **waste management planning is the key issue**. Business generally is currently under pressure to adopt waste policies that move waste generation up the waste hierarchy, by prioritizing waste reduction and encouraging reuse and recycling rather than disposal options.

TOOLS AND INDICATORS TO MONITOR ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ON WASTE GENERATION (FOOD AND PLASTIC), AFFECTING SEA BASINS AND COASTAL DESTINATIONS

Assessment and reporting are complex tasks that will not produce the expected results unless they are carried out with the needed time and energy devoted to it. This requires that the mandates and capacities to carry out this task are considered as part of the core infrastructure of social organizations, oftentimes a responsibility of the government. The mandate should be clearly backed by laws and regulations.

From a **global perspective**, the most comprehensive and complete building block and references to develop indicators for sustainable tourism, is the UNWTO Guidebook¹⁸ published in the 2004, which provide definitions, source of informations and recommendations, offering a detailed description of key steps to indicators development and use.

At **international level**, the **Global Sustainable tourism Criteria for Destinations (GSTC-D)**, are an effort to come to a common understanding of sustainable destinations, and are the minimum understanding that any tourism management organization which wishes to be sustainable should aspire to reach.

The **criteria and indicators** were developed in 2013, based on already recognized criteria and approaches, including the UNWTO destination level indicators, GSTC Criteria for hotels and tour Operators, and other widely accepted principles and guidelines, certification criteria and indicators.

In the **Section D: Maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts** of the GSTC tool for destinations, the **Criteria D10 – Solid waste reduction**, states that ‘The destination has a system to encourage enterprises to reduce, re-use and recycle solid waste. Any residual waste that is not reused or recycle is disposed of safely and sustainably’.

To ensure the implementation of the **Criteria D10**, civil society and other stakeholder groups must be given a leading role along with to the local administration. This will create synergies and provide the public with different points of view.

In particular, the role of the **coordination team** (and or the local coordinator manager at destination level) is to manage and coordinate the entire process. This includes engaging the wider expert community; gathering, analyzing and interpreting data; and organizing peer review. The selection of effective technical partners is crucial for the process.

By integrating tourism more fully within economic, social and environmental measurement standards, the framework aims to provide a common language and organizational structure for exploiting the richness of data already available and for more effective data production, management and integration, focusing on **waste prevention (food and plastic) and management**. Such a standard-based framework can further support the credibility, comparability and outreach of various measurement and monitoring programs to address this issue.

At **European level**, the **European Tourism Indicator System – ETIS**, was specially designed by the European Commission in 2013, aiming at helping them to develop and carry out their

¹⁸ Indicators of sustainable development for tourism destinations

plans for greater sustainability. ETIS methodology, has been so far welcomed and implemented by 100 destinations across Europe during 2- year pilot phase (2013-2015).

ETIS is a voluntary management and information tool. Its monitoring results are based on self-assessment, observations, data collection and analysis by the destinations themselves, based on **43 core indicators and a set of supplementary indicators**¹⁹, such as for coastal and maritime tourism, accessibility.

Although the applicable criteria and indicators are easy to be implemented, **ETIS does not set minimum values to be achieved and it does not provide any certification or label.**

Concerning **Waste prevention (food, plastic, etc.)** the Section D : Environmental impact, contains the **Criteria D.3 'Solid waste management'** with **3 core indicators (D.3.1 , D.3.2, D.3.3)**, which enable destinations to collect quantitative data on waste production per tourist night compared to general population waste production per person (kg), the percentage of tourism enterprises separating different types of waste and percentage of total waste recycled per tourist compare to total waste recycled per resident per year.

Nevertheless, the **feedback gathered by the ETIS destinations** during the pilot phases in 2013-2015, showed some critical issues, still pending in some cases, such as:

- ☐ Clarify the messages for destinations in terms of benefits/costs
- ☐ Improve Internal communication
- ☐ Stakeholder WG commitment/involvement in all stages
- ☐ Investing in Skills/competences of the management team
- ☐ Create sense of ownership (communication campaign, local meetings) ;
- ☐ Measurement (empowerment)
- ☐ Capacity building in management and monitoring
- ☐ Promote visibility at European level
- ☐ Political endorsement and commitment
- ☐ Awareness raising of locals
- ☐ Diversification of the tourism products as a way to spread tourism

The **EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS)**²⁰ is another tool developed by the European Commission, allowing actors in the tourism sector to improve their environmental performance and promote the quality of their services. This voluntary tool and certification scheme aims at helping its users to achieve enhanced performance.

EMAS Sectorial Reference Document (SRD) for the tourism sector, adopted in June 2016, contains the description of best environmental management practices (**BEMPs**), indicators and benchmarks to monitor progress achieved.

Ecolabel, is the European voluntary scheme, established in 1992, aiming at promoting products and services with a lower environmental impact. Multi-criteria (pass/fail) and third party verified criteria addressing main environmental impacts over the products' or services' life cycle.

Still at European level, efforts to monitor and assess environmental impacts and sustainability

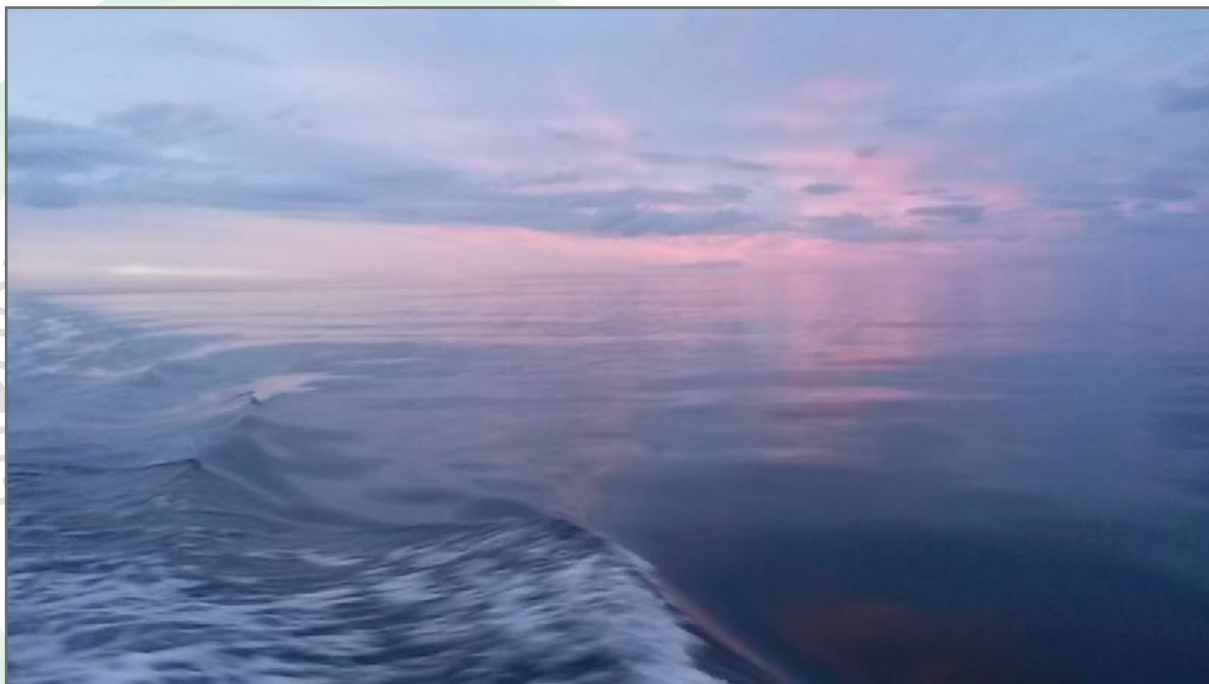
¹⁹ ETIS toolkit 2016

²⁰ www.emas.eu, The EU eco-management and audit scheme (EMAS), is a voluntary tool and certification scheme which aims to help its users to achieve enhanced environmental performances

trends of tourism have been undertaken by the **European Environment Agency (EEA)**.

The EEA proposal for a set of 19 indicators based on the **Drivers – Pressures – Impacts – State- Response**, to be used at European level and that can be also downscaled at sub-regional level.

The indicators are covering a wide range of topics related to tourism such as: attractiveness of places, water consumption, **waste and recycling** biodiversity disturbance, spread of sustainability practices by the adoption of environmental certification schemes and **labelling**, **potentials for ecotourism** and land take by development of specific tourism and recreational related facilities (marina and golf courses).



In the **Circular economy Action Plan**²¹, the Commission is committed to come forward with a simple and effective monitoring framework, composed of a set of **10 key meaningful indicators**, grouped into four stages and aspects of the **circular economy**: (1) production and consumption, (2) waste management, (3) secondary raw materials and (4) competitiveness and innovation.

The **EU Monitoring framework for the circular economy**²² aims at measuring progress towards a circular economy in a way that encompasses its various dimensions at all stages of the lifecycle of resources, products and services.

Reducing food waste has an enormous potential for saving the resources we use to produce the food we eat. Food waste takes place all along the value chain: during production and distribution, in shops, restaurants, catering facilities, and at home. This makes it particularly hard to quantify. According to Eurostat's preliminary estimates, EU food waste decreased from 81 to 76 million tonnes (i.e. by around 7 %) between 2012 and 2014, equivalent to a drop from 161 to 149 kg per capita.

At **national level**, there is an interesting example of **developing criteria for the sustainable**

²¹ COM (2015) 614

²² COM (2018) 29 final

structuring of tourism destinations in Germany, supported by the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety, launched in 2017.

The criteria system, which is a combination between Global sustainable tourism criteria for destinations (GSTC), ETIS, German Sustainability Code, Destination certification in German, presents a total of **40 action recommendations** for making tourism destinations sustainable and covers all dimensions of sustainable development. 40 criteria divided into **8 fields of action** are introduced, accompanied by **67 measurable monitoring indicators**.

The 3 working levels are **DMO²³s** (which is the main contact for all local stakeholders/partners and coordinates the common path toward sustainable development), the **Cooperation level**, (where cooperation and agreement with other stakeholder groups is necessary) and **Destination level** (in any destinations there are number of factors external to tourism, but which influence the sustainable development of tourism).

Focusing on food waste management and recycling, under the ecological dimension of the system, **criteria RM6** states that *'tourism decision makers pursue strategies to reduce waste generation in tourism business by calculating the information materials produced for it'*, and **criteria RM7** foresees that the DMOs *'takes internal measures to promote environmental friendly employee behavior, in particular for waste food and catering/hospitality'*.

Comparability of indicators at local, national and international level allows greater benchmarking opportunities and continuous improvements.

However, there still some challenges that certain indicators should further address with a detailed approach, such as:

- Nautical, flora, fauna, space
- Water, waste management and recycling, energy consumption
- Landscape pressure
- Resilience and risk, security and health
- Satisfaction (customer, residents, tourists.)
- Public participation Culture heritage (tangible and not tangible)
- Financial investments (public and private)
- Economic vitality
- Employment (young, women, immigrants...)
- Marketing
- Distinction (different type of tourist destination)
- Carrying capacity
- **Marine litter and plastic in the sea**
- Big data and digitalization

The rise in tourism to developing regions of the world has many positive effects on local economies and employment, but it creates issues when these countries are not equipped to handle the side-effects of tourism, which include increased stress on waste removal systems. While destinations and Tourism & Travel companies must act to counter the effects of tourism on the world's oceans, travelers must also understand the stress tourism places on local and global ecosystems, and take actions to mitigate negative effects.

CONCLUSIONS: TURNING VISION INTO REALITY

Ecotourism has been considered so far, with an interdisciplinary, holistic, integrative and circular approach, aiming at mainstreaming sustainability through **measurement and monitoring tools and indicators**, and at creating positive local impacts and economic opportunities for sustainable development.

Policies and actions at EU level bring an important added value by providing economies of scales, addressing cross-sectorial challenges and offering replicable solutions, but also by facilitating **exchange of experiences, best practices and lessons learnt**.

Moreover, they are complementary to policies at national, regional and local level, which addresses sector-specific priorities at destination level. Effective policies and actions that boost investments in tourism, help the industry to fully exploit the financing opportunities and direct investments to the evolving needs of the sector.

Ecotourism destinations have the potential to become **local drivers towards** (alternative) tourism management strategies and poverty reduction.

The engagement of public-private partnership and inter-regional and inter-sectorial cooperation is fundamental to turn vision into reality, by developing new **green business and eco-friendly models** with a circular, interdisciplinary and inter-sectorial approach (**tourism, culture, environment, food and plastic waste management**).

This is the case of **MED sustainable tourism community**, created in November 2016, comprises almost hundred organizations (public authorities, private companies, universities and international organizations) in nine Euro-Mediterranean countries and it strives to make policy makers, scientists and practitioners **join forces to design policies and management strategies for a sustainable tourism**.

The Community's members are leading the development of common tools to monitor the tourism industry, they are studying and testing new tourism models and they are actively engaging policy makers as managers in a constant dialogue to make tourism a real driver for sustainable development.

DMOs- Destination management organizations can deal with those challenges at local and regional level of administration. Without management infrastructure improvements, the cumulative quantity of plastic waste available to enter the ocean from land is predicted to increase by an order of magnitude by 2025. When tourism is concentrated in areas without effective waste management systems, trash and plastics invariably end up contaminating forests, rivers, oceans.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is becoming increasingly important in tourism, since there is the need that companies take their responsibility for the impacts produced by their actions and contribute to sustainable development.

Given tourism specificity, there is however the need to clarify what CSR means in tourism and to define the main actions that tourism businesses should implement for being responsible.

From a CSR perspective, **ecotourism** in its pure form would appear to be a form of tourism

which does not have a negative impact on the environment, and which protects and builds the life of local ecosystems. It should also involve close partnerships with the local community.

It is quite important to **gather and disseminate transnational experiences and good practices among ecodestinations**, aiming at establishing a critical mass of the best models through i.e. transnational projects, because tourism must be memorable experience and destinations must be sustainable.

Measuring sustainable tourism is not a trend, it **is the smart future** to create a sustainable system for the planet and to respect the social–cultural dimension, focusing on:

- ☐ **Planet** - Tourism with respect for the local environment and the global climate.
- ☐ **Values** - Tourism with respect for social, cultural and natural values.
- ☐ **Business** - The responsible role of businesses and public-private co-operation in tourism development.
- ☐ **Marketing** - Linking destination management from “more tourists every year” to “attracting the visitors you want”.



“Alone we can do so little;
together we can do so much”,
Helen Keller



EXPLORING SOOMAA: THE MULTIFUNCTIONAL AND MARGINALIZED

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INTRODUCTION

This article is based on a fieldwork conducted in 2017 in Soomaa National Park in Estonia. Soomaa (literally ‘swamp land’ in Estonian), advertised as a place to experience wilderness, is an increasingly popular tourist destination. However, this is not the only paradox: the area is also inhabited by temporal residents, who are the focus of my research and presentation.

National park is a special kind of rural area, characterized by scattered population distribution, marginal economy and modest infrastructure and heightened attention to the protection of nature. In the last decades, both international environmental protection and rural areas in Europe have undergone fundamental changes. Regarding national parks and its human residents, this has had an effect on the economic, social and political structure, including an increase in external influences to be coordinated with local interests, and evaluating the various aspects of the territory to strategically strengthen selected virtues. On one hand, every action is restricted by external legislations. On the other hand, the attention caused by those restrictions can provide crucial advantages for tourism. In the last years almost every state, region or city in the world, included Estonia, has taken the goal to increase the portion of tourism economy in the total economy. The reason is that they see in tourism a possible development key to the economic growth. Nevertheless, although tourism revitalizes economy, it also adds pressure to answer external demands.

Therefore it can be said that Soomaa National Park, as simultaneously a scenery, institution and resource, is characterized by several competing local, regional and international stakeholders, whose priorities are based on symbolic, economic and political views. One of the key challenges of sustainable development is the introduction of the combined conception of nature as a value and as a central development resource of society in the context of the overall development of Estonia.

Drawing parallels with European cases from different contexts that nevertheless face similar problems, I present the main narratives prevalent among the national park's inhabitants, who represent widespread understandings in the society. I will provide a selection of values that are based on both individual perceptions and broader cultural ideas, verifying, but also contesting them. At the same time, I will take a look on the adaption strategies and tactics used in the changing socio-economic situation, to understand what kind of potentials of the landscape is currently used and which are set aside.

SOOMAA NATIONAL PARK: NATURE PROTECTION AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

When we arrived in Soomaa in the summer of 2017 to inventory of vernacular rural architecture and collect place-lore (place names, traditions, characters and events associated with the place in question), I expected to be part of a rescue mission, collecting myths and legends and taking pictures of vernacular architecture that would soon not be there anymore. There sure seemed to be a lot of potential for such things: the website loodusegakoos.ee administered by the State Forest Management Centre advertises the peripheral area in the heart of the country for its wild nature untouched by human activity, and yearly floods, that can cover up to 175 km² of the area with water (loodusegakoos.ee: Soomaa National Park).

In his inventory of Estonian mires, the landscape ecologist Mati Ilomets has distinguished four historical periods in the protection of wetlands in Estonia:

1920-1940, when the catalyzer for drawing attention to wetlands was protecting the birds that inhabit them;

1940-1950, when the USSR came up with the concept of "nature improvement" (also known as "land improvement project) and wetlands were subject to draining for the sake of agriculture and forestry;

1955-1968, a revolution, during which the first legal nature protection act was accepted by the government in 1957 and several botanical-zoological nature protection areas were created. First nature protection means were also established in one of the areas of what we know today as Soomaa National Park, by creating a botanical protection area in Halliste wooded grassland.

1968-1992 was a period of active discussions in the monthly Estonian Nature magazine. Some of the wetlands were freed from the drainage project, and 30 new wetland protection areas were established, among them in 1981. The one that merged several bogs in the area of today's Soomaa (Ilomets 1994; kaitsealad.ee/eng: Soomaa National Park).

Following the work by Ilomets in 1994, Paal and Leibak have added a fifth period, that began with the political reestablishment of independence and brought new responsibilities with international cooperation and conventions (Paal and Leibak 2011). According to the website kaitsealad.ee which is dedicated to Estonian nature protection areas, Soomaa National Park was created in 1993 by merging Halliste botanical protection area and the bog protection areas, to protect the bogs, forests and floodplains, as habitats of protected species and cultural

heritage. Another bog was added in 2005, bringing the total area of the national park to 39,884 ha, of which 51% are bogs, 5% are floodplain grassland, 0.5% is cultivated farmland and the rest is different forests. Since 1989 Soomaa is designated as an internationally Important Bird Area, and belongs since 1997 to internationally important wetland or Ramsar areas. In 2004, Soomaa gained recognition as a natural and bird site in Natura 2000, the pan-European network of protected areas (kaitsealad.ee: Soomaa National Park).

However, there are also three villages in the area of the National Park. Tipu, Sandra and Riisa, which are architecturally very eclectic: rural vernacular architecture here ranges from stone ruins to agricultural multiple dwelling complexes of traditional Estonian farmhouses, long buildings divided in 3 sections, with low walls of horizontal logs and a high straw thatched roof; from farm resorts to Soviet era two-storied silicate-brick apartment buildings, called Khrushchyovkas. Our first task during the fieldwork was to locate the buildings, photograph and describe them, adding the collected information to the database of the national registry of cultural monuments. The other task during our fieldwork was to collect place-lore for a project by Estonian Literary Museum that runs an interactive map of the memory-scapes of national parks, providing information about the cultural heritage of national parks. For us, this meant interviews loosely based on a specific set of questions and visiting, photographing and mapping the places mentioned.

Our research group consisted of people arriving straight from the capital, and, naively, we were mildly surprised that keeping up the romantic and idealized stereotype, the traditional colorful and fabulous place lore, is not a priority to the community. Questions about sacred places, will-o'-the-wisps (or foxfires, mystical lights in the bog, popular in European folklore), ghosts and aliens were hopeless — the community had obviously much more practical issues on its mind.

American landscape geographer Kenneth Olwig has written about circular referencing that happens in tourism industry, when a representation of a landscape is created and distributed to masses (Olwig 2004). Once a tourist visits the landscape and finds that very image there, they will reproduce it. But what if the picture is completely different from what was expected? Somewhere between folklore and politics local people go on with their everyday lives.

RURALITY AFTER THE AGRICULTURAL REVOLUTION

It is not only nature protection discourse that has developed. All over the Western world changes in the rural resource base and agricultural reforms of late 20th century have resulted in the marginalization of agriculture in the recent decades. The economy and social structure, and therefore opportunities and options in rural life have completely changed in the recent decades, and so has the image of rural life. In her book "Otsides kogukonda sotsialismijärgses keskuskülas" ("Seeking community in post-socialist centralized villages") (2011) Aet Annist, an Estonian anthropologist describes in detail 21st century everyday rural life, which is characterized by unemployment, low incomes and barely any communication between the inhabitants. However, this does not mean that the image of an idyllic, safely stable rurality that is associated with authenticity, traditional values and customs and in contrast to the image of anonymous and polluted urban life, is merely an illusion to everyone.

Revalorization of rural spaces and the adoption of the free movement in the European Union have created an interesting repopulation dynamic, that has a notable impact on the whole concept of rurality and understanding of the rural population, however small it may be (in the future).

Whereas in the traditional rural/urban dichotomy, cities were seen as the symbol of “possibility, progress and modernity” and rural space represented crude conservatism (Boscoboinik 2018: 521), then in the 21st century the same geographical place can be considered either a center or periphery, based on the possibilities it provides or denies (Boscoboinik 2018: 526). These processes that started from Western Europe in the 1970s, have by now spread to an international scale, and can be noticed also in Estonia. Such repopulation dynamic when people have several residences, with the goal to increase their professional opportunities, diversify their habitat, add variety to leisure activities is called ‘multilocal dwelling’ (Perlik 2011 via Boscoboinik 2018). The acquisition of second homes in attractive tourist destinations in rural spaces is made possible by new forms of mobile work and results in new forms of housing and ways of life. Multilocal dwellers that use the freedom to move, quick, cheap and user-friendly means of communication, and new forms of mobile work simultaneously blur the line between work and leisure, centre and periphery. This kind of movement is not counter-urbanization, or ex-urbanization, but an urban project: those who can choose for their desired landscape, leisure and work place, constitute their personal center, which can geographically be located in the city or countryside (Boscoboinik 2018: 526).

One of the effects of amenity-led migration instead of resettling because of economic pressure, is the appearance ‘hobby-farms’ (Jääts 2008). Estonian ethnologist Liisi Jääts, who did her fieldwork among the residents of Karula National Park, one of the national parks in Estonia, describes ‘hobby farms’ as a sign of the urban attitude that is transforming social structures and existing models of social relationships in rural areas. ‘Hobby farms’ are usually owned by wealthier people, who are car-owners and have their day-job in a different field, easing the economical pressures and giving them the opportunity to run an enterprise that concentrates on lifestyle and experience, rather than traditional tangible products (see Jääts 2008; Värnik et al 2011; Boscoboinik 2018). Combined with a general shift in the relationship between humans and nature, this provides an opportunity to add value to the farm and redefine it as a multi-product enterprise (Slavic and Schmitz 2013: 267).

AGRITOURISM AS A SAVIOUR?

According to Slavic and Schmitz, 21st century farm- or agritourism is often based on four principles: 1) a flexible strategy; 2) sustainability-oriented family life-cycle concept that respects relationships between family members and land, and considers inheritance issues; 3) adaptability to new values; 4) general commodification of farm assets to satisfy the visiting tourists (Slavic and Schmitz 2013: 266-267). Therefore, although tourism revitalizes rural areas, it makes them also dependent on social pressure that demands the whole package from the provider in tourism enterprise: tangible products, social inclusion and entertainment, aesthetical pleasure (often cultural heritage related) and nature protection (Filipe and Mascarenhas 2011: 37-38).

National park status can be considered an added value to a rural area, which is characterized by scarce population, marginal economic activity, modest infrastructure and then starts receiving heightened national and international attention to the area's nature protection. On one hand, one must adapt to restrictions by external constraints from nature conservation discourse, but on the other hand, the limelight shed on the scarce natural resources can be useful.

A glance on Geiranger, a fjord and community by the same name in western part of Norway provides relevant material for comparison with Soomaa. In this picturesque place, tourism

and farming have co-existed since the late 19th century. In 2004, Geiranger acquired the status of a nature conservation area, and in 2005 World Heritage status. In Geiranger, tourism development is supported on national and regional level, and also a part of Norwegian government strategy. Based on fieldwork conducted in the area in 2007, Marte Lange Vik, Tor A. Benjaminsen and Karoline Daugstad explore tourism as a necessary income diversification strategy in rural Europe, especially in areas where traditional rural businesses are facing decreasing profitability (Vik et al 2010). The authors use narrative and discourse analysis, concentrating on experiences, rather than ideology, to understand the balance between local actors and broader environmental discourses, and the interplay between farming and tourism. The authors describe the results of their fieldwork and interviews as 2 main attitudes emphasizing different aspects of the total situation. The two main narratives prevalent are marginalization narrative — associated with the traditional agriculture discourse and telling the tale of its marginalization — and synergy narrative — that focuses on tourism and mutual benefit. While interviewees agree on environmental values, disagreements about the course of the processes in area create distancing and social antagonism.

The marginalization narrative consists of three arguments with a focus on unequal power relations. This victim narrative was mostly expressed by people in the farming sector who complained about unfavorable policies and management by external factors. The main issues are marginalization of agriculture, bush encroachment because of difference in environment values, and disempowerment of locals by external decision makers (Vik et al 2010: 46). They were also concerned that Landscape Protection and World Heritage status, albeit strengthening tourism, causes additional restrictions for farming (Vik et al 2010: 42).

Synergy narrative, with its focus on tourism and mutual benefit, was expressed by the actors of the tourism sector, World Heritage Management, and various municipal and government officials dealing with conservation, planning, and development. Compared to the competition-approach, main arguments there stress the symbiosis of farming and tourism activities and the Landscape Protection and World Heritage status are seen as positive aspects (Vik et al 2010: 45). It is in the best interests of tourism business to take into account all the ideas and practices in the community, saving and vitalizing the area in a way that, at first, doesn't make anyone its victim (Vik et al 2010: 45). And indeed, the social antagonism was not so much against tourism itself, but skepticism by the local respondents was expressed rather about bureaucracy, official policies and management.

In recent decades, Barata and Mascarenhas have developed a Cultural Park concept that follows a similar perfect scenario for exercising the multifunctional potential of rural areas. Cultural Park is an idealized view based on active participation in the valorization and conservation of cultural landscapes. It is a holistic view on land planning, environmental protection, cultural heritage and educational activities, which aim “at the improvement of rural population's quality of life, land's memories preservation, sustainable development, new practices, new areas of knowledge and apprenticeship” (Filipe and Mascarenhas 2011: 38). This ideal can be compared to a well-functioning national park, which also requires cooperation between environmental, farming and tourist institutions. The quality of life of local inhabitants is, of course, the indicator of the success of such cooperation and the resulting politics.

Returning to Soomaa, and looking at the weaker end of the power struggles, individuals on the location, and their reflections, where does this case study locate on the scale that could be drawn from a botanical protection area to all-inclusive culture park?

SOOMAA: A CASE STUDY

In our interviews, 'Soomaa' turned out to be a concept with various meanings. Clearly, as demonstrated by the estranged neighbors living just 7 kilometers from each other, an abstract name is not enough to strengthen the unity of the local community. This tendency was especially visible among those inhabitants whose roots go back multiple generations in the landscape. Additionally, local bus routes separate travelers from the villages by taking them to different towns.

On a broader scale, as Raul Rebane noticed in a recent audio lecture where he touched upon the reputation of rural life, Estonians can not really appreciate wetlands, just because there are so many of those in Estonia (Rebane 2017). When we asked about the nature protection value of the territory, the locals of Soomaa would independently from each other use their words to paint a picture of a picturesque bush country, similarly to how it is represented in tourist books. Although Soomaa National Park was originally named after a geopolitical distinction that had been made already in 1935, the branding concepts of "Soomaa" and "fifth season" became a part of the area's tourism strategy around the year 2000, and was usually approached by locals with a charitable scepticism, because water can rise both in spring and autumn, but even then in specific areas only.

On the other hand, to defend the tourists, newcomers, and all victims of such scepticism, Mats Widgren, a Swedish cultural geographer, advocates for an interdisciplinary landscape research in his year 2004 essay "Can landscapes be read?". This approach takes into account four aspects present in each landscape. These are: form, or aesthetical appearance of the landscape; its function, what is the landscape used for; processes that take place in the landscape; and context or what is happening around the landscape and how this affects it (Widgren 2004). Every landscape consists of an aesthetical view, a network of memories, habits, traditions and laws, and physical opportunities which may be relevant or not depending on the perceiving individual or collective.

There's no doubt that there is more isolation in the community nowadays, because before, the unity of people was guaranteed by associated professions. People would still fondly remember timber floating, haymaking and transporting, cow-milking and potato-picking, and gathering for parties, waiting for the mobile shop on wheels and attending cinema screenings in the village center both before and during the kolkhoz times. However, there is plenty of things happening today as well. During our fieldwork of 2+2 weeks in June-July and August 2017, we participated in the community daubing workshop in Sandra village, a documentary movie night that was held in Tipu school house as part of a camp dedicated to dugout canoes, a scything competition called "Soomaa Vikatimees 2017" in the yard of Sonni farm, marveled at the exhibition of knitted crafts made by the Handicrafts Association of Soomaa Women, went on an excursion to Öördi bog where a representative from the State Forestry Management Centre presented us with the results and further plans of the mire restoration project. We made additional trips to the national park to participate in the meeting of 'Soomaa community and collaboration council', to spend a mid-winter week in Mardu artist residency, and to skate on Tõramaa meadow with skates that we borrowed from Karuskose household.

I have already mentioned the Estonian ethnologist Liisi Jääts, who did her fieldwork among the residents of Karula National Park in 2003.-2004. One of her conclusions was, that the attention from urbanites received by national parks accounts for the destruction of rural homogeneity in those areas (Jääts 2010: 28-29). She divided her interviewees in two groups:

“native inhabitants” and “the newcomers” (Jääts 2010: 45). For “native inhabitants”, rurality is associated with agriculture and forestry, and local landscape is perceived in continuity, as connected to their personal memories and experiences. “The newcomers”, who have an urban background, rural life is a quality-based lifestyle, they perceive the local landscape in terms of environmental protection, health, and cultural heritage. Our fieldwork in Soomaa confirms the attractiveness of national parks, but I see such a division of inhabitants as problematic.

Among others, we interviewed a woman who was born in 1950. Born and raised in Soomaa, she has several kids and grandkids and is now retired. Highlighting important places, she recalls Tipu school, where her mother would work as a cook, also the fields and cattle she used to take care of in the kolkhoz times. It is all associated with deeply emotional memories, and we can notice tears in her eyes when she mentions all the different houses, that she has called home throughout her life. They are all in close vicinity and located cleverly on higher points of land, where even the highest floods can't reach. Her husband, born in 1941, who most of his life worked as a forest ranger in the nearby area, shows us with great pride the dwelling complex that he and his family have built. However, their neighbor, born in 1957, who has stayed despite all of the people significant to her leaving, has a much more critical view. As a horse breeder and a hobbyist microhistorian, she criticizes the restrictions and overly strict demands imposed on local farmers and enterprises by the nature protection institutions and the European Union. She has located several ruins in the nearby forest, and telling tales of past times, she describes the tranquility in rural life today as ‘tomblike’.

For a self-proclaimed hiker and fisherman who bought himself a house in Tipu village in 1979, having a rural summer home is a sign of success, a national-romantic adventure for which he thanks his guardian angel and ‘instinct of a nature person’. Every once in a while, close-by in his Soomaa house, one of the initiators of the memoryscapes project that positions place-lore from various national parks on an interactive map on the internet, provides an entertainment program for locals and visitors, while his main job is located in the town called Pärnu about 30 kilometers away. The young family of Karuskose household organizes canoe- and kayak-tours on the rivers, trips to the forests, bogs and islands, with camping, catering and sauna afterwards. The leaders of the tourist website soomaa.com that advertises the national park's wilderness are the leaders of the local entrepreneurship with their canoe-, snowshoe- and kick-sled expeditions, however, they mention problems with the devastating forestry economy as well.

MTÜ Tipu Nature School is an enterprise that supports the socially responsible entrepreneurship philosophy of sustainable ecotourism. Created in 2007. by a German woman who moved to Soomaa, this initiative makes use of international volunteers in organizing workshops, trainings, expeditions, camps and thematic evenings that advocate nature-friendliness alongside environmental and heritage sustainability to everyone interested.

This is just an outtake of the list of people who have stayed or arrived in Soomaa, and merely a glimpse on the problems, joys and potential that the landscape has. The eclectic inventory represents a selection of individuals, landscapes and values that we met during the conducted interviews.

No doubt that Soomaa has elements that attract urbanites. The vacationer, who became associated with Soomaa in 1979 describes: “Soomaa has this wetland mystery”; “You need to have immense resources of energy, the level of entropy is immensely high in here”; but for him it is nevertheless a thrilling summer project connected to romantic nationalism: “If you want to manage it here, you have to spend a lot of energy, in return you get mosquito whine and two

Lyme diseases and... But there is something like that, when I come here, then I come home. Therefore: this is my creation, I have given my 100% here.” (ERA, DH 1624) A second-home-owner, who was born in 1963, and received his property Soomaa in 1999. thinks the same way: “The tough situation forces you to live in the moment at all times,” and this makes him feel good (ERA, DH 1626). Living in the countryside is either for the rich or the fanatics, and despite working in the capital city Tallinn and spending most of his time there, his identity is connected to Soomaa — as the land, not the community, because there is no job for him here, and “those people who are here today, get their social charge from somewhere else.” (ERA, DH 1626).

A ‘newcomer’ born in 1980 who is renting a household in Soomaa for the third winter in row, acknowledges her opportunity to choose has an important privilege — while the ‘oldtimers’ are constrained by their roots in the place. However, also the ‘oldtimers’ see the freedom of opportunity from different angles. The former forest ranger (born in 1941) who lives in Tipu village is proud of himself for staying in the countryside despite of all the temptations, and ironizes: “People go to the city, there’s the paradise, everything, fun. Milk is produced in the shop and bread grows on the shelves in the shop as well.” (ERA, DH 1622). However, his neighbor (born in 1957) brings out the opposite aspects: “Well, I try to visit the city as rarely as possible, I don’t have any resources... Whenever you go there, you see things that you want, but if you don’t go, you’ll live another day without a problem.” (ERA, DH 1629). Even if the center of today is characterized by mobility and flexibility and periphery is static and inflexible and in theory its all subjective, then floods, nature protection restrictions, weak mobile phone signal and inconvenient bus connections are the inescapable reality of Soomaa.

The silence in everyday life was also experienced by our research group, but the subjective depression of it becomes the most apparent in the next commentary that reflects the accumulated concerns with the lack of a social support network, difficulties with finding companions with similar interests in this small community, nostalgia for the past and the narrative of decline or disappearance of rural life (Serk 2017: 58), but is most likely also affected by the interview situation that supports discussing these topics. “See, when a person is alone, the problem with communication is a painful thing, it is... A person that spends all their days among other people does not understand this, they think “Oh how nice and quiet!” It always makes me angry when they come to Soomaa, “Oh lord, quiet!” But they can’t imagine silence being death. That there is no life in silence. That it is impossible to survive for a person in this silence, so for the persons that arrive from among crowds, at first it is nice, beautiful here, but at one moment you will be fed up with it.” (ERA, DH 1629).

Her view on those who on these days move to the countryside to stay, is pessimistic at times. “The young. You see, let’s say it straightforward, a young person has not been beaten by life yet. But let them live here their whole life here, see if they still want to keep this approach up. No. They come and live here, but for how long? And it used to be like this very often, when I was receiving Maaleht [a local newspaper on rural issues], that when someone somewhere came to the countryside, it was like “Oh, see, a young family came to the countryside!”, but when they left, no one would write about that.” (ERA, DH 1629).

The variety of life experiences and professions provides of superficial thrills, and even the socializing potential provided by the Handicrafts Association of Soomaa Women fades because of the different interests of the individuals. “But the problem is that nothing connects us any more. We don’t have mutual activities, or how do I say. [—] She deals with her own projects that I know nothing about, and I will never know, because these times have passed. Well. And see, this is where the line goes — we have nothing to connect us any more, we don’t even

have common topics to discuss.” (ERA, DH 1629). There are gaps on the community, between the active and passive people living in the surroundings. The issue here is how to get everyone involved, especially the ones that want to belong to the community, but are not taking part of the activities provided this far.

The infrastructure adapted to new values and needs favors short-term “escapades to the countryside”. This phenomenon is not connected to a specific destination, but activities that are seen as stress-curing, happening in a certain type of landscape considered authentic and idyllic in contrast to urban life (Boscoboinik 2018: 523). This context gives a ground for an ironic commentary on the weak mobile signal reception in Soomaa, made by a freelance journalist in the ‘travel guide’ section in a popular news portal in Estonia: “The lack of phone reception gives a clear sign to the traveler — this place is so abandoned by people that it must be really good for a truly relaxing vacation, undisturbed by any other holidaymakers.” (Einama 2016). In the two years following the aforementioned commentary, the situation has not changed much.

In addition to the fading community, we would often also come across an opinion the national park protects its nature, but not its people, signaling a lack of recognition and respect of the local people and their customary rights. Restrictions for haymaking and the mire restoration project are just a few examples of the increasing control and bureaucracy. Those decisions are not dependent on the local community but scientists and officials, leading to the estrangement of locals from the landscape. In the minds of the older generation, the main institutions such as Environmental Board of Estonia and State Forestry Management Centre became intertwined and national parks were seen as a unrealistic nature protection initiative led from the capital Tallinn. A couple consisting of a husband that was born in Riisa in 1944, left in the Soviet times and returned in the 1990s with his wife from a nearby county, praised the national park for popularizing the area, but they believe that the boardwalks and river expeditions are attractions directed to the entertainment of urbanites, and the nature protection aspects are not paid enough attention to.

Similarly to the problem where traditional small-scale agriculture is marginalized by factory-farming, entrepreneurs in tourism industry have their share of problems in the context of highly competitive neoliberal capitalism also with the synchronizing constraints of Euro-globalization. “In the beginning, when the national park was established, they would say, “Oh we will have jobs and bread and like... Hordes of tourists will come here on tours, one of us could provide accommodation, the other catering and the third could go to the bog with them and the fourth doesn’t even know what they’ll do. But we never made it anywhere. Well, some people who would try organize accommodation, but then the big controls came and... They thought there’s not enough toilets and what other requirements there were.” (ERA, DH 1629). Represented negatively in both in the marginalization and synergy narratives, the lack of information and bureaucracy stemming from the nature protection discourse lead to a social antagonism against the officials (Vik et al 2010: 41, 43).

There was a separate discussion about the aggressive landscape design methods used by the nature protection institutions. “It’s easy to spend the state’s money,” the couple from Riisa village ironizes and explains, “They’re using the tax payers’ money.” (ERA, DH 1632). This cynical approach gets a sad tone when the interviewees admit, that the unpleasantness of the restrictions is also connected to knowing that if they would go on a dedicated pilgrimage to the officials in the capital city, they could get a permit for action.

Last, but not least, another highlight in the landscape is the drainage ditches, part of the

great “land improvement” project in the USSR, that are being filled during the mire restoration project. While most of the people are not happy with the aesthetical side of the works, then for the former forest ranger the ditches represent generational continuity as semi-natural landscapes, partially created (dug) by his ancestors. “See, now some smart people discovered that we need to restore mires — mires need to be restored, and draining ditches to be filled, as if there wasn’t enough mires! For decades, maybe hundreds of years it has been as it is, the ditches haven’t dried out the mires, but now it’s necessary to fill them.” (ERA, DH 1622). He denounces the over-regulated forestry policies, but describes the nature protection, or rather nature conservation activists also as being “green [foolish] in their heads”, referring to the inappropriate understandings about nature prevalent in the urban environment.

THEORY AND PRACTICE

As a ‘national landscape’, Soomaa National Park would ideally be valued both for its nature and culture, but the priorities of its actors are based on their symbolic, economic and political needs. Every meaning of landscape has its market, whether local, regional, international or all the aforementioned (Mormont 1990: 33). Parallel to the changes in the physical and geographical space, the tasks of the associated politics have changed. Increasingly, it should consider both the interests of local community and external authorities, find a balance between the different values and strategically increasing the availability and usage of selected resources (Mormont 1990: 30). Postmodern landscapes are characterized by the competition of multiple stakeholders in the same geographical area — this is what divides reality and the Arcadian Culture Park.

Place and sense of place are always socially and culturally constructed, and always in danger of being discursively manipulated and having political consequences. Multifunctional agritourism, especially when it is so strongly linked to environmental protection and cultural heritage discourses, affects the socio-economic structure of the region and redefines rurality. It forces farmers to enter business, marginalizes traditional rural lifestyles by constraining agriculture and forestry, diminishes urban and rural differences, and adds to the standardizing power of global markets, the commodification of culture, homogenization of places and behaviors (see Jääts 2008; Vik et al 2010; Ciervo 2012; Slavic and Schmitz 2013).

The people of Soomaa who were raised in the time and place where a modernist agricultural paradigm was prevalent and/or have spent most of their lives working in agricultural production are trapped in difficulties. They have survived the Soviet Union, the collapse of the centrally planned collectivist economy and privatization that followed, but are now facing the continuing marginalization of farming, emigration from the countryside and changes in land-usage directed by Nature Protection institutions. In the meanwhile they are still growing plants and raising animals to provide food for themselves and their families. However, even the tellers of most nostalgic stories idealizing the collectivist approach of soviet economy, understand that times have changed without the possibility to be reversed.

Tourism in Soomaa is both referring to the local territorial identity image, and providing modern services that “frequently recall typical urban cultural values (comfort, relaxation, entertainment, privacy)” (Slavič and Schmitz 2013: 269). National Park status revitalizes life in the villages and attracts new, enthusiastic inhabitants, who are clearly perceived positively and give hope for sustainability. However, traditional ways of life have almost completely been replaced by commercial agritourism. The new multifunctional rurality consists of nature protection, tourism

and cultural heritage (Jääts 2008: 134). Educational tracks and boardwalks, canoe-, snowshoe-, skating- or kick-sled expeditions during the flooded “fifth season”, Tipu Nature School that promotes nature-friendly sustainable lifestyles and rouses people to value community and heritage, are all part of tourism agenda directed mainly to the outside of the local community. According to Slavic and Schmitz, such signifiers of rurality are less connected to the material everyday of rural life, and increasingly more a part of a “virtual or hyper-rural-simulacrum-society” that is oriented on consumption (Slavic and Schmitz 2013: 267). This is also supported by the nature protection discourse which promotes grazing local meadows with highland cattle instead of dairy cows, and agrees with horse-breeding in terms of maintaining local endangered breeds, but does not support horse-riding facilities.

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HOW TO TRANSFER SUSTAINABLE AND ECOTOURISM PRACTICES FROM PROTECTED AREAS TO NON-PROTECTED AREAS

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ORIENTATION

In many countries in Europe the sustainable tourism and ecotourism have been developed successfully in protected areas, particularly in national parks and nature parks, more locally in Natura 2000 areas and in areas comprised with valuable natural and cultural monuments. Additionally the most relevant sustainable certification methods have been developed based on these circumstances and thus the sustainability can be assessed, evaluated and verified. Nevertheless, only a very limited number of countries and regions can present a sustainable tourism cluster with comprehensively covered geographical areas comprising protected and non-protected areas integrated with each other without disturbances of different character. Typically there exist differences between different uses of the nature and natural resources that result to potential or actual conflicts.

The increasingly important approach which we could apply in Europe is: how could we transfer sustainable livelihood and living practices that have been verified in protected areas to neighboring areas comprising buffer zones, recreational areas and economic areas? In these areas different use patterns of land and natural resources and inhabitants' living conditions typically may conflict with each other and such problems have to be solved to reach sustainable state of life. In principle sustainable and ecotourism can be used as core means and instruments to overcome these difficulties. One of the main preconditions for sustainability in general and in tourism development is that sustainability can be assessed in the context of local environments and socio-economic structures, with local societies and the inhabitants in addition to the nature. For assessment and validation we need internationally verified certification and validation systems which combine local or region based development concepts and sector based systems. This can be demonstrated and verified in the tourism sector by comprehensively developed destination based certification system, for instance.

APPROPRIATE CONCEPTS APPLIED IN FINLAND

In Finland we may distinguish mainly three major patterns or paths in that type of development. We may develop regions based on **the UNESCO biosphere concept**. We established the first biosphere reserve in Finland in 1992 and currently we have 2 biosphere reserves where sustainable development have been verified and can be demonstrated in practice. The first reserve bases on forests and other renewable natural resources. The area comprises rural villages and typically combination of rural production and small-scale industries and increasingly SMEs in service sector, mainly in tourism. This biosphere reserve is located in the eastern part of Finland, in the borderline with Russia. The second one is located in the seaside and archipelago. It is very much based on the state of the Baltic Sea and the islands combining rural

fishing and nature protection cultures where livelihood is increasingly gained from combining traditional fisheries and modern aquaculture with active protection and controlled tourism and transferring from production society towards services.

The second international concept applied in Finland is the **Geopark concept** within the UNESCO network of geoparks. So far there is only one officially accepted Geopark in Finland. It is situated in the geological unique area in northern Finland in Rokua district. It was developed by the Finnish geological institute and Metsähallitus which formerly was called the Finnish Forest and Park Service, both being state services by character. Of course the municipalities play a key role both in the geopark and biosphere concepts as without the active support from the local and regional authorities and the local societies these concepts could not have been developed and further elaborated.

Currently there is a process where a large area comprising a few cities and other municipalities in the Saimaa lake area in the eastern part of Finland is under evaluation to be accepted officially as the second Finnish Geopark of UNESCO. If this will be done successfully it will be the largest geographical area in Finland where geological unique areas and attractions are integrated into areas where water based socio-economic development, industrial sites dominantly based on sustainable use of forests and modern services sectors prevail, and where sustainable ways of living can be demonstrated, validated and verified. It could act as a window for demonstrating combination of old and traditional agro-industrial society towards modern services orientation where increasingly sustainable tourism would lead the development in rural and urban areas.

We should understand both biosphere and geopark concepts as demonstration areas whose approaches and practices could be multiplied and transferred into other regions as well, with or without an official acceptance by UNESCO. The core issue in both concepts is that the criteria and indicators used for sustainable development and in planning and management of geographical based development could be followed and applied in other parts of the country, if the local societies and inhabitants have that wish and devotion. In order to work with such concepts systematically, it is advisable to collaborate with those universities, research and management institutes as well as educational and other entities who have working experience and appropriate specialization in such concepts. International cooperation is also highly recommended in these development concepts.

OTHER RELEVANT OPTIONS

The third option for sustainable local and regional development can be based on integrating protected areas with typical, "normal" socio-economic areas using buffering zones with softer land-use patterns than traditionally have existed like in the case of the UNESCO concepts or by integrating protected areas and economic areas by the decisions of local societies and inhabitants. We may use larger protected areas like national parks or smaller areas like Natura 2000 areas or cultural heritage areas and transfer their principles applied in modified forms into the neighboring areas with different socio-economic structures and living conditions. This transfer and modification requires joint methods and ways of planning and preparation based on which new type of decisions can be made.

PRECONDITIONS FOR APPLYING OPTIONS IN PRACTICE

For the this approach the precondition is that the local people understand the necessity to

lead the life in an increasingly sustainable manner and that experiences gained in protection and recreational services more sustainable way of life can be reached. However, there exists some major obstacles that hinder such development processes in practice. Typically these issues are very dependent the **regional and municipal development strategies should be targeted towards sustainable development goals**. on the various stakeholders and their roles, interests and preferences and the administrative cultures prevailing.

One of the main influencing factors is that The other core issue is that **the organizational and management structures** including politicians and policy makers, should enable sustainable development by improving their **governance** from traditional top down to more participatory working, planning and management methods which should be **transparent**. These actors should also distinguish and understand their roles in enabling sustainable investments and other developing measures in the forms of balanced land-use planning, infrastructural investments related to roads, energy supply, water supply and wastewater and other waste treatment. All these factors create the institutional supportive basis for all sustainable businesses and other actors including the tourism ones. However, ecotourism is not always fully or highly dependent on all these decision-makers due to typically lower scale of needs of ecotourism from the administrative or management structures and thus the progress can be achieved with smaller inputs and less dependencies.

However, lack of sustainable strategies and goals as well as old-fashioned administration structures are in most regions and municipalities the most critical topics hindering sustainable development and sustainable tourism. The importance of this problem-area should always be clarified and assessed as it is a precondition for sustainable development both in protected areas and non-protected areas as well as for transferring good or best practices between these areas and destinations.

INVESTMENT RISKS SHOULD BE MINIMIZED

From the sustainable ecotourism point of view, large and nature and natural resources **destructing investments**, for instance in mining industries, may destroy all the main conditions for sustainability and the whole ecotourism concept, as we have recognized all over the Europe and the rest of the world. International development banks can make difference in this field as their investment program and project planning and monitoring systems are on the average much more appropriate and more sustainability concerned than those of typical commercial international and national banking and other financing schemes.

The international development banks typically may also provide a bridge between the protected and non-protected areas. This is due to the concept that often the funding program comprises two elements, namely the loan to be provided by the bank for the client country or its region or other subjective, and the grant to be provided by the Global Environmental Fund (GEF) or United Nations Development Program (UNDP) or by a donor agency such as the EU or a bilateral fund from different sources. Sustainable tourism is in most cases funded through the grants, yet most of the infrastructural investments enabling tourism through the loans. In recent years the social and other NGO related funds have become increasingly important in the forms of grants or soft loans.

In order to gain commitment from the local inhabitants we should apply participatory methods in all levels of planning and decision-making as found appropriate and involve all members of

local societies from the very beginning of the development planning. If this will not take place, we will meet dis-commitment of local inhabitants to sustainable development and potential conflicting issues may turn into actual conflicts at later stage.

Globally, unfortunately the UN and Government led the sustainable development programs are too bureaucratic and unpractical to be used in leading sustainable development in practice, for many reasons such as the weak role and number of indicators among sustainability criteria and how to assess and measure them in practice. They are typically too general to be turned into applied in practice. We should turn also this issue upside down: How could we use certification processes and programs developed for sustainable tourism in promoting sustainable development in practice? This is increasingly required as local development criteria and indicators are seldom applicable and useful in concrete planning, but the ones used in modern sustainable destination certification comprise such character.

CASE STUDY IN FINLAND

We have been working with this issue in Finnish Lapland for years and more precisely with one certification process of tourism distinguished also by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council. When we have worked with criteria and indicators for assessing the sustainability, we have found out where the bottlenecks exist and at which level the problem solving should take place. For example, in one region the piloting destination area called Pyhä-Luosto is located in three different municipalities, with different strategic development goals and concepts of sustainability. Also the administrative and management structures and traditions vary to a large extent. How to manage the sustainable development process in such conditions?

The appropriate solution we apply is to assess and apply in a modified form of the existing national park and its principles for sustainable tourism in the neighboring socio-economic conditions and link it within the framework of the Green Destinations Certification scheme. In comparison we have learned that the guidelines in the national park are less precise and comprehensive and thus combine them in modified form to the more precise and to some extent more strict certification criteria and indicators of the Green Destination concept. The combination is managed by using the participatory discussion and planning method as it is the key method for conflict resolution and transferring good or even best practices from one system to another one in practice.

This approach created a logical development framework that we may use both in developing sustainable tourism as well as for presenting systematic development path to strengthen local and regional sustainable development. Ecotourism is in the core of these development activities and it is linked and integrated directly with sustainability measures and actions in the destination area.

We have also carried out surveys among tourism businesses and stakeholders and administrations how they find sustainability in the context of regional and local development and vice versa. This has led us to the roots of the existing problems: what are the main bottlenecks and how could we solve them? As a result we have found out that there exist less problems among the tourism businesses and local people than among old-fashioned and political decision making and traditional planning methods applied in the utilization of natural resources including forest, water and mineral resources.

In order to be able to prove the approach we have involved one university specialized in management and governance topics and another one specialized in natural resources and tourism into the process.

(The oral presentation of the author will concentrate on demonstrating the sustainable development concept and conflict resolution process in practice in Pyhä-Luosto area in the Finnish Lapland and the above mentioned text is used as an orientation to the problem area.)

SUMMARY

The concrete answers and methods to improve the situation is to increase transparency and openness in planning and decision-making processes, to use increasingly participatory working methods, to strengthen the role of sustainable businesses and their managers in leading the development efforts in practice (as the market mechanism supports more strongly tourism cluster than any other) and to change the production oriented planning to service oriented approach in developing the society at all levels. The transfer of good and best practices from one certified and verified system to another one is effective based on this approach and leads to more sustainable practices more likely than using traditional management and organizational concepts.



ECOTOURISM AS A SOCIAL INNOVATION: LESSONS FROM TURKEY

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this research is to discuss ecotourism as a social innovation tool and to present the ecotourism practices of two non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and their economic, social, and environmental contributions to the local people in the context of social innovation. To that end, a field study and a qualitative study were conducted in Aşağıçerçi village and in the Drahna Valley, which are located within the borders of the Küre Mountains National Park in Bartın province. Economic activity in these underpopulated rural areas is highly dependent on agriculture, horticulture, and forestry. Because of the lack of economic activity, inhabitants have faced the challenges of outmigration and an aging population. Therefore, to solve social and economic problems and to contribute to the sustainable use of resources, two local NGOs have started to develop ecotourism activities in the region to provide new economic opportunities for the inhabitants and sustainability of the ecosystem. Results show that ecotourism enhances sustainable use of the ecosystem and contributes to the development of the local economy, while ensuring the sustainability of the local culture.

Keywords: Social innovation, ecotourism, rural development, NGOs.

INTRODUCTION

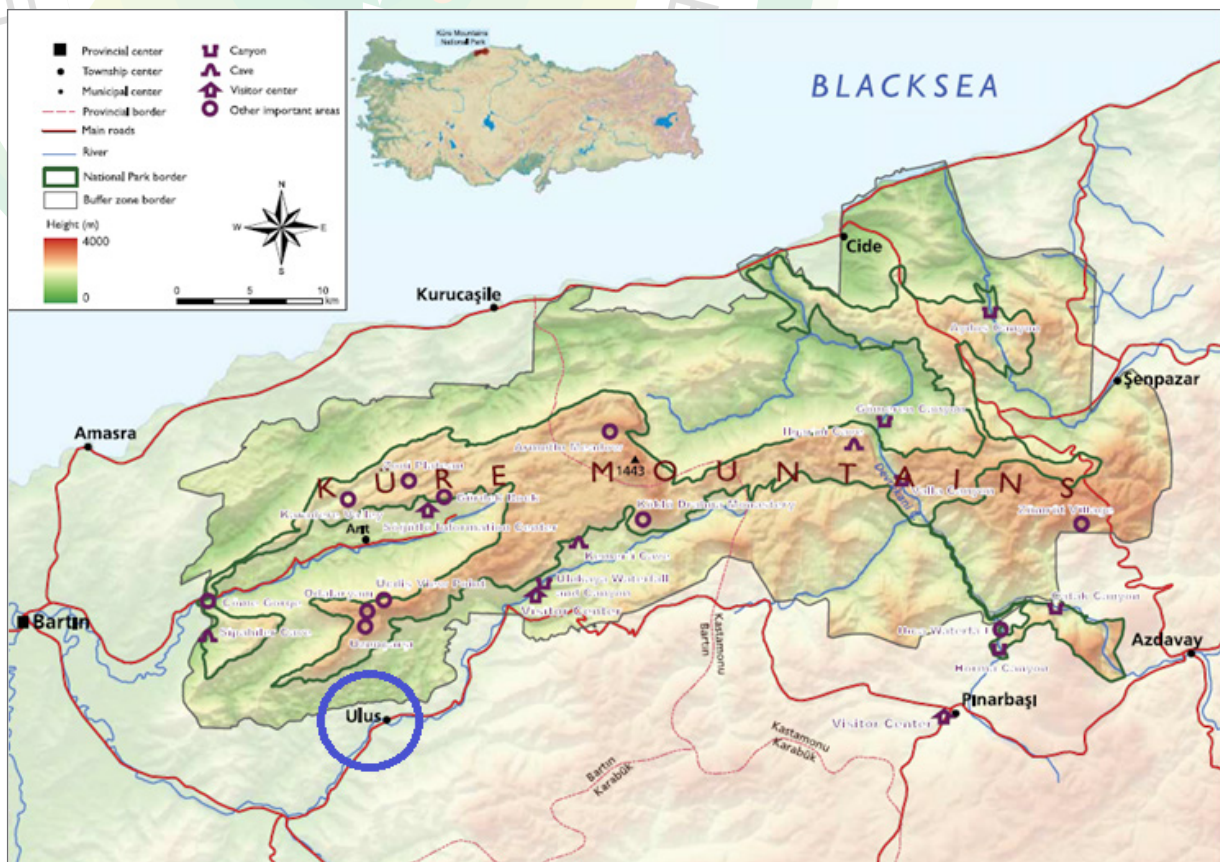
Many rural communities face challenges related to insufficient sources of income, such as lack of employment facilities, poor infrastructure and transport, an aging population, and outmigration. These challenges become much more pressing when the sustainability of the communities is at stake. Expansion of new local businesses (e.g., family-owned guesthouses) and activities (e.g., ecotourism) in rural areas can solve these problems by developing the local economy. Therefore, local entrepreneurs, NGOs and local authorities have initiated a number of projects in the context of social innovation in order to address these challenges in rural areas.

Social innovations are new solutions (services, products, processes, models, markets, etc.) that meet social needs more effectively than existing solutions and lead to new or improved capabilities and relationships and better use of assets and resources (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012). Social innovation brings transformative changes in a society so that existing economic, social, cultural and environmental challenges can be resolved for the benefit of the society and the planet (Cahill, 2010). Social innovation in tourism represents an important developmental factor, owing to its influence on the transformation of the 'customer-oriented' perspective into the 'community-oriented' approach (Alkier et al., 2017).

In this regard, ecotourism can be an innovative means for the economic development of rural communities with limited economic activity that also preserves the natural and cultural resources of the region.

Some rural areas in Turkey suffer from economic difficulties because of a lack of employment facilities, limited economic activity, and lower living standards. Ulus town, in Bartın Province, is a remote area located in the boundaries of the Küre Mountains National Park (KMNP) in the north of Turkey (Map 1) with a total population of around 20,000 inhabitants. Ulus hosts mountainous areas, waterfalls, plateaus, and canyons of great interest for outdoor activities. Many of those resources are in rural areas that suffer from depopulation, as the lands have been abandoned because of economic distress. There are 26 villages located in the KDMP Buffer Zone in Ulus town. From 1990 to 2014, the total population of these villages decreased by 69% because of the lack of economic activity (KMNP, 2015).

Today, the main local economic activities include agriculture, livestock farming, apiculture, and forestry. Ulus town is a charming place for trekking, hiking, camping, and canyon passing. It offers warm weather, stunning landscape, and a unique local cuisine and culture in an impressive ecosystem. However, opportunities to make a living are very limited, and the development of ecotourism is seen as a way to increase economic activity and income. Some local NGOs have initiated ecotourism projects with a view to solving the area's economic problems and reversing the recent depopulation. This paper examines two NGOs' projects in the context of social innovation and assesses their economic, cultural, and environmental impacts on the local community.



Map 1: Location of Ulus town
Source: KMNDP (2018)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social innovation has gained increasing importance in the last decade in the context of a wide range of social problems. However, its implementation in the tourism industry is not prevalent (Ball, 2005). The range of innovations in tourism to date has been limited to skills development, sustainability issues, and ecotourism initiatives, which can be categorized as social entrepreneurship rather than social innovation (Ergul and Johnson, 2011). Social innovation in tourism has become more elusive in recent years with the advent of the sharing economy in various tourism and hospitality sectors (Walker and Chen, 2018).

The term social innovation was introduced by Drucker as a new dimension of management that aspires to drive social change through mass organizations (Walker and Chen, 2018). Social innovations are “new ideas, products, services, models, institutions, social relationships, and collaborations, offering new to overcoming pressing societal challenges” (Volynets, 2015: 5). Social innovation involves companies, social enterprises, NGOs, cooperatives, informal networks, partnerships, and voluntary associations. The goals of social innovation are to meet social needs and to achieve economic sustainability by focusing on the ideas and solutions that create social value.

Social innovation is a phenomenon that refers “a novel solution to the social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than current solutions.” (Alkier et al., 2017:2). Social Innovation Generation (SiG) a collaborative partnership that aims to support whole system change through changing the broader economic, cultural and policy context in Canada to allow social innovations to flourish, describes social innovation as “an initiative, product, process, or program that thoroughly changes the basic routines, resource, and authority flows or beliefs of any society (e.g., individuals, organizations, neighborhoods, communities, whole societies)” (Volynets, 2015: 5).

Gerometta et al. (2005) identify social innovation as a phenomenon that has the following three dimensions: (1) the content dimension, which constitutes the impact on society; (2) the process dimension, which creates changes in social relationships and evolves as innovations happen; and (3) the empowerment dimension, which allows the innovation to reach new levels of power in both people’s private lives and in society as a whole (e.g., increasing freedom and well-being). These three dimensions can be easily recognized in the majority of cases of ecotourism.

According to Caulier-Grice et al. (2012), five core elements define the practice of being socially innovative:

- i. Novelty. Social innovations do not need to be completely original or unique, but they can deploy existing ideas or knowledge in new ways in a specific, field, sector, region, or market.
- ii. Implementation. Social innovations must have the potential to be implemented practically in a sustainable way.
- iii. Meeting a social need. Social innovations should meet a social need that, if not met, would lead to harm or suffering.
- iv. Effectiveness. Social innovations should be more effective than existing solutions and should provide a measurable improvement in outcomes.
- v. Enhancing society’s capacity to act. Social innovations should empower people to create new roles and relationships, develop assets and capabilities, and/or make better use of resources.

Most of the current social innovations in tourism industry are related to web-based technologies, such as social platforms, which offer opportunities for individual exchanges. For example, the online platforms Airbnb (commercial) and Couchsurfing (non-commercial) facilitate hospitality relationships (Mosedale and Voll, 2017).

Social innovations create new institutions and networks as well as social entrepreneurship. A narrow definition of social entrepreneurship focuses on earned-income strategies for non-profit organizations. However, in a broader sense, social entrepreneurship includes all types of innovative, social-value-creating activities that can occur within or across sectors (Guo and Bielefeld, 2014). NGOs are effective initiatives that lead the community in economic and social development.

Social entrepreneurship constitutes the initiatives that identify and address significant social problems in communities (Zhang and Swanson, 2014). Social entrepreneurship aims to seek out, recognize, and pursue opportunities to create social value; it is the act of carrying out community interests using entrepreneurial initiatives (Zappalà, 2001). Social entrepreneurs have roles in shaping and creating social values within society, such as reducing poverty, encouraging the economic development of a community, and improving health care. Ergul and Johnson (2011) claimed that social entrepreneurship is generally associated with sustainability and environmentally conscious projects, such as ecotourism and community involvement.

Social innovation projects provide benefits to the community by creating job opportunities, increasing economic gain, and preserving the culture and environment of a particular area. For example, environmental social innovation projects—including recycling enterprises, low-impact housing developments, renewable energy cooperatives, organic gardening cooperatives, farmers' markets, car-sharing initiatives, and community composting practices—help solve pollution problems by minimizing waste and degradation of the environment and by preventing declines in biodiversity (Seyfang and Smith, 2007).

Xanterra, the USA's largest national park concessions management company, operates hotels, lodges, restaurants, retail outlets, camping grounds, and transportation systems developed using Ecologix, an environmental management system that focuses on the logical integration of ecology and business. The case of Xanterra provides new insights into a successful and innovative company that has led the way to sustainable practices, sustaining natural systems through continuous innovation for the environment and for business (Carlsen and Edwards, 2008a.)

Scandic Hotels' social innovation program has contributed to the greening of the tourism industry through responsible construction activities, management and operation of hotels, education of team members in various sustainability related issues, running eco-certified hotels, taking part in local community events, banning jumbo prawns from all its kitchens because of unsustainable farming practices, and serving fair-trade coffee in all its hotels (Bohdanowicz, 2008).

Socioeconomically oriented innovative projects have contributed to the development of the economy. For example, the Blackstone Valley Tourism Commission created the Sustainable Tourism Laboratory to find new ways to empower tourism to play a significant role in creating resilient communities that are able to meet, flow with, and prosper from today's immediate and emergent social, economic, and ecological challenges (Quick, 2008).

The Diablo Trust, with its innovative approach to land protection in the Diablo Canyon Rural

Planning Area, developed a model for the maintenance of traditional ranches as economically viable enterprises that conserve habitats for wildlife and restore native ecosystems (Carlsen and Edwards, 2008b).

The Eco Travel Services travel agency, a social enterprise in Singapore, works with non-profit organizations, social enterprises, and other partners to conduct projects for the development of rural villages within Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. It adheres to five core values: teaching sustainable ways to travel, loving nature, having the spirit of adventure, opening up to new cultures, and growing with the community. Eco Travel provides homestay accommodation with villagers. It also trains villagers with the collaboration of Chiang Mai University and Singapore Management University, teaching them conversational English for effective communication with tourists. Three-quarters of the fees are given to the family that hosts the tourists, while the remaining 25% is donated to a community fund that finances public projects in the village with a focus on social impact (Biqi, 2012).

The ASSET project was initiated to carry out collaborative marketing activities between stakeholders in rural areas in Gambia, including 80 representatives from private medium-sized, small, and micro-business, skill centers, community-based tourism, and the cultural and entertainment sectors (Alkier et al., 2017).

Tasting Arizona, a non-governmental consortium that includes tourism, food and beverages, farming, education, communities, festivals, and food organizations aims to provide “local flavor” to customers in Arizona. Because visitors demand local flavor, a range of food products that represent the taste and feel of Arizona has been identified (Carlsen and Edwards, 2008b.)

The Experience Development of Danish Attractions (EDDA), a project that focuses on sustaining the socioeconomic well-being of built attractions in Denmark, encourages product and management innovations through joint competence development. All staff are involved in courses, study trips, and experiential discussion groups in order to acquire knowledge and facilitate the implementation of innovation (Hergesell et al., 2008).

Segarra-Oña et al. (2015) developed the LIVING LAB project, which aims to raise awareness of social innovation and to develop a social innovation model in ecotourism in the Dominican Republic, promoting novel ideas and encouraging both practitioners and public authorities.

The Smokehouse Restaurant, which offers training and work placements, is a good example of a social enterprise. It offers a six-month culinary training program to students while they participate in the operation of the restaurant (Volynets, 2015).

The innovative movement developed by the Asian-German Sports Exchange Program focuses on sustainable tourism in war-affected areas of Sri Lanka. It runs social sporting events that enrich people’s travel experiences by contributing to the advancement of intercultural understanding and peace in this ethnically divided country (Schulenkorf, 2008).

Ecotourism is a social enterprise model that addresses critical environmental issues while providing economic benefits to the community. Benevides et al. (2018) affirmed that social innovation in tourism, including ecotourism, constitutes the substitution of national macro policies for regional policies in order to minimize the socioeconomic impact of generating employment, promote local culture, increase regional income, and preserve natural resources. Previous studies have shown that social enterprise with the spirit and soul of social

entrepreneurship is the appropriate approach for a community-based organization to take. Situmorang and Mirzanti (2012) claimed that social enterprises focusing on the development of ecotourism should be implemented by community-based organizations.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, a qualitative research method was used. In-depth interviews were carried out with the executive directors of NGOs and the owners of guesthouses in order to reveal the impacts of ecotourism development projects conducted by the NGOs.

The researchers conducted interviews with the following NGOs: DRAHNA, the Association of Environment, Development, Culture and Cooperation, and APSUV, the Association for Providing Services for Ulus and Its Villages and guest house owners. The purpose of the interviews was (1) to collect information about their socially innovative projects (the education of women running guesthouses in the villages) and (2) to determine their views on the impacts and benefits of ecotourism development projects in terms of their economic, social, cultural, and environmental effects. In order to analyze the impacts of the NGOs' ecotourism projects in the area, Aşağıçerçi village and villages located in Drahna Valley (Alıçlı, Köklü, and Kozanlı - Figure 1) were selected as the study area.

The fieldwork was carried out from May to June 2018. A total of five guesthouse owners and two NGO executive directors were interviewed in person, in most cases at their places of residence. The interview with the executive director of DRAHNA was conducted by telephone, as DRAHNA's headquarters are located in Istanbul. Guesthouse owners were sampled using a purposive snowball sampling method (Jennings, 2001) in order to identify and reach eligible people. Interviews ranged from 20 minutes to 40 minutes and were tape-recorded.

In addition to the data collected from the participants, and in order to qualify the research, the observation method was used to obtain data during the fieldwork, both from the interviews in this study and from former visits made by the author in connection with previous research. Secondary sources of data, including journals, published books, unpublished reports and newsletters, government documents, and an internet database, were collected to obtain information on Ulus town.

RESULTS

A total of seven respondents were interviewed in this study (Table 1).

Table 1: List of Respondents

Respondents	Location	Features
Executive Director of DRAHNA	Pendik, Istanbul	NGO
Executive Director of APSUV	Ulus	NGO
Owner of Küre Dağ Evi (Figure 2)	Aşağıçerçi Village	Small lodging (12 rooms), restaurant, and events
Owner of Taş Konak	Köklü Village	Small B&B lodging (5 rooms)
Owner of Ünal Guesthouse	Alıçlı Village	Small B&B lodging (3 rooms)
Owner of Saraç Guesthouse	Kozanlı Village	Small B&B lodging (4 rooms)
Owner of Çamlık Guesthouse	Aşağıçerçi Village	Small B&B lodging (5 rooms)

This study revealed that the NGOs' main aim in conducting innovative projects is to respond to the economic, social, and environmental challenges that confront the rural communities in Ulus region. For this reason, DRAHNA (established in 2005) and APSUV have made efforts to innovate new ways to empower ecotourism, taking into account the economic development of the area, and to encourage the area to prosper from today's social, economic, and ecological challenges.

DRAHNA aimed to develop ecotourism activities by increasing the amount of guest accommodation available in the villages of Ulus town in the buffer zone of the Küre Mountains National Park. Their project, Development of Ecotourism-Based Guesthouses, was conducted in 2011 in order to meet the social needs of local people in terms of employment opportunities while providing accommodation facilities for visitors. The project was funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) in the context of the Improving Forest and Protected Area Management Project.

A total of 25 households who were eligible to run a guesthouse were selected for the education course. They were educated on accommodation services, running a guesthouse, and environmental issues. The course provided local women with new skills and roles, enabling them to run a family business and broker new relationships and collaborations between various groups. The women who completed the course were given certificates. Through the efforts of the NGOs, traditional houses were turned into guesthouses, and project funds were used to decorate one room of each house with the necessary furniture and fittings. As a result, these houses have started to host tourists, and today there are 10 guesthouses run by local women.

As a result of the project, public awareness about conserving the national park and forest ecosystem was to some extent raised. The executive director of APSUV stated: "National parks and forests provide benefits to rural communities living in villages. Forests provide a substantial contribution to the well-being of the community. Forestry provides seasonal job opportunities to families that some of them earn their living from forestry. Therefore, we have created awareness among residents that forest ecosystems must be protected for the sustainability of the community. Besides, ecotourism can be used as a tool for increasing the income of the locals that we attempted to develop an ecotourism project considering the improvement of local economy."

The executive director of DRAHNA remarked: "Forest is very valuable here. Besides earning their living from forestry, they benefit from the subsidiary products of the forest, such as mushroom, cranberry, rose hip, medlar, linden, wild pear, blackberry, blueberry, snail. They prepare their winter food from these plants, i.e., frozen mushroom, marmalade prepared from rose hip or cranberry, jams made from blackberry, as well as dried fruits."

The project contributed to the development of ecotourism, increasing the amount of accommodation available, and promoting the region's natural beauty, local culture, local food production, and agroforestry. One of the women participants from Aşağıçerçi village reported: "Tourism increases the production and sustainability of local food. We cook local food from mushroom, Abraham-Isaac-Jacob [locally called ısıt], prickly ivys, and smilaxes [locally called diken ucu] for our guests."

APSUV contributes to solving problems by educating inhabitants in various sustainability related issues, making efforts to maintain local farming traditions, to promote the local culture and to produce food focused on "local flavor" representing the taste of Ulus town. One guesthouse

owner noted: “Serving local food to visitors, [it] is much more important that we do not only serve local flavors, but it is also meaningful for the sustainability of local culture, as these foods are linked with protecting cultural traditions, traditional farming practices, and keeping local food away from genetic modification.” Furthermore, farmers’ markets can play a significant role in the economic development of the area; they attract visitors, thereby stimulating the local economy while preserving farmland and rural livelihoods.

One female guesthouse owner reported: “Ecotourism activities in the region contribute to the survival of local handicrafts. In Ulukaya village, where the waterfalls and canyon are located, two craftsmen have sustained a wood-carving tradition. They earn their living by selling boxwood spoons and ladles to visitors. A kind of local embroidery called Tel kırma [Figure 3] can also be sold to tourists.”

Regional development projects that are conducted to improve the quality of life of residents in the area are not a new initiative. The Association for the Beautification of Aşağııçerçi Village has conducted two projects in the area: the Project for the Determination of Alternative Sustainable Livelihoods and Training in Ulus Town, funded by GEF in 2004–2005, and the Establishment of the Multipurpose Women’s Center at Aşağııçerçi Village project funded by the EU in 2008. These projects were focused on collecting, packaging and marketing wild natural herbs that can be used in herbal tea or as spices in order to provide additional income to families in the villages. These projects have changed residents’ lives to no small extent by addressing the economic challenges they face.

The DRAHNA-organized Local Keşkek [ground wheat] Festival has taken place every July since 2005 (Figure 4). This event brings around 5,000–6,000 local people and visitors together, especially rural people who have migrated to İstanbul or to other big cities, and strengthens the ties between them. According to DRAHNA’s executive director, the festival offers people a reason to come together, and families who migrated to other cities have started to restore their former houses.

The executive director of APSUV emphasized the importance of events in the area for the development of ecotourism: “Since 2013, the Bartın Bike Festival has been held in the KMNP, and it hosts an average of 200 cyclists every year. The Ovacuma–Uluyayla–Ulus–Bartın route is one of these bicycle routes. Six thematic routes have been determined within the scope of EcoRoute, where the values reflecting the natural and cultural identity of Bartın province can be seen, and one of these tourism routes is the Ulus Küre Route. These events have caused ecotourism to become important here.”

The KMNP Ulus Visitor Center and Ethnography Museum opened in 2015 in a historical mansion called Kocagöz Konağı, which was built in 1932. Cultural artifacts ranging from traditional clothes to kitchen utensils are on display, and information is provided to tourists visiting KMNP. The artifacts on display were collected from local villages by members of the APSUV (Figures 5 and 6).

There is also an APSUV project related to the revitalization of the Salt Road, a previously busy caravan route that has lost its functionality. As part of the project, construction work continues on a 12km walking route that connects the Drahna Valley (starting from Köklü village) to Kurcaşile, located by the Black Sea.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has examined the active roles played by two NGOs in addressing social change and local dynamics, focusing on their valuable work in developing the local economy and ecotourism in Ulus town. The NGOs aim to use ecotourism to improve the economic welfare of rural communities, provide training and jobs, and develop culturally appropriate opportunities. They contributed via ecotourism projects to addressing the following issues in the region:

- educating local people in the running of guesthouses and in various sustainability related issues
- organizing events for the local community and visitors
- stimulating and maintaining traditional farming activities by initiating ecotourism
- improving and supporting local production
- conserving biodiversity for wildlife
- sustaining rural culture and increasing awareness for the protection of rural heritage
- stimulating community collaborations to develop ecotourism in the area
- reviving community collaboration to produce local products
- restoring old buildings.

Ecotourism has an economic impact on local communities, and it plays an important role in increasing the means of living of rural communities. A UN-supported study by the Collaborative Partnership on Forests revealed that ecotourism returned up to 95% of revenues to local economies (Bailey, 2016). Ecotourism as a social innovation tool is beneficial for the community, as it creates new ideas and solutions to resolve local social needs and problems. The results of this study show that ecotourism is seen as a way to improve the quality of life of rural people, as it contributes to the economic and social life of local residents. The NGOs consider ecotourism as a solution for the long-term ecological and economic sustainability of rural people living within the boundaries of KMNP.

NGOs play a significant role in the development of ecotourism, implementing projects for the well-being of communities. In this regard, strong local institutions are important for providing effective structures to develop successful, community-based tourism. However, it should be noted that the success of these initiatives requires the involvement of local communities and the holistic development of ecotourism. The results of this study show that these NGOs aim to ensure through ecotourism the economic empowerment of rural communities that have been neglected by central and local government for many years.

Previous studies have shown that the most appropriate approach for the development of ecotourism is social entrepreneurship (e.g., Situmorang and Mirzanti, 2012). Social entrepreneurship can provide social change in the community by educating people, improving their quality of life through new employment opportunities, and contributing to the sustainability of the natural environment.

For the effective development of ecotourism, local people should be motivated and assisted in setting up more accommodation facilities. Such efforts will encourage the development of small businesses and an increase in local employment; this in turn is likely to lead to a decrease in outmigration. Although some research has pointed out that the benefits from ecotourism are small in absolute terms (Coria and Calfucura, 2012), ecotourism can still play an important role in increasing the standard of living of rural communities and in reducing poverty.

Ecotourism has the potential to provide economic incentives to preserve biodiversity and natural areas, provided that the revenues are large enough and accessible to the target populations (Colvin, 1994; Fennell, 2008). For this reason, provision should be made to allow as many people within the community as possible to benefit from ecotourism.

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Figure 1: The Drahna Valley



Figure 3: Tel Kırma (local embroidery)



Figure 2: Küre Dağ Evi, Aşağıçerçi Village, Ulus



Figure 4: DRAHNA's Local Keşkek Festival



Figure 5: KMNP Ulus Visitor Center and Ethnography Museum



Figure 6: Artifacts exhibited in the Ethnography Museum (local wedding dress, gunpowder box)

The Role of Protected Areas towards the Economic Development of Tourism in Georgia

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ABSTRACT

As a very important part of sustainable tourism, the protected areas have a tremendous role in developing of ecotourism and ecologically friendly society. The work is devoted to the relationship between protected areas and the local communities around, positive and negative impacts of tourism and their analysis and concludes in the author's opinions for future developing of sustainable tourism in Georgia.

As sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability. Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them.

The work aims to underline the importance of environmental protection and sustainable development of tourism (ecotourism) in Georgia, especially on protected areas in connection with local communities. Correspondingly, the authors present and analyze different surveys done on protected areas which clearly show the weaknesses and strengths on the way of sustainable tourism development in Georgia.

The Paper provides the research methods as follows: systemic approach to estimation of current state of natural resources, ecotourism and sustainable development of tourism; statistical methods and analyses.

Keywords: Protected Areas, Eco-tourism, Sustainable Development of Tourism, Local Communities, Georgia

INTRODUCTION

As sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability. Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them.

As a very important part of sustainable tourism, the protected areas have a tremendous role in developing of ecotourism and ecologically friendly society. The work is devoted to the relationship between protected areas and the local communities around, positive and negative impacts of tourism and their analysis and concludes in the author's opinions for future developing of sustainable tourism in Georgia.

CURRENT STATE OF INTER-RELATION OF ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM IN GEORGIA

At present, there are 14 Strict Nature Reserves, 10 National Parks, about 20 Managed Reserves, 40 Natural Monuments and 2 Protected Landscapes (Tusheti and Kintrishi) protected countrywide, most of which are capable to be subject to sustainable development through environmental and entertainment events. These Parks and Reserves nowadays cover 520,811 hectares, which constitutes 8,6% of the whole territory of Georgia (Agency of Protected Areas of Georgia). Within these categories the national parks are most popular and well formulated in Georgia (Kajaia G., 2003).

Fortunately, there is an extended and well developed network of protected areas in Georgia, established and operating in line with the international standards. More than 17 years National Parks are managed through close cooperation with the famous international institutions, such are the World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF has the fully operational regional program Office in Tbilisi for South Caucasus Area), International Union for Conservation of Nature, List of National Parks of the United States, with financial support by the international donors, such are: KfW (Credit Bank of Germany), US Department of Interior (US/DOI), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), US Agency for International Development (USAID), World Bank Global Economic Fund (WB/GEF), Caucasus Nature Fund (CNF) etc.

2015 the World Bank rendered aid to develop the "Strategy of Tourism Development in Georgia 2025". As shown in the Strategy Document, based on the analysis of close links between tourism and environment, the primary problem has been outlined envisaging the state of conservation of nature in the country. In this regard, the main cause is inconsistent and improper waste disposal, as well as low awareness on sustainable tourism. Air pollution is also the acutest challenge for two large cities of Georgia – Tbilisi and Kutaisi. It is mostly entailed with outdated vehicles and overloaded traffic. Waters are also gravely polluted with sewage wastewaters.

In order to give deeper impression about the actual situation on protected areas in Georgia, we will present and later on analyze different surveys recently performed on these territories.

According to the WEF Travel and Tourism competitiveness report 2017, in comparison to 2015 Georgia has better ranking only by 1 point in 2017 (71th place in 2015 and 70th place in 2017). Besides, Georgia has mostly improved ranking in components of environmental sustainability

and natural resources in comparison to 2015: 52th place in Environment Sustainability in 2015 – 42th place in 2017, 113th place for Stringency of Environmental Regulations in 2015 - 105th in 2015; 109th place for environmental legislation enforcement in 2015 - 69th place in 2017; 76th place in Sustainability of T&T Industry Development in 2015 – 64th place in 2017; 125th place for Natural Resources in 2015 - 106th place in 2017; 124th place for Total Protected Areas in 2015 – 103th place in 2017; 104th place in for Total Known Species in 2015 – 101th lace in 2017 (Table 1.).

Table 1: Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index 2017 edition, WEF

CHARACTERISTICS	2015 (141 countries)	2017 (136 countries)
ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY	52	42
Stringency of environmental regulations	113	105
Enforcement of environmental regulations	109	88
Sustainability of T&T Industry Development	76	64
Threatened species (% total species)	81	82
Forest Cover change	-	3
NATURAL RESOURCES	125	106
No. Of World Heritage natural sites	83	86
Total Protected areas	124	103
Total known species	104	101

Source: the Table has been developed by the author based on the WEF, The Travel&Tourism Competitiveness Report 2017 (edition Paving the Way for a More Sustainable and Inclusive Future).

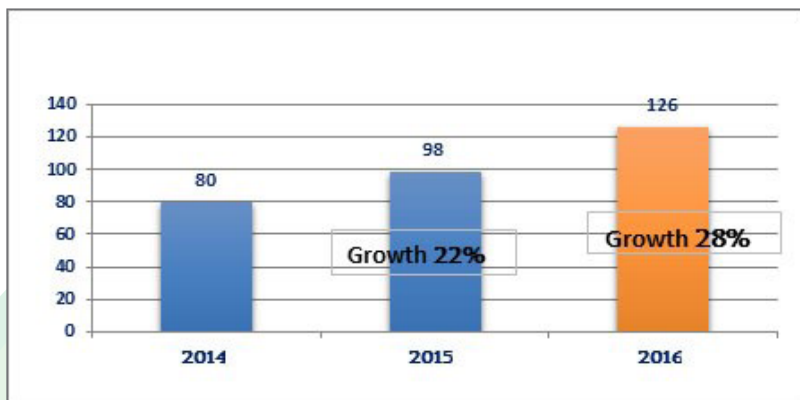
Another interesting data to be demonstrated will be the Survey held in 2016 by “Monitoring and Estimation Questionnaire of Public Perception and Impact” developed by the APA. The public opinion poll has been held for the population residing near the protected areas in Georgia (covering 1800 persons). The poll aimed at: estimation of public awareness level on environment; fears and expectations of the population in terms of protected areas; analysis and study of current state of their participation in management part during the development of protected area.

The survey revealed the positive attitude of the population towards the protected areas and eco-tourism development thereon, but they still have economic and social problems. Therefore, the local authorities are trying to activate their involvement in management process on the protected areas. One of the positive examples of local involvement in sustainable development is Martvili Canyon, where after infrastructural works, the boating sector was delegated to local Ltd. “Uputskhoi” for management, holding 70% of income and employing 80 local families.

Partially, the local community underlined the problems related to pasture usage, wood-cut, hunting, fishing, human consumption plant collecting and other restrictions on the protected areas. Despite of this, 31% of the respondents expressed commitment for involvement in eco-tourism development and protected area management considering that development of protected areas will facilitate to better environmental protection, increased visitor number triggering creation of job opportunities and increase of incomes for the locals. All these aspects are playing a tremendous role in forming of sustainable development of tourism in protected areas.

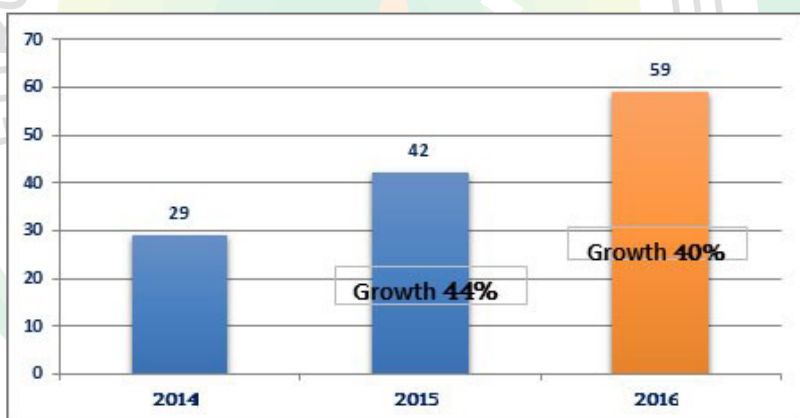
The surveys confirm that compared to 2015 (9-month data), the number of family hotels near the protected areas in 2016 increased with 28%, catering objects – 40%, employment – 24% (see, Charts 1, 2, 3).

Chart 1. Increase of the number of Hotels near the protected areas in 2014-2016



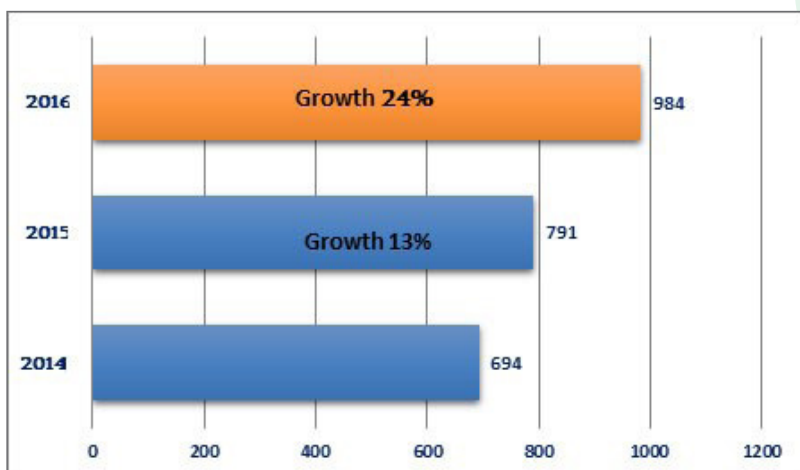
Source: LEPL Agency of Protected Areas (2016)

Chart 2. Increase of the number of catering objects near the protected areas in 2014-2016



Source: LEPL Agency of Protected Areas (2016)

Chart 3. Increase of employment in tourism sector near the protected areas in 2014-2016



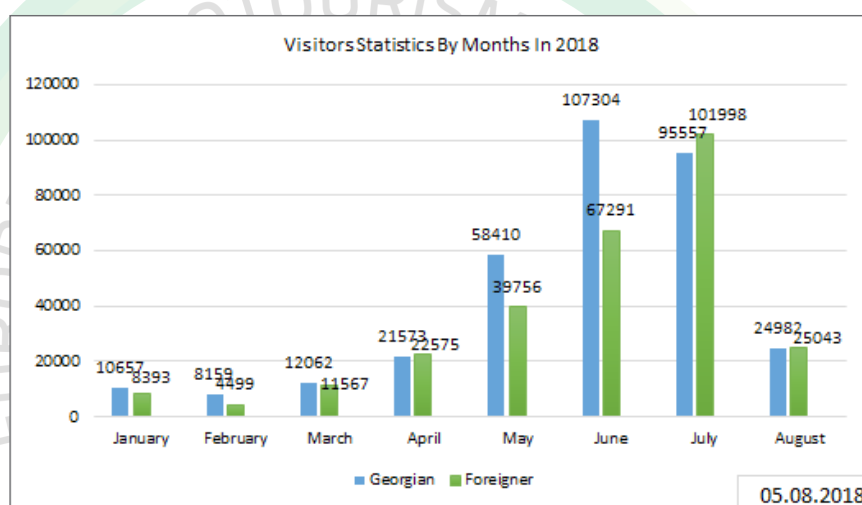
Source: LEPL Agency of Protected Areas (2016)

Deriving from the survey analysis, eco-tourism development on Georgian protected areas contributes in development of tourism in general, strongly supports the economic development of the regions and local community, production of eco-tourism products, facilitates to one of the components of sustainable development of tourism.

On the other side, the rising number of tourists on the protected areas also increases the risk of negative impacts of tourism on these areas as well as in whole country in whole.

The following new statistic data developed from Agency of Protected Areas of Georgia shows the dynamic of increasing of visitor numbers on protected areas of Georgia by months in 2018.

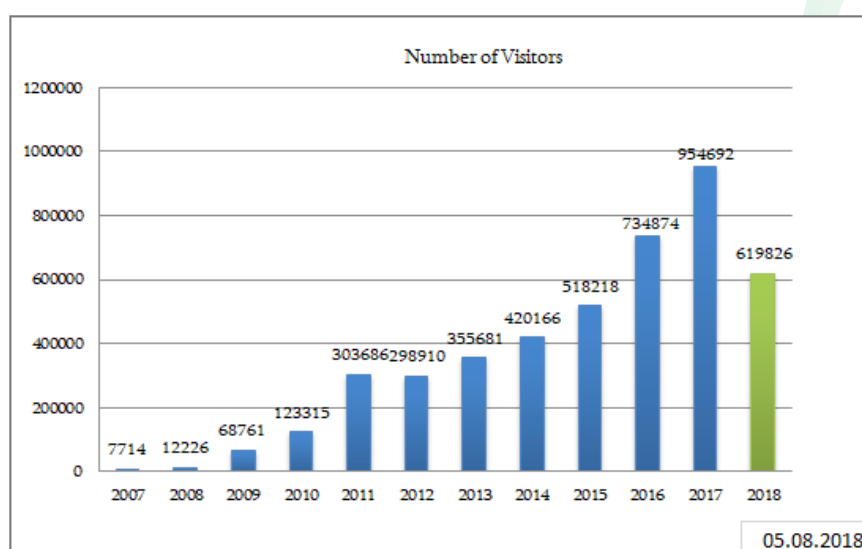
Chart 4: Number of Visitors on Protected Areas of Georgia



Source: LEPL Agency of Protected Areas, August 2018

If we compare these data with the statistics of visitor numbers by years in the following chart, we can clearly see that the tourist number (101.998 visitors) visiting the protected areas only in month of July 2018 is more than the number in year 2017 in whole (954.692 visitors).

Chart 5: Number of Visitors on Protected Areas of Georgia by years



Source: LEPL Agency of Protected Areas, August 2018

As we can see from the last two presented charts, the number of tourists visiting the protected areas is increasing drastically. Of course, the increased number of visitors brings economic benefits for the local community, but also the risk of environmental footprint on the visited areas seems to be too high. Some professional groups already talk about the negative impacts of accelerated growth of visitors and call it over-tourism. So these two contradicting factors should be considered and balanced rationally not only on regional but also on national level. This is mostly important factor taking into consideration, that one of the six principles of the “Georgian Tourism Strategy 2025” is “*sustainability*”.

CONCLUSION

Concluding from above presented work, it is clear that Georgia is still on initial stage concerning the environmental policy implementation and a sustainable tourism development. Despite of this fact, during last years the georgian government intensively facilitates the opportunities of business development of the local population around the protected areas. In major part, the local community started to understand the economic impact from ecotourism in their region, what strengthens their motivation to be involved and commit themselves in common management of the protected area. Through the rising of sustainable tourism awareness, the locals become the number one environment and nature protectors in the areas.

One more very important rising problem for Georgia seems to be very fast growing number of visitors in a small country. This fact causes the necessity of further researches what will show the clear positive and negative impacts of visitors on protected areas in order to reach the sustainable development and avoid an ecological breakdown in future. Further studies should be conducted by scientists, donors or private organizations with strong support of government as well as the whole process should be strictly monitored. In this connection, it is worth to mention that recently the new Prime Minister of Georgia has publicly declared strict green and sustainable policy in the country. Taking into consideration the trend of increasing visitor figures, offered tourist products should adapt to the capacity of existing environmental resources throughout the country.

Thus, the governments, together with local communities and all other tourism stakeholders, should intensify their activities to provide environmentally friendly destination, sustainable minded and educated communities and competitive tourism environment for the better future.

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COMMUNAL WORK, COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES DAY “LET’S DO IT! ESTONIA”/ “LET’S DO IT! WORLD CLEANUP DAY 2018”

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Key Words: communal work, ecotourism, World Cleanup Day

TALGUD

Talgud is the Estonian word for communal work, which is a gathering for mutually accomplishing a task or for communal fundraising, it is useful for promoting active attitude, strengthening local communities and supporting the development of local leadership.

Talgud is a word that is in slightly different forms know all over Northern Europe and Baltics since the early middle ages that meant the communal action, like building a house, that was not possible by a single family. Work was done as a community, knowing that when the occasion arises each family can call rest of the community to help with their need.

ELF is the short form for Estonian Fund for Nature, it was founded in 1991 and it stands for the preservation of natural diversity. ELF was one of the first organization to start popularizing the communal and volunteer work in Estonia.

“ELF Talgud” / “ELF Conservation Holidays” are longer volunteer projects to protect valuable and endangered species and habitats. Regular since 2001. Over the years more than 8000 volunteers have worked on hundreds of sites. “ELF Talgud” provides much needed conservation work to raise the awareness of conservation and biodiversity work - it is part of ecotourism.

Staying longer on the event helps people learn about local nature and culture as well as strengthen the local economy. Educational lectures and sightseeing trips are organized for the participants of the volunteer work. That is to provide new knowledge through which helps the participants form a deeper understanding of the place the event takes place. Usually the transport, accommodations and catering is sourced locally. Adding to the fact that the useful work is done by a small group that stays in the region and uses the local services so the event can be equated to ecotourism.

Working together for the environment gave the idea to do all the volunteer work all over Estonia on the same day.

ELF employees and volunteers organized a **community activities day “Let’s do it!”**.

Community activities day “Let’s do it! Estonia” – a campaign to encourage people to volunteer for their local environment in a wider meaning. It has had 50 000 volunteers annually since 2008.

What is the community activities day “Let’s do it!”?

It's the day of collective action that has been taking place in different forms all over Estonia since the year 2008. In 2008 people gathered together to clean Estonia from illegal garbage, in 2009 people gathered together to generate good ideas and from 2010-2017 there have been several different actions (talgud) all over Estonia. Every community, organization or active citizen decided by themselves what needed to be done and asked other people to join according to that.

One of the most famous projects by ELF and other NGO-s is "Let's do it! World", which has spread this model - one country in one day - around the world, to date nearly 140 countries and 20 million people have joined to clean up illegal waste.

This year community activities took place on the 5th of May. The day was really successful - there were 2177 different actions taking place all over Estonia with around 53 128 participants (4% of the inhabitants)! Many Estonians care about their environment and are willing to collaborate.

"You do not need to invent a new high-tech tool to change the world. The experience of The Day of Civil Actions shows that there is also no need for tens of thousands of Euros to change Estonian living environment - it is enough to have tens of thousands of Estonians who care," says the initiator of Estonian action, Tarmo Tüür.

On September 15, 2018, World Cleanup Day, people in 150 countries will stand up against the global trash problem and clean up waste, making it the **biggest positive civic action the world has seen**. Imagine a powerful "green wave" starting in New Zealand and ending in Hawaii with hundred of millions of people taking positive action together on the very same day.

Let's Do It! has never been only about cleaning up waste. We also aim to unite the global community, raise awareness and implement true change to achieve our final goal— a clean and healthy planet.





STANDARDS AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT IN ECOTOURISM

Ecotourism Business Models – Successful Examples
Eco Labeling for Sustainable Tourism



SUSTAINABLE TOURISM CERTIFICATION IN EUROPE TO CREATE SYNERGIES AMONGST TOURISM BUSINESSES, DESTINATIONS AND OPERATORS

Herbert Hamele

ECOTRANS - European Network for Sustainable Tourism Development

“Certification, when based on transparent, objective and measureable procedures, provides a reliable basis for identifying tourism businesses and destinations and their products and services that meet sustainability criteria. It provides guidance for travellers and other purchasers to encourage sustainable consumption patterns and green purchasing. It gives a checklist and targets for businesses to work towards when creating sustainable products and services and supply chains, and is used to improve innovation and market access. Therefore the marketing and branding of certified tourism has become an important feature of sustainable tourism development.” (Introduction to the topic “certification and marketing” on tourim2030.eu).

How can “sustainable tourism certification” seen in the context of global and European developments?

Which new tools are available to certificates and tourism businesses, destinations, and tour operators to make their tourism more sustainable and to raise their visibility in the international market?

1. The 17 UN SDGs 2030 are all relevant to sustainable tourism from both points of view: many forms of tourism are contributing to the problems as well as other – more sustainable – forms of tourism contribute to solutions and can be driver for achieving the goals
2. The rich countries in the world – including the OECD countries in Europe – risk to fail in achieving the SDGs, especially regarding the SDG 12 (Sustainable consumption and production), 13 (Climate action), 14 (Life below water) and 15 (Life on land). In Eastern European countries the situation seems to be a bit less dramatic.
3. Sustainable tourism has been defined since 2009 by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council with a set of baseline criteria for businesses, tour operators and destinations on sustainable management, socioeconomic, cultural and environmental impacts. These standards are widely recognized and used for the recognition of certificates around the world.
4. The Tourism2030 portal for sustainable and responsible tourism offers a knowledge base on 10 topics as action fields for making tourism more sustainable – including the topic on “certification and marketing”.
5. More than 200 environmental & sustainability certificates worldwide, 2/3 operating in Europe on local, national, European or global level, 1% of tourism is certified = 1 out of 100 SMEs – not yet a real choice to the consumer.
6. The European Eco-Tourism Labeling Standard can be used as baseline for the identification of those certificates for Tourism businesses, destinations and operators who significantly contribute to sustainable development in the destinations in or close to protected areas. Few certificates are offered to both businesses and destinations – and thus create synergies between them.
7. What about the situation in Europe?

The European Parliament's committee for transport and tourism (TRAN) had commissioned the University of Lancashire and ECOTRANS in 2017 to provide a detailed picture European tourism labelling (Quality labels and Sustainability labels), to assess opinions and expectations of tourism stakeholders and to make recommendations for European action in order to improve the situation. The report gives 6 recommendations:

- a. Initial meeting & work group with certificates
- b. Joint initiative with GSTC: European added value
- c. Encourage national tourism industry to engage
- d. Provide promotion platform & programme for networking and support
- e. Promote local level initiatives & support businesses
- f. EU procurement and project funding to contract certified businesses
8. **The European TRIANGLE initiative has developed 3 practical tools for tourism businesses, destinations and tour operators**
 - a. CSRCCT online course
 - b. Global Certification Quickfinder
 - c. Green Travel Maps
9. The "Competence in Sustainable & Responsible Travel & Tourism Certification" online course enables to understand the GSTC criteria in detail and to refer them to the own business and responsibilities
10. The "Global Certification Quickfinder" makes it easy to any tourism business, destination or tour operator to find those certificates which they can apply for and to see how far their standards cover sustainability issues or are GSTC recognized, how credible their auditing systems are, and which special services they offer to applicants and certified members, e.g. listing their certified members on the global Tourism2030 "Green Travel Maps".
11. The "Green Travel Maps" on Tourism2030 provide transparency and support the market access of certified tourism: each guesthouse or camping site, destination or tour operator on the map is linked with its website and with the profile of its environmental or sustainability certificate.
12. The maps are a planning tool for destinations and as source for marketing sites of national tourist boards, e.g. the German National Tourist Board uses the "Green Travel Msp Germany" for their site "Destination Germany – a sustainable experience". In agreement with the certifying bodies ECOTRANS is forwarding their lists of certified tourism to booking services and tour operators for planning and signing on their websites. Thus the maps can be used for both managing, marketing and monitoring the green tourism offer (e.g. for SDG 12).

What next?

ECOTRANS is currently developing a "Travel Green Europe" app with a consumer mode and a mode for professionals. The app will bring you straight away to the sustainable tourism offer in your preferred destination, to the choice of appropriate certificates, and to the Tourism2030 knowledge base for making tourism more sustainable. The participants at the EuroEco2018 conference in Georgia and all ecotourism stakeholders in Europe are invited to join!

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FAMILY TRAVEL AS NEW WAY REACHING

SUSTAINABILITY

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Keywords: family travel, sustainable, slow tourism

INTRODUCTION

Analyzing achievements of tourism, we are thinking about new sustainable ways of its development to reduce and avoid problems caused by uncontrolled, unintended tourism and/or overtourism.

“We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them” - once Einstein said.

So, analyzing new ways and visions, we have to pay attention to one interesting tendency, which increases along the transportation logistical comfort gets advanced.

As time goes, there is much more demanded and trendy to travel with family. This has quite a number of reasons: it's not only about the lack of possibility to leave kids with someone, but it's also about creating memories for whole family, getting experience together, sharing time, discovering new places and learning something new together... Doing many new things together because when one is in their own place of living, time goes quickly and everyday routine doesn't give chance to spend more free time with loving people.

So, family travel is the main purpose, that would be ideal to be promoted for sustainable development of tourism. There are lot of positive sides about family travel encouragement, and some of them are – possibility and arisen demand towards developing almost all kind of services considering each age and social segments.

Until we get deeper into the issue, first let's find out **what is Family?**

In each definition of each country's legislation Family is defined as unity of parents and children. Though we all know that this notion may vary and it may include: only couple, single parent and child(ren), grandparents, relatives and also quite remote people at first sight to whom one feels love, care and together they feel like home... So, notion of family is quite broad but for sure it stands on the most sacred love and heartfelt, dedicated feelings.

Though in every culture family's classical definition considers husband, wife and child(ren). Still, there are different types of families. The first, the most traditional and spread **type of family structure** is²⁵:

NUCLEAR FAMILY

25 <https://family.lovetoknow.com/about-family-values/types-family-structures>

The nuclear family is the traditional type of family structure. This family type consists of two parents and children. The nuclear family was long held in esteem by society as being the ideal in which to raise children. Children in nuclear families receive strength and stability from the two-parent structure and generally have more opportunities due to the financial ease of two adults.

There are other quite common structures of families as well:

SINGLE PARENT FAMILY

The single parent family consists of one parent raising one or more children on his/her own. Often, a single parent family is a mother with her children, although there are single fathers as well. The single parent family is the biggest change society has seen in terms of the changes in family structures. One in four children is born to a single mother. Single parent families are generally close and find ways to work together to solve problems, such as dividing up household chores. When only one parent is at home, it may be a struggle to find childcare, as there is only one parent working. This limits income and opportunities in many cases, although many single parent families have support from relatives and friends.

EXTENDED FAMILY

The extended family structure consists of two or more adults who are related, either by blood or marriage, living in the same home. This family includes many relatives living together and working toward common goals, such as raising the children and keeping up with the household duties. Many extended families include cousins, aunts or uncles and grandparents living together. This type of family structure may form due to financial difficulties or because older relatives are unable to care for themselves alone or because of cultural tradition. Extended families are becoming increasingly common all over the world.

In extended family notion should also be included polygamous families that are/were traditional form of lifestyle in many cultures. Such marriages contributed to the extension of relationships of the family by incorporating more people considering main value principle of survival, especially in African cultures (formula "Ubuntu" – "I am because we are"). Though, Christianity brought some challenges to traditional African practices such as polygamy by equating it with adultery and sin. Besides this, Western values of individual success and education determines high financial expenses that is not easy issue in wider families and number of children²⁶.

CHILDLESS FAMILY

While most people think of family as including children, there are couples who either cannot or choose not to have children. The childless family is sometimes the "forgotten family," as it does not meet the traditional standards set by society. Childless families consist of a husband and wife living and working together. Many childless families take on the responsibility of pet ownership or have extensive contact with their nieces and nephews as a substitute for having their own children.

STEP FAMILY

²⁶ <http://mojaafryka.weebly.com/concept-of-family.html>

Over half of all marriages end in divorce, and many of these individuals choose to get remarried. This creates the step or blended family which involves two separate families merging into one new unit. It consists of a new husband and wife and their children from previous marriages or relationships. Step families are about as common as the nuclear family, although they tend to have more problems, such as adjustment periods and discipline issues. Step families need to learn to work together and also work with their exes to ensure these family units run smoothly.

GRANDPARENT FAMILY

Many grandparents today are raising their grandchildren for a variety of reasons. One in fourteen children is raised by his grandparents, and the parents are not present in the child's life. This could be due to parents' death, addiction, abandonment or being unfit parents. Many grandparents need to go back to work or find additional sources of income to help raise their grandchildren.

These are main types of families and connecting them with travel industry, we have to pay attention to all these features characteristic for them to consider in service and provide as comfortable environment as possible.

SOCIAL ASPECTS AND TRENDS IN WORLD TOURISM

Tourism itself is quite trend-follower industry and its appreciation is changing annually. This refers to not only popular destinations but activities as well. This year intellectual travel is more in demand, it's trendier to learn something new while traveling rather than do nothing but present and check in at the popular tourism place. It's becoming more trendy gaining knowledge and experience due to traveling.

As Priority Pass Blog indicates for 2018 popular travel trends:

"You Can't Beat the Experience.

Travelers in 2018 will look to excite all senses. They will take more thrill-seeking adventures, engage in cultural immersion experiences, and set their sights on extreme regions of the world. It's no longer satisfactory for people to go to destinations simply to say they've been there. It's all about doing something meaningful while there²⁷

Another trend is that some travelers spread their wings beyond places they would normally consider in order to discover under-appreciated destinations. Using experience with overtourism especially in Europe, less traveled destinations are on visitors' maps. For fans of the popular photo sharing site Instagram, the world appears as a blank canvas ready to be filled. Remote regions of the world will be more popular among social media savvy travelers seeking a unique experience and one-of-a-kind shot.

There is also a change in family travel trends: while traveling with nuclear family is gaining irreversible character, still atypical family vacations like, single parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren, also adults with their nieces and nephews are becoming more typical and have caught the attention of tour operators around the world.

Along grown tendency of traveling with family, there are variation in **types** and **content** of traveling families.

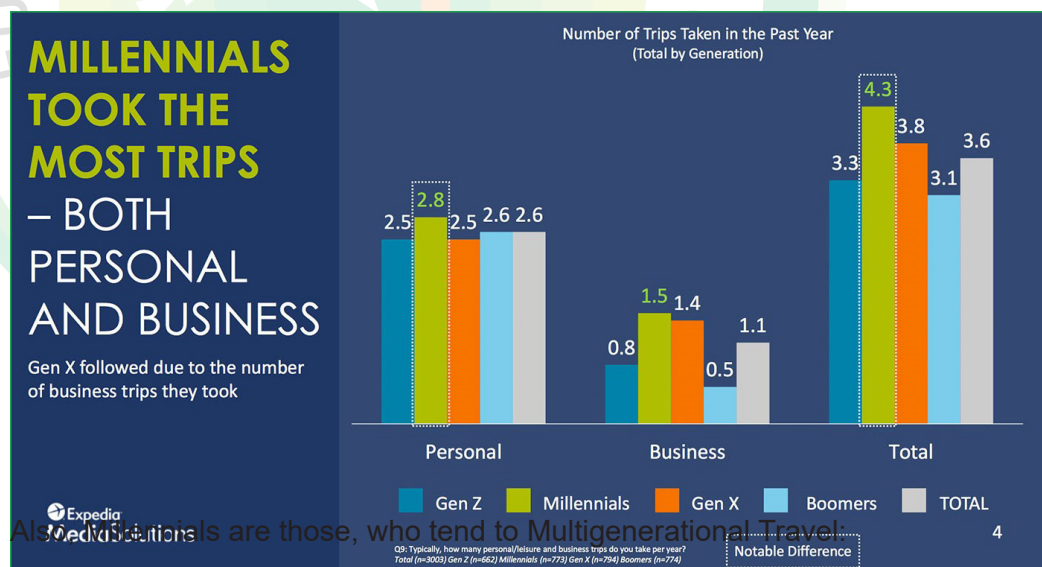
27 <https://www.prioritypass.com/es/blog/2018/2018-travel-trends>

MMGY Global has released the data from its 2017 Portrait of American Travelers survey where results found that Millennials²⁸ are a huge segment of travelers, and will have a major impact on the industry²⁹.

Millennial families, which are married or unmarried couples living together with children aged 17 or under currently in the household, make up 16% of all American travelers. They went on a combined 36.9 million vacations and spent \$50.4 billion on leisure travel during the past 12 months and they are the driving force behind growth in travel this year.

- While U.S. travelers only intend to travel 6 % more this year, Millennial families intend to travel 35 % more;
- Millennial families intend to spend 38% more than Millennial couples on vacation and 88 % more than Millennial singles;
- 26% of Millennial family vacations are to international destinations; fewer than 20 % of couples or singles are traveling internationally. This possibility may be because 3/4 of Millennial families consider themselves happy, optimistic about their own future (83 %) and the future of the world (62 %).

European Millennials are also leaders in traveling and high technology use in tourism³⁰:



- Among families, millennials are significantly more likely than non-millennials (81% vs. 57%) to say they've ever traveled with their parent(s) on a family vacation since becoming an adult.
- So why have millennials in families traveled with their parents? They are significantly more likely than non-millennials to say:
 - Because it's a tradition (37 % vs. 23 %).
 - Because their parents help watch their kid(s) (24 % vs. 14 %).
 - Because they simply have to/are expected to (19 % vs. 9 %).

28 Millennials – Generation, which was born in 1980-2000

29 <https://www.travelagentcentral.com/running-your-business/stats-millennials-to-travel-35-percent-more-2017-according-to-mmgy>

30 <https://info.advertising.expedia.com/european-millennial-travel-trends-for-german-british-french-travellers>

So, in family travel millennials do make their impact.

Now, we have to think about **quality of vacation**.

Despite the fact that we care about calm and quite environment provided for families, groups and/or individuals at the destinations, we have to consider the fact which we cannot handle but is the reason of lack of comfort – it is a JOB.

And, yes, job does matter today. One can't ignore it even he/she is on deserved vacation³¹.

According to 2017 Alamo Family Vacation Survey, held in the U.S. (conducted in January 5-10, 2017, with 2,100 adults from the 50 states and the District of Columbia) around Half (!) of American workers have felt vacation shamed – by co-workers, supervisors and/or employer for taking time off to go on vacation .

The reasons can be broken down into details:

- 37% are vacation shamed is because their co-workers are unhappy about their workload;
- 1/5 have taken fewer or shorter vacations because they've been vacation shamed;
- 46% say they're serious when vacation shaming their co-workers etc.;
- 63% of dads left unused vacation days on the table compared with 51% of moms;
- Only 1/5 (18%) who get paid vacation use all of their vacation days to actually go on a vacation (rather than stay at home, do errands, etc.).

Families are also working on their vacations:

- Nearly 2/3 (65%) of working families say they pressure themselves to work during family vacations even though most (53 %) prefer to completely unplug:
 - 1/5 working families say they prefer to work or to check email once or twice a day;
 - Those workers with unused vacation days are significantly more likely to prefer working or checking email during family vacations once or twice a day (23 % comparing to 14% in previous year).
- About half (48%) of working families say they pressure themselves to work during family vacations because they don't want to come back to a mountain of work.
- 28% work because they say it feels good to know they're needed.
- Approximately 1/4 (23 %) say they're expected to check-in with work while on family vacations.
- More than half (58%) of family workers say they feel guilty because their co-workers have to take over their job duties when they go on a vacation.

So, when we talk about comfortable environment for families, in some cases it can be just delighting factor to their "shamed" and busy vacation.

According to this reality, there was held a survey, according which there was figured out the main motivator for adventure travel: it is recharging and refreshing oneself from everyday working routine as it is seen on this chart³².

The following groups are significantly more likely to feel guilty all of the time or sometimes because their co-workers have to take over their job duties:

Considering travel reasons there should be provided relaxing and entertaining services and

31 https://www.alamo.com/en_US/car-rental/scenic-route/2017_Family_Vacation_Survey_Fact_Sheet.html

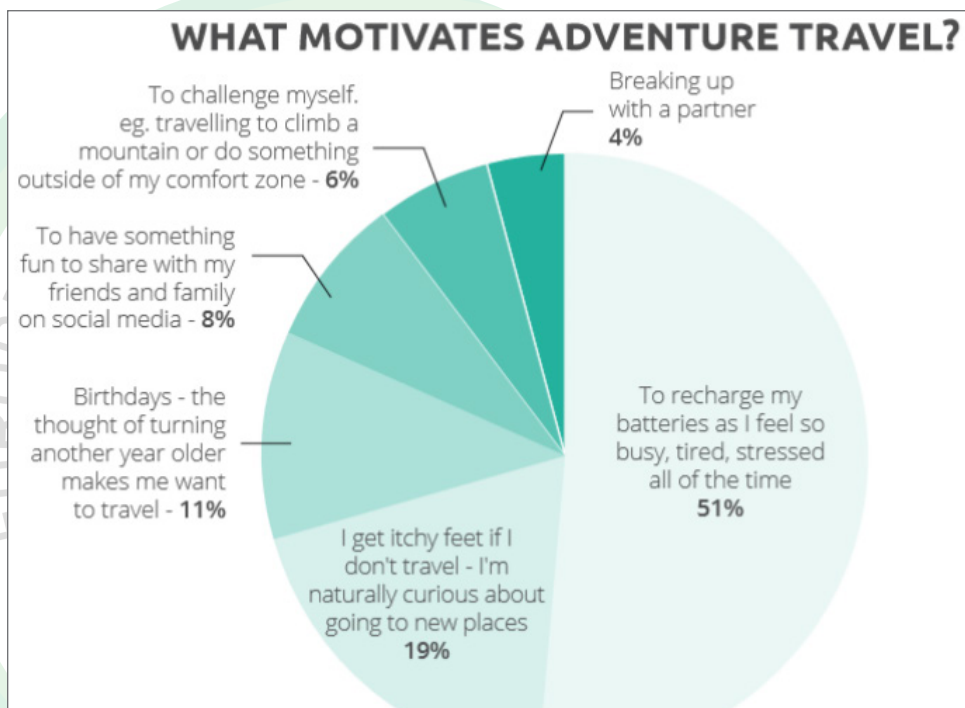
32 <https://www.treksoft.com/en/blog/65-travel-tourism-statistics-for-201>



matter while planning family tours.

- Millennials vs. non-millennials (56% vs. 29%).
- Those with unused paid vacation days (57% vs. 29% of those who use all their paid vacation days).
- Those who feel vacation shame (85% vs. 20% of those who don't feel vacation shame).

Many factors



In choosing destinations and activities, of course age matters along with other factors like nationality, religion, education, occupation, group number and content and their interests. Outdoor adventures and fitness/yoga classes matter more to Millennials and Gen Xers³³ than they do to Baby Boomers³⁴,

The three most significant findings are³⁵:

1. Every age group rated healthy food, activities and environment as "important," but having the full range of wellness components matters more to younger travelers than to Boomers;
2. The wellness components that stand out as significantly more important for younger travelers are: outdoor adventure programs, environmentally-friendly properties and properties that "do good" for the local community or have "Voluntourism" programs.
3. The travel agents weighed in on what types of properties are most desired by their wellness-travel clients. For the Baby Boomer (and older) crowd, luxury spa resorts ranked highest; sand and sea destinations were the first choice for their younger cohorts.
4. All groups chose access to beaches and pools as the top two requirements. Healthy cuisine ranked third for Boomers but sixth for younger travelers.

33 [Gen X. same Generation X refers to demographic group born between 1960-1980s](#)

34 Baby Boomers - Generation born in 1940-1960s

35 <https://www.travelmarketreport.com/articles/Age-Matters-Different-Ages-Have-Different-Preferences-In-Wellness-Travel>

It should be mentioned, that attitude towards choosing tourist places has changed a lot and most of travelers, especially millennials tend to search not only information about destinations to visit, but also learn comments and feedbacks about the places until they make final decision.

Considering family factor, it must be marked, that travelers under age 35 care less about distances to the destinations as well as couples with no children, while for the parents with children distance limits do have meaning.

Also worthy to note that parents are significantly more likely than those who are married with no children to prefer theme park vacations, while non-parents are three times more likely to prefer cruises. 3/5 of parents typically take their vacations during the summer school break, compared to 23 percent of those with no children³⁶.

Of course, traveling with kids is not easy despite their number and age. Each age has its own difficulties and priorities. Despite individual occasions, children's age and nationality, traveling with kids still have many issues in common, like:

Money Economy. Families usually spend more money, than couples or singles (still it depends on the demand of those), so they mostly are trying to cut down expenses and find best combination of cost and quality (hotel, guest house, restaurant, flights, entertainment...). Families with definite budget expect to have discounts on kids or because of number of the family members. Cutting down prices per person still makes sum quite good amount, so for the hotels, that is not that issue of problem, especially on lower season.

Families also travel with small children. Usually there is no fee for kids under 2, they eat less and can sit on laps and sleep in one bed with the parent. But other needs that may occur to babies must be considered, like:

✓ **Health caring**

- *Meals* – Different cuisine is often an issue for adults, so for the children it may have even bigger meaning. Of course, in this case experienced parents prepare properly in advance taking medicine they know for digestion system and getting kids used to new meals step by step, but *hygiene, bio products, pharmacies* and *doctors* should be on high level including language knowledge.
- Of course, *safe rooms, stairs, infrastructure, amenities* and *play grounds* are in the MUST list

✓ **Laundry** - is always an issue for traveling families, as kids use much more clothes per day than adults do. Laundry service should be provided for tourists. It will be a benefit for traveling family because they won't need to carry a lot of clothes with them (thus, pay less for the baggage) and on the other hand, it is also additional revenue for locals.

✓ **Play and Educate.** Traveling is no longer process of just changing geography, but also having fun and getting new experiences and knowledge, getting involved in new local activities to learn better hosting cultures and learning new skills. So playing and educating services should be provided for families locally, with animators or without. That is an issue of creativity, proper presentation and safe infrastructure.

Free time should also be considered for different purposes like time for naps of children and/or seniors.

36 https://www.alamo.com/en_US/car-rental/scenic-route/travel-tips/gender-age-region-affect-vacation-preference.html

✓ **Travel Time.** I guess no one, including families are happy with long transport hours. So, planning itinerary for families, especially with children, seniors and members with disabilities, long distances between sites should be avoided.

✓ **Wi-Fi** – is often highly demanded even in the transport, because according to researches quite often people still work or check and respond their emails while traveling, families want to connect to relatives and friends, or just let kids sit quite with online videos when window view is getting bored³⁷.

There is number of international experiences, that provide safe and funny entertainment for children, which gives parents/grandparents some free time for themselves.

One of popular, most children-oriented entertainment programs are offered in Mexico and Caribbean Islands. There is whole spectrum of fun and educational entertainments for children of any age: from two months up to 17 years: sports, excursions, eco-club, pool games, indoor games, handicrafts, certified nannies, indoor play area, cribs, baby food and educational activities, also climbing wall, batting cage, tennis clinics, video arcade, teen disco, pool table and supervised activities³⁸.

There should be noted, that Americans pay much attention to family issues including family travel. In Americas family-friendly destinations and services are offered more frequently and in wide diversity, while Europe is more positioning by historical places to be visited not specifying focus groups. Surveys about families are held much more intensively in Americas rather in Europe. There are number of organizations, blogs and web-pages who are working on this issue. So, part of data and analysis is based on American experience.

Although, it's fact that family does not include only parents and children but quite often they are presented with three generations. Seniors are separate group in tourism with its needs and specificities. Tourism services oriented on elderly is frequently referred to as **Grey/Silver Tourism**.

The concept and definition of Grey/Silver is the color usually associated with the hair color of elderly persons. Grey Tourism is a niche market in the tourism sector that refers to the senior travelers. Defining the concept of 'Grey tourism' is a complex phenomenon as it involves several aspects like professional or economic (retirement), cultural (customs and traditions), social (grandparent) and medicinal (loss of health or physical fitness). Generally, people aged 60 and above have been classified as Grey tourists or senior tourists. But the age has come down to 50 in many studies³⁹.

Special requirements for grey tourists: Grey tourists always give priority for few of their special needs while planning their holidays. If unattended, those may become barriers to their travel. Finance, quality experience and health care facilities are the major concern for elder travelers. Hence they always make plans for travel finance in advance. Senior tourists are ready to spent for quality experience and very particular about the value for money in each purchase. They also assure on health insurance and medical facilities available in the destination. Safety and security form another important condition in selecting a destination by this age group.

What motivates seniors to travel?

37 <https://worldtravelfamily.com/problems-of-travelling-with-kids-blog/>

38 <http://bestfamilybeachvacations.com/best-resorts-for-toddlers/>

39 <http://troindia.in/journal/ijcesr/vol4iss12part6/65-75.pdf>

The market of Grey tourists is heterogeneous in respect of their motivation to travel. Motives reveal the clear description of any travel market. Extensive research has undertaken to examine the travel motivation of senior travelers. The previous researches highlight visiting friends and relatives, rest and relaxation, opportunities for socialization, exposure to novel situations and escape from stresses of daily life as the major motives behind elders to undertake a tour. Physical activity, curiosity and possibility for new experiences always encourage grey tourists to travel. According to the studies, novelty and knowledge, health and wellbeing and nostalgia also inspire elders to travel to special destinations. A good number of grey tourists find time only after retirement and completing their family responsibilities to visit places they have always wanted to.

Elderly ones might have special needs. These might have to do with their age, mobility, medical condition, or dietary restrictions. It should be ensured that the tour operators and specialists are informed in advance at the destination⁴⁰.

Generally, people with **disabilities and special needs** are also considerable part of tourists.

Travel with special needs family members – is another important issue to be considered. This is another part of contribution in tourism development from the local governments' side as it has a great meaning for people with disabilities as well as their families.

Proper development and consideration of their needs of different spectrum is a great stimulus and chance for this kind of people to be treated equally with others, to be involved in family activities and to have happy vacation days together with others (not only family, but also new friends at the destinations).

For this result special trainings should be delivered and proper infrastructure, amenities and activities should be provided for children and adults with vision, hearing, motion impairments, autism and other physical and psychological problems, as traveling, **journey is a therapy**: getting acquainted with new places, cultures, people, activating all five senses can be reviewed as part of treating therapy including feeling of equality when people with special needs may have equal chance to share beautiful and interesting moments of life with their family members.

LGBT Family Travel. There are up to 30 countries in the world where same-sex marriages are legal, accordingly in same countries there are LGBT Family-friendly destinations, where services and amenities meet their needs.

SLOW TOURISM

To go back and spread an idea of travel mentioned above, there comes a notion, that is close to understanding term "Travel Therapy" and also, should be an inseparable part of family travel concept. This is **Slow Tourism** concept:

Travelling to the destination takes a few hours, same goes for the return. Once they reach, they are too exhausted to visit point of interest. Resting for a day and leaving on the next one just doesn't make sense. By travelling 'fast', people end up even more tired. They go out to free their minds but all they do is go and return feeling like they need to go on another vacation. Why not plan an elongated getaway which is a sooth for one's soul? Yes, there is a need to

40 <https://www.vermontagedcare.com.au/organised-travel-tours-elderly-people/>

'Travel Slow'.⁴¹ Slow Tourism includes Slow Food – quality organic food – which is itself the founder of slow tourism idea.

What it basically is, to enjoy a place from the point of view of the locals. It asks of you nothing but to spare a few precious days, to explore. Slow tourism is all about living in a place at a slow pace.

Hopping locations is hectic. There's a schedule again. Visiting the most famous locations doesn't mean one have actually visited the place. They should go there and explore, learning the routes to those hidden spots from the locals. Venture out about in the locality. There are serene locations which offers peace. When family visits a place, **slow tourism** is recommended to help them absorb the vibe of the nature.

Don't you think, that the travel boom is significantly reasoned by **social media**? The virus called "Check in" from different locations. Almost 90% of travelers, including families, choose their location according to how it will look on their Instagram, Facebook or Twitter walls. I myself am a guide and I had a number of tourists who were addicted to their social media and my story telling and understanding of hosting culture didn't have that big meaning rather than searching for better location for photo to share and thus prove others their privilege and distinctive social status.

This trend can be taken into account as one among many reasons causing **overtourism** – as more and more famous destinations are visited for posting on social media and emphasizing their own status in society.

In case of Slow tourism, people will spend more time at one place (location, city, region...), it means that infrastructure and services and activities should be developed better and in more verities than it is needed and/or can be experienced by 1-2 nights' tourists. It means more economic benefits for the destinations.

Slogan "**Go Slow, Enjoy More!**" depicts the benefit of this concept.

Profit of slow tourism are:

- One is getting acquainted with new place and environment without time pressure and is getting more pleasure and part of hosting culture;
- They can cover much more geography areal around and get more local services while staying at one place for a while;
- Slow tourism is helping to RELAX and REST – that is really rare. We are used to attach these notions to the sea shore, where one can lay in the sand and consider themselves relaxing and resting, but on the other hand these notions can be spread on each destination, where one can find something very close to their soul and appreciations. We are used to rush from one place to another while traveling, to be on time with itinerary... While slow tourism is there to enjoy your time being in other country and understanding and revealing it from inside out.
- Slow tourism is one of most sustainable way of tourism development, that is rising responsibility towards places and people that one is passing and meeting each day of their stay, and on the other hand, it is a contribution to authentic culture development, where slow tourism can cause more variety in service and activities connected to local culture, traditions, rural tourism and other.

41 <https://www.sundaysforever.com/slow-tourism/>

- And of course, reducing carbon emission with staying longer at one place rather than traveling long distances every day.

So summing up an idea of slow tourism and family travel we are coming to understanding pros and cons of the concept suggested in this thesis.

The Advantages of traveling with family are:

- Safety
- Spend quality time together:
- Having fun and making memories
- Rediscovering and understanding each other
- Learning something new together
- Taking care of hosting environment
- One can relax, as they are in a family where everyone knows each other and everyone is accepted the way they are – Unlike within certain professional and friend groups, there's no need to put up appearances, there's no pretense, no needing to explain yourself, to just be fully understood and accepted, family is better and easier managed according to common consultations.

Disadvantages of traveling with family may be:

- Each age or each gender may have their own priorities to visit museum, shop or hang out in cafe or night bars;
- They may get fed up with each other and while at home they have their own rooms, where they can separate and have their own time, there is a lack of it while traveling;
- It is not as fun and relaxing as traveling with friends and doing some crazy things together;
- Health problems and foreign language and unknown/untrusted foreign doctors;
- It costs expensive.

Despite these disadvantages, each of them are solvable within family negotiation and they should not be reasoned to cancel travel with family. Family experience is always worthy to try.

RESULTS OF NEW SURVEY IN GEORGIA

Getting acquainted with existing statistics and surveys worldwide, I decided to make my own little survey in Georgia about family travel, that has never been done before.

There were **two small-scale simultaneous online surveys** held at tourism professional intranets and in public social media space of Georgia in July 10-20, 2018.

One survey was for those who usually travel with family and another one was for tourism sector representatives, who used to serve tourist families while traveling in Georgia.

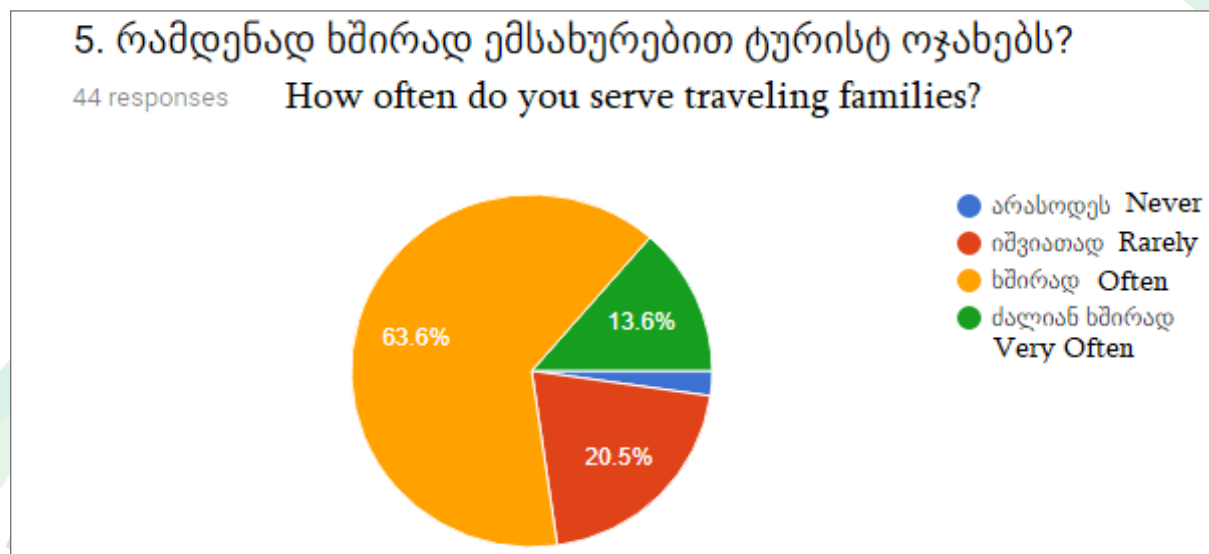
There have been surveyed 100 people.

According to the survey **serving tourist families:**

There were 62% responses from ladies and 38% from men (tourism professionals), with different years of experience in tourism: most of them 1-2 years in the industry (31,8%), up to 5 years – 27,3%, 5-10 years of experience – 25%, more than 10 years in tourism were 15% of respondents.

Tourism sector was mostly represented by tour guides 50%, tour agencies – 26.2% and

accommodation - 14,3%. About 10% of respondents were restaurants, winemakers and drivers together.



On the question, how frequently do you serve tourist families 63,6% answered – frequently, 13,6% answered – very frequently, 20,5% answered – rarely and only 3% answered – none.

As for type of tourist families, most frequently they are represented young parents with children 53,5%; 46,5% - are couples, and 37,2% are older parents with adult children. 18,6% served families of three generations. LGBT families' percentage in Georgia was zero according to this survey.

Highest share of travelers in Georgia are in age 35-50 that counts 75%; 29,5% - are representatives of 20-35 age group, silver travelers count up to 21% of Georgia's visitors, and also children of 6-12 years old are 18,2% of our country's visitors. Children up to 5 years are 4,5%, and teenagers come little more than 9%.

As for nationalities, who travel with families more often, there were counted a broad spectrum of Georgia's tourism costumers, among them these countries where mentioned more often: Russia, Ukraine, UAE, Israel, Baltic countries, Caucasian countries, USA, Poland, Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, China, Kazakhstan, India, Iran...

In the highest demand and expectation from traveling families in Georgia are: Comfort in accommodations and means of transportation, Bio products, Wi-Fi – for communication with other family members, Cheap prices, Attractions for children, Clean environment...

And for activities, families visiting Georgia are most interested in Cultural Tours – 69%, Wine and Culinary – 54,8%, Ethno Activities (crafts and other master classes) – 33,3%. Extreme, Eco tours, Water attractions and Night life each share equally 11%.

The biggest problem in serving families for Georgian tourism representatives are:

- ✓ Time management issues including long hours of transportation (due to Georgian complex relief and not adequate itinerary – not considering age and other features of tourists...);
- ✓ Lack of elderly age and children-proper infrastructure, children's beds, baby seats in

the vehicles, family-friendly offers at the accommodations and family menus at the restaurants.

- ✓ Lack of children's entertainment during a tour, also lack of nanny's services especially in the evenings.
- ✓ High prices, less service quality and normal public WCs are still an issue.

According to responses, families stay in Georgia up to one week (61,4%) or more (up to 10 days – 25%). 9% of families leave Georgia in 2-4 days and only 4% stay for fortnight.

47,7% of respondents have never met families with special needs members and 45,5% have met them rarely.

And finally, when we asked about provided discounts for families, the highest rate of response (30%) was – None. 25% replied that they have discounts for families at the accommodations, 17,5 answered that they make lower prices for families for transportation and 20% consider that offering family bigger vehicle is also part of discount.

Now let's see responses of **Georgian families**:

In this survey also ladies were more active 74.5%, than men – 25,5%.

And their age was mostly in 31-35 age group – 39,2%, 26-30 years - 21,6%, 36-40 years – 13,7%.

62% of respondents live with their families (spouse and children), 18% live with parents and 12% with parents of husband/wife. Hence, 77,6% are married, 12,2% are single, 8,2% are divorced and 2% are single parents. 41,5% of these people have two children, 39% - have only one and little more than 17% have 3 kids. Only 2% have 4 children. Children's age biggest group is 2-6 years – 39% and 6-12 years – 34,1%.

On the question – with whom would you prefer to have vacation or travel - 51% of answers was – with family, 31,4% answered - with spouse only and 19,6% - with friends.

Nest question was - With whom and where your children are having holydays?

Where 54% answered – We are resting together at the resort; 29,7% - We are together in the village; 24,3% - They are with grandparents in the village and 13,5% - They are with grandparents in the resort.

The most desirable places to have a rest and relax are mountains 48% and sea 42%, resort is desired by 30%, village -16% and forest – 10%.

Accommodation preference is diverse and almost equally is divided among hotel, guest house and flat rental – 34%, 30% and 26% accordingly.

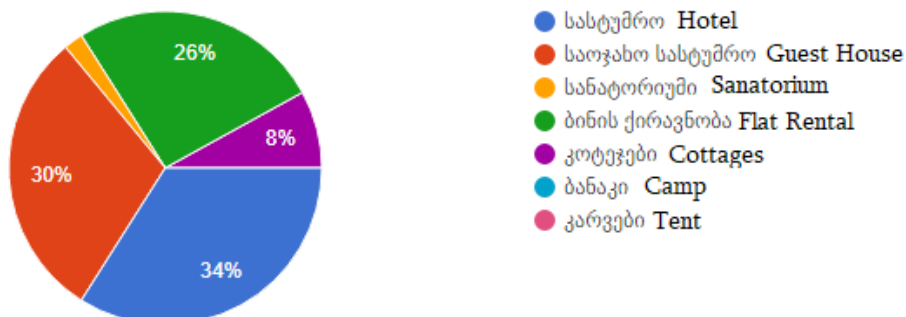
Georgian families say that feeding in the place is very important 53%, while 17,6% say that it's no problem as they can cook themselves. 27,5% considers that cafe/restaurant visits can be a nice option. Despite this facts, 57,1% need three times meal a day while on holiday. 28,6% is ok with two meals per day, more than 12% want meal 3+ time a day.

For the respondents - meal cooked with local bio products is very important - 62,7% and important for 17,6%.

10. ბიუჯეტიდან გამომდინარე რა ტიპის განთავსების საშუალებას ირჩევთ დასვენების პერიოდში?

50 responses

According to your budget, which kind of accommodation do you choose for vacation



activities, 22,4% would spend time in cultural activities and craft masterclasses. Sport Activities, Hiking, Horsing and Rural tourism share 10-12%. 14,3% of interviewee would Do Nothing.

Excursions are preferred 1-3 times a week by up to 60% of answerers.

In the list of most frequently mentioned problems occurred while traveling and resting with family are:

- Not appropriate price and service quality,
- Not Clean environment,
- Lack of infrastructure (especially considering children in infrastructure planning process),
- Parking problem,
- Noise at night,
- Lack of trusted nanny for kids,
- Lack of entertainment for kids both indoor and outdoor (according to weather),
- Lack of entertainment facilities for adults,
- Public transportation discomfort especially in summer,
- And not considering interests and budget of families, not family-friendly offers and discounts.

For the purpose to feel oneself better, to have more comfortable and interesting holiday, 46% of respondents voted for family discounts at the hotels, 40% ticked interesting entertainment for children, 34% wants safe and isolated yards for the kids, for 30% food provision is essential, 20% need to be sure of high quality medicine service and 12% need support of qualified nannies.

Amenity rentals, day camps, night life, pet-friendly services and shopping share 2-4%.

As for safety issues, each of them were highly estimated: safe environment, safe power system, evacuation plan, fire extinguisher, enough distance from main road, no pets in the rented place, no crime and police control, bio product in menu, marked routes..

BASIC NEEDS OF FAMILY-FRIENDLY DESTINATIONS

To sum up results of this survey and searched international experiences, there are some tips that family-friendly tourist places and destinations should consider and provide⁴²:

1. **Peace of mind** - first thing that most of travelers want to make sure before leaving their homes, is safety of the place to be visited. This issue plays even bigger role when it comes to traveling with family. Safety is a broad notion and includes crime and eco disaster free destinations, accommodations with fire extinguisher and evacuation plan, places with no wild or street animals and with less steep cliffs, safe playgrounds, graded pools for kids and adults, low stairs and safe balconies and other childproof infrastructure, as the last thing parents want to do is worrying about safety of their kids or elder people.
2. **Room for all** - accommodations should consider large family suite, where grown-up children, grandparents and/or nannies can sleep in separate room. If pets are not allowed in family-friendly places (again for the safety issue), there can be provided separate pet hotels, that is also an option for locals' additional income.
3. **Bare Necessities** - family-friendly hotels and destinations care for family convenience and also for their own income, hence they offer families to carry less and instead rent some necessities on the place: strollers, cribs, bikes... washing machine supply helps to pack less clothes, hair dryer is also an advantage.
4. **More for Less** - discounts for families, where kids stay for free in their parents' suite or for half price. Also some resorts offer a second room or cabin for half price. Babysitters and nurses for elderly usually cost extra.
5. **Bio food** - have huge importance not only for children, but adults as well. People on vacation try to rest and this includes resting their stomachs as well. Behind bio product supply stands great afford of farming. Farming itself helps local people stay in their own place and make money with their everyday work. Also, it includes rural tourism development, that is at the same time discovering, educational and fun especially for those, who live in big cities.
6. **Get away chances** - of course it's not much fun to stay at one place during whole vacation, so transport and tour guide services are usually in high demand. Not only these two professions, but whole local region gets profit, as traveling on excursions is helping development of infrastructure to the sites and causes additional services at the places of interest.
7. **Programs and playgrounds** – formula “Kids play – parents get away” is golden for most of vacationing families. Some resorts offer day and/or camps, different educational, sport and fun programs, where kids can enjoy and parents have some spare time for themselves. Animators, infrastructure, nannies and another stuff and amenities are income increasing possibilities for hosting community.
8. **Time to be adults** – while children have their joyful time, parents need their own infrastructure and service that include shopping, different fun activities, massage and health care, restaurants... All this usually cost high price, but it is worthy for adults.
9. **Family Entertainment** - is not only for kids, but whole family. Excursions, crafting, culinary masterclasses, festivals, health caring, water and sport activities, as well as indoor games while rainy-days make families closer, make their own memories and fun. On the other hand, special preparing and adequate stuff is needed. This kind of activities are permanently in sphere of interest and of course, they cost extra money.

10. **Welcoming locals** – all these won't cost a thing unless there is no goodwill from local

42 <https://adventure.howstuffworks.com/destinations/summer-travel-families/10-must-haves-family-friendly-resorts1.htm>

society for tourism to be developed and also, to be included as stakeholders as well as decision-makers in tourism developing process in their area. Also no quality will be achieved if not political will and support with urban planning, infrastructure, service and training provision.

CONCLUSION

Combining concepts of family travel and slow tourism, we are fulfilling the goals of sustainable development and changing formula of local tourism businesses.

Family travel works well for empowering family contacts, creating mutual memories, discovering and learning new things and skills, getting acquainted with new cultures (on national and international level).

Slow tourism itself refers to an idea to stay longer at one place (city, village, resort, region) and experience locality in depth, to enjoy all the verity of local hosting, services and activities, use transport less and thus help reduce carbon emission; to make friends with local people, hang out together or enjoy doing nothing; meet local families and share time and knowledge to each other. Due to longer stay, it causes rising responsibility towards the place, falling in love more with the environment, familiriaz with it and becoming its devotee.

For locals slow pace traveling families are bigger challenge and responsibility. They should provide deeper understanding of their own culture for long stay visitors, thus, it comes to necessity to learn, know and sustain their own culture themselves, to show guests how different and authentic they are – as authenticity is the main reason of tourism development. This comes to provision of ethnic activities that will help tourists get involved into understanding, creating and/or maintaining local culture, traditions, craft, rural tourism... This is creative job for locals. This is the reason to keep population in provinces. And of course, all this determine creating number of working places and increase income.

According to different countries' surveys, traveling with family is gaining more and more popularity worldwide and increases in scale; family travel is time that family members want to share together but rushing from one site to another, matching the pace of busy itinerary, sleepless mornings and spending long hour in transport is not the ideal result of vacation intended for family sweet memories. Slow pace it the way out to help families enjoy being together and find activities of interest for each age segment while being longer at one place.

All in all, family is sacred notion for each culture and religion and of course, we, the representatives of one of the largest industries in the world, have to pay much more attention to it, respect, support to sustain and develop in the best way.

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İNKÖY'S ECOTOURISM RESOURCES AND

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

İnköy, in Van province, is a sparsely populated region with a mountainous and rugged terrain. Its natural features have kept it safe from environmental degradation until recently. Limited access over land and a lack of transportation by sea have contributed to the protection of its natural beauty. However, the same factors have caused economical backwardness and limited resources. The livelihoods of local people consist mainly of fishing and transporting tourists to Akdamar Island, which is popular for its Armenian church.

This study aims to draw attention to the rich ecotourism potential of İnköy and its surroundings and to the opportunity to develop ecotourism in order to overcome economic problems in the region and address the difficulties of local people on low incomes. In this connection, the tourist attractions and natural resources of the region were assessed by experts in terms of their attractiveness, supporting infrastructure, environmental degradation, and accessibility. The ratings show the significance of natural resources: attractiveness scored 8.6 out of 10, environmental quality 9.2 out of 10, accessibility 1.8 out of 10, and infrastructure 0.4 out of 1.0. In addition, four sightseeing routes were identified by the experts as having the potential to develop ecotourism and increase economic growth in the area. Given the area's remarkable attractions and the findings of this field survey, it can be concluded that ecotourism investments in the near future will contribute both economically and socially to the development of the area.

Keywords: Ecotourism resources, Local development, İnköy, Turkey.

INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism, with its important economic, social, and environmental impacts on rural communities (Buckley, 2003), has grown over the past 30 years. Today, ecotourism is an important market segment of the tourism industry in many countries, including Australia, Kenya, Nepal, and New Zealand (Eagles, 2003). In Turkey, the central government and local authorities in rural areas are attempting to develop this alternative type of tourism, and the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism is promoting ecotourism as part of its 2023 Turkish Tourism Strategy (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2018).

Lim and McAleer (2005) stated that as the world population becomes increasingly urbanized, peaceful and unique natural locations attract environmentally-friendly tourists who want to experience different and exotic places. As natural resources are limited, mankind must produce goods using technologies that are compatible with nature and the ecosystem in terms of carrying capacity (Page and Dowling, 2002; Tyler and Dangerfield, 1999). Ecotourism has become a popular type of tourism in the last decade, as it promotes the wise use of natural

resources (Tyler and Dangerfield, 1999).

Van province in eastern Anatolia is one of the least developed regions in Turkey. The tourism industry is seen as one of the main tools for economic development in the region. Although locals have great expectations in terms of increasing tourist numbers, the local authorities are concerned about the unplanned development of tourism due to an increase in day trips to the region. In order to prevent uncontrolled development of tourism in the area, tourism activities must be planned by the decision-makers. Such planning should cover determination of the quality of natural resources (essential for preserving those resources), provision of socioeconomic benefits to local people, generation of revenues, education of communities on environmental issues, provision of high-quality experiences to tourists, and ensuring the active participation of local people in the sustainable planning process. Attention to these issues will prevent the uncontrollable development of tourism while providing job opportunities, especially for younger residents who might otherwise migrate to cities in order to find jobs. However, in recent years, attempted improvements, especially in terms of road accessibility, have led to the deterioration of the natural environment.

İnköy and its surroundings have come to prominence as an area with great ecotourism potential. The area is composed of small village settlements and has unspoiled nature, blue waters and bays, distinctive local flora, historical buildings, and a unique social life. The sheltered nature of the area caused it to be used in the past for religious purposes, including the construction of monasteries and churches. This study assesses the natural resources of İnköy in terms of their significance for the development of ecotourism and the sustainability of the rural community, and provides insights for decision-makers.

İNKÖY AND ITS ECOTOURISM RESOURCES

İnköy, a district of Gevaş town, is a peninsula composed of bays located in the southern part of Lake Van. İnköy and its surroundings, where most of the ecotourism activities can be undertaken, are sparsely populated. Four village settlements with a population of 200 inhabitants - Göründü, Altınsaç, İnköy, and Genciller - are located on the shores of Lake Van (Figure 1). The sparseness of the population prevents environmental degradation and provides advantages for the development of ecotourism.

As a nature-based type of tourism, ecotourism is carried out in protected and relatively untouched areas (Lawton and Weaver, 2001). The İnköy area has lots of attractions in terms of nature-based tourism, especially ecotourism: "mountains, wild and untouched natural areas, birds, the lake, forests, and wild flowers" (Eagles, 1994: 64). The area hosts volcanic formations that are located in the inner part of the region, mountainous terrains, beaches, nationally recognized bays, and other attractive morphological formations. Attractions in the eastern and southern parts of the region (the least degraded areas) include deep valleys, canyons, forests, streams, and local culture.

The research area has attractive natural and social resources and can fulfill the needs of ecotourists (Figure 2). The pristine area offers a wide range of ecotourism activities to tourists who are motivated to be alone with nature, experience and take pictures of wildlife, be physically active, acquire knowledge about nature, meet people who have similar interests, enjoy an escape from daily routine and stress, and take part in activities such as trekking, bird watching, and rafting (Blamey, 2001). Visitors can also experience all aspects of rural culture.

Because of the steep Kavuşahap Mountains to the south, road transportation is limited. The

area's rugged mountainous structure also makes it sheltered. The easiest access is by water transport over Lake Van. Local residents earn a living through fishing, agriculture, stockbreeding, and organizing boat trips to nearby Akdamar Island, which is an important tourist attraction. The villagers in the area have made significant improvements to the water transport facilities by establishing cooperatives. However, limited agricultural land is available.

This lack of economic diversity has caused residents to move to Van province or to migrate to big cities to earn a living and to seek new economic opportunities. Tourism has therefore gained importance as a solution to the economic problems of the rural community. Although there are no man-made structures to meet the needs of ecotourists, the area has significant potential for the development of ecotourism. Therefore, provided that an appropriate balance can be found between usage and protection, ecotourism can be developed in the region in order to improve the economic welfare of local people.

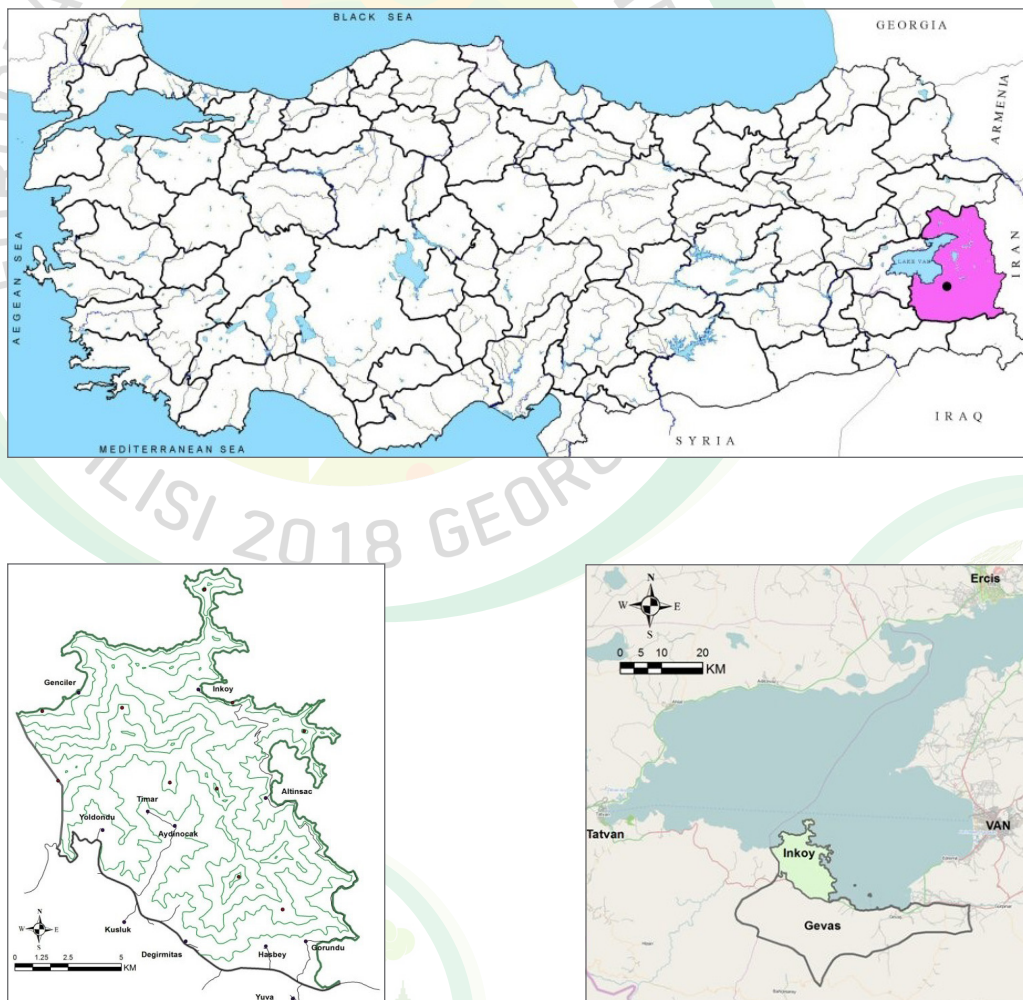


Figure 1: Location of the research area



Figure 2: The natural resources of Inköy and its vicinity

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative approach consisting of three methods of data collection. First, experts were asked to assess the area's resources. Second, the authors drew on their own observations as an important source of information. Third, data were collected from interviews with local people regarding economic conditions in the villages and the need for new local development initiatives.

The study used Priskin's (2001) checklist for the assessment of the quality of the resources. Priskin proposed a regional resource assessment framework for nature-based tourism, evaluating tourism potential under four categories: attractions, accessibility, supporting infrastructure, and level of environmental degradation. For the purposes of the present study, some minor changes were made to the checklist to take into account the characteristics of the area.

The aim of this study was to evaluate Inköy's ecotourism potential and the quality of local resources in the context of an adapted version of Priskin's four categories: level of attractiveness, accessibility, supporting infrastructure, and level of environmental degradation. Using a qualitative approach, the evaluation was carried out by five experts: a biologist, a landscape

architect, an art historian, an expert on outdoor sports, and an anthropologist at Van Yuzuncu Yil University who participates in outdoor activities.

Resource identification was initiated through interviews with these experts. Data collection in the field was achieved using the checklist developed by Priskin (2001). A five-day field survey was undertaken, and all potential resource sites were visited by the experts and the authors.

The first category is level of attractiveness. Ten different indicators, similar to those in Priskin's (2001) study, were used to assess the resources: (1) floral diversity (the degree of species diversity of vegetation and local flora); (2) scenic diversity (the level of diversity associated with landscape features such as rural areas, lakes, mountains, and waterfalls); (3) recreation opportunities (the opportunity to engage in activities such as climbing, trekking, cycling, swimming, and water sports); (4) adventure opportunities (the opportunity to engage in risky or hazardous activities such as four-wheel driving on steep terrain, bungee jumping, walking along a suspension bridge, horse riding, and paragliding); (5) lakes or wetlands; (6) shores and rocky coastline/bluffs (coastline characterized by rocky outcrops, headlands, bluffs, wave-cut platforms, or canyons); (7) sandy beaches (coastline dominated by straight, sandy beaches); (8) good vistas (areas offering a wider view of the landscape); (9) scientific interest (unusual features, such as rare biodiversity, nature reserves, rocky outcrops, or deep holes); and (10) geological features (limestone pillars, caves, and large rocks or outcrops). A scoring system ranging from 1 to 10 was used to evaluate the quality of the indicators and reflect their importance. The maximum average score each site could be assigned was 10. High overall scores indicated multiple attractions, while low overall scores indicated low levels of attractiveness.

The second category is accessibility, the ease with which destinations can be reached. Access was assessed using five indicators: (1) proximity to the city center; (2) proximity to other natural/historical resources; (3) quality and type of road (distance from the highway, asphalt or stable surface, etc.); (4) transportation by all kinds of vehicles; and (5) transportation to the destination partly by vehicle and partly on foot (up to 500 m). Some additional criteria were determined for the evaluation. For indicators (1) and (2), if the resource is at a distance of 30 minutes or 40 km from the city center by highway, two points were given; resources not meeting this criterion were given 1 point. For indicator (3), resources that are at the roadside or can be reached by an asphalt road of up to 3.5 km scored two points; resources not meeting this criterion were given 1 point. Indicator (5) was rated over two points. If the resource is accessed by walking further than 500 m, one point was given. Each of these indicators were assigned values ranging from 1 to 5.

The third category, the supporting infrastructure, consists of eight indicators: (1) toilet facilities (separate toilets for men and women, with washing facilities); (2) picnic tables (tables with seats), seats, or benches (such as simple park benches); (3) suitable places for barbecues (cooking facilities, including places where fires may be lit); (4) rubbish bins (waste disposal units); (5) facilities for the disabled (including ramps and accessible toilets); (6) shades or shelters (including covered areas, summerhouses, shelters or refuges, and trees), (7) first aid and/or telephone facilities (coverage by mobile phone companies); and (8) clean fresh water. All indicators, with the exception of shelter, received a score of either 0 for absence or 1 for presence of the facility. We assigned a heavier weighting to shelter because of its importance, and thus the sixth indicator was weighted with a score of three points. A score of 0 was given if no shelter was available.

The fourth category is the level of environmental degradation, evaluated using the following

10 indicators: (1) litter/debris (amount, type, and density); (2) weeds (density and invasiveness of wild plants); (3) disease (presence of diseases that may affect the ecosystem); (4) fire hazard (caused by non-natural events such as camping); (5) erosion (deterioration of tracks or pathways, flood channels/canals caused by visitors); (6) trampling of vegetation (damage to vegetation complexes in terms of their physical structure); (7) demolition or destruction of sand dunes (caused by visitors); (8) erosion of landforms; (9) tracks/pathways (built tracks for four-wheel vehicles); and (10) buildings (non-tourist buildings such as squatter shacks). A scoring system from 1 to 10 was used to evaluate the degradation of the region. Each resource site could receive a maximum score of 100 for this category. Low scores indicated minimal disturbance caused by humans. High overall scores indicated a requirement for rehabilitation and/or visitor management.

Using the data mentioned above, four walking routes were devised by the experts who participated in this research.

RESULTS

Resource sites located in İnköy were evaluated as shown in Tables 1–4.

Table 1: Level of attractiveness

Level of attractiveness

1 = Very poor, 10 = Very high

(1) Floral diversity	9
(2) Scenic diversity	9
(3) Recreation opportunities	9
(4) Adventure opportunities	8
(5) Lake or wetland	8
(6) Shores and rocky coastline/bluffs	8
(7) Sandy beach	10
(8) Good vistas	10
(9) Scientifically interesting	8
(10) Geological features	7
Average score	8.6

The results show that İnköy has rich and diversified attractions. The vistas and sandy beaches form the main attractions in the area, with scores of 10 from the experts. The area is also rich in terms of floral diversity, scenic diversity, recreational facilities, adventure opportunities, lakes/wetlands, shores, and rocky coastlines, with average scores of 9 and 8 in the corresponding categories. It is also scientifically interesting and has geological features. All of its tourism resources were classified in the “high” category. The level of attractiveness was above average and close to international standards. These results show that İnköy is distinctive in having a number of interesting resources that are attractive to ecotourists. For example, the shore, the coastline, and the beaches provide numerous recreation opportunities for visitors. The results indicate that the resources are mainly concentrated near the shoreline.

Table 2: Accessibility

Accessibility

1 = Very poor, 5 = Very good

(1) Proximity to the city center	1
(2) Proximity to other natural/historical resources	1
(3) Quality and type of road	1
(4) Transportation by all kinds of vehicles	3
(5) Transportation to the destination partly by vehicle and partly on foot	1
Average score	1.4

The lack of good accessibility was seen as the main hindrance to development of ecotourism in İnköy. The resources can be accessed only via a sand track and using a four-wheel drive vehicle. Some highly attractive places are inaccessible because of poor transport routes. Accessibility is the core problem in the area, as it increases both cost and time spent. The only transportation available is by sea, and the village roads are uncomfortable to travel on. Transportation facilities are the most important element of tourism, since they enable tourists to reach the region.

The main reason for the region's inaccessibility is the difficulty of crossing the İhtiyarşahap Mountains, which are located in the south of the research area. Since the area is surrounded by high mountains running from east to west, road transportation is difficult. The roads between the coast and the inner areas of the region are of low quality and built at the bottom of deep valleys. However, it should be borne in mind that the inadequacy of road transportation in the region helps protect the natural environment.

Table 3: Supporting infrastructure

Supporting infrastructure

0 = Absent, 1 = Present

(1) Toilet facilities	0
(2) Picnic tables	0
(3) Suitable places for barbecues	1
(4) Rubbish bins	0
(5) Facilities for the disabled	0
(6) Shades or shelters	1
(7) First aid and/or telephone facilities	0
(8) Clean fresh water	1
Average score	0.4

In general, İnköy has very low levels of infrastructure, which hinders the development of ecotourism. Some basic infrastructure facilities are available: barbecue areas, clean fresh water, and shades and shelters. However, there are no toilets, picnic tables, first aid or communication facilities, facilities for disabled people, or rubbish bins. Although clean fresh water, barbecue facilities, and shade are available, the quality of these facilities is low. Clean fresh water is spring water provided by simple man-made fountains. Shade is largely the shade provided by the trees in the natural surroundings; naturally shaded areas are mainly found at or close to the shore. In these respects, it is clear that the infrastructure in the research area is not sufficient to meet the needs of ecotourists.

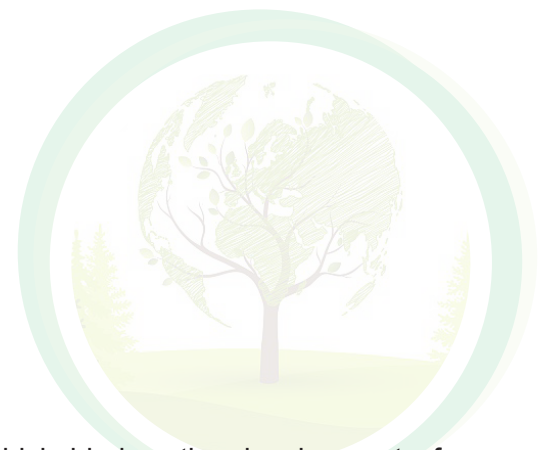


Table 4: Level of environmental degradation

Level of environmental degradation

1 = Very high, 10 = Very low

(1) Litter/debris	9
(2) Weeds	10
(3) Disease	9
(4) Fire hazard	9
(5) Erosion	9
(6) Trampling of vegetation	7
(7) Demolition or destruction of sand dunes	10
(8) Erosion of landforms	10
(9) Tracks/pathways	9
(10) Buildings	10
Average score	9.2

One of the most important aims of ecotourism is the protection and sustainable use of the environment. The results of this study indicate that the area is relatively free of environmental problems and that İnköy is an ideal place for ecotourism with its undisturbed nature and ecosystem. In 92% of the area, environmental degradation is minimal because of the area's remoteness and inaccessibility. Resources are not exploited by locals or by the current tourist population. However, trampling of vegetation is not controlled, and this may lead to problems in the near future. Therefore, some regulation and protection initiatives are needed. Overall, the results of this study show that İnköy has great potential for the development of ecotourism.

In İnköy and its vicinity, four different sightseeing routes were determined using the field studies and data obtained from the experts (Figure 3).

Route 1 runs between Akdamar Island and the İnköy area. This route can be reached only via maritime transport. Starting at Akdamar Island, travelers can enjoy the scenery and see the topography of Altınsaç, İnköy, the Deveboynu Peninsula, and Gençler. During the tour, a large number of bays and forelands can be seen at close quarters.

Route 2 requires some physical effort, as it can be reached only by trekking or on horseback. The route starts in Göründü and takes in Gençler, Altınsaç, İnköy, the Deveboynu Peninsula, and Ağın. Different attractions can be seen along this route: large and small beaches, Göründü, a slope with thyme, Altınsaç, St. Thomas Church, Üçdelik Cave, İnköy, Hinar Hill (Şupan Mountain, Çadır Mountain, and Van), Ağın, Gençler, and the Cow Cave. Visitors can experience a unique natural environment and witness the long history of the area.

Route 3 is suitable for tourists arriving at Gençler through Routes 1 or 2. Starting from Gençler, it allows Bahçesaray to be reached via Timar, Aydınocak, Kuşluk, and Anaköy. On this route, visitors can enjoy the attractions of Cow Cave, Gençler, Karaayavar Hill, Kale Hill, Timar, Aydınocak, Kuşluk, İkigöz Cave, Anaköy, and Bahçesaray. Hiking, spelunking, hunting, wildlife observation, adventure sports, and photography can be enjoyed on this route, as can trekking and hillwalking.

Route 4 starts from Göründü and passes through Yuva, Törel, and Anaköy, ending up at Bahçesaray. On this route, it is possible to reach Göründü, Nest, Waterfall, Törel, Anaköy,

and Bahçesaray, and visitors have the chance to take part in mountain trekking, hunting, and experiencing rural life. Wildlife observation, adventure sports, and photography are also available.

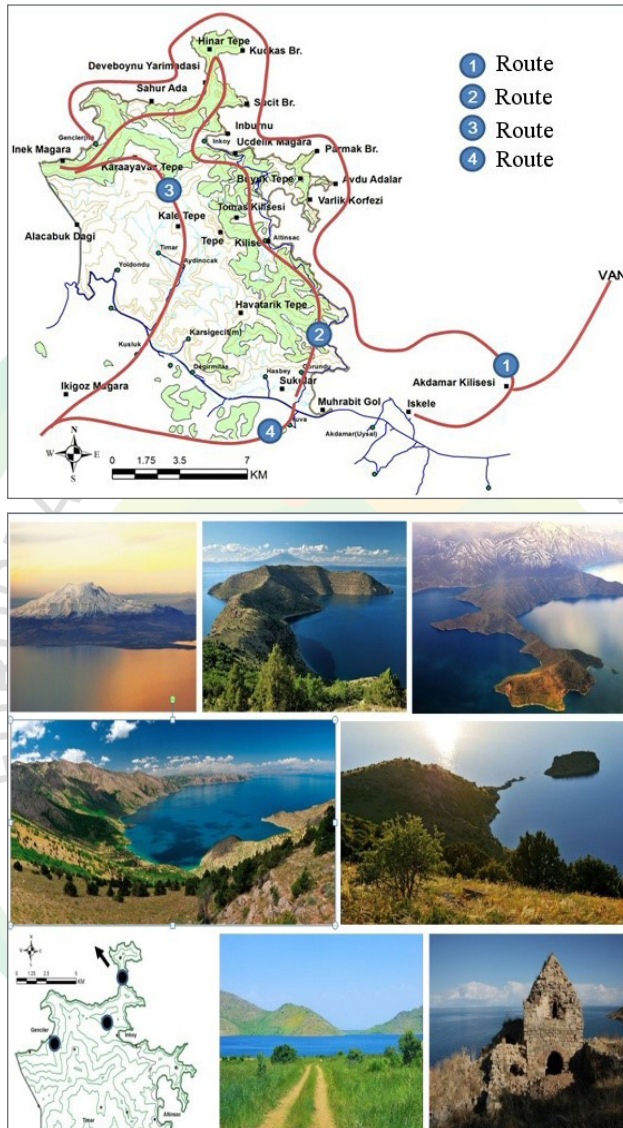


Figure 3: Proposed sightseeing routes in the İnköy region

When these routes are put into practice, tourism activity in the region will increase. Local people will therefore be able to increase their income by offering refreshment services (food and beverages) and guesthouse facilities and by selling local handicrafts and souvenirs. Given the lack of economic activity that has characterized this area, such a development in ecotourism would constitute a significant improvement for the local economy.

Local people have suffered from a lack of economic activity, such that the development of ecotourism will help address outmigration and low income levels. As Akdamar Island and Akdamar church (4 km from İnköy) attract thousands of tourists, residents are already prepared for the development of nature-based tourism in the region. They indicated that tourism is an important element in their economy and that, as a source of additional income, it will increase their quality of life. They believe that İnköy has great tourism potential and that local government should take the initiative to develop tourism activities, supporting the residents to run guesthouses or to offer guest rooms in their houses to accommodate tourists.

CONCLUSION

In this study, the ecotourism potential of İnköy, located in the southern part of Lake Van, was examined, and the region's natural resources were evaluated by experts involved in outdoor activities for the development of ecotourism. Sightseeing routes were also identified. It is essential to determine the quantity and the quality of the resources in order to reveal the ecotourism potential of the area, especially for local authorities and decision-makers. This study evaluated the quality and quantity of resources for ecotourism development based on the categories of level of attractiveness, accessibility, supporting infrastructure and level of environmental degradation. The results show that the region has outstanding natural resources that can be used for the development of ecotourism.

The results indicate that the vast majority of the area has remarkable attractions with ecotourism potential. However, the absence of highway access to the resources is a key disadvantage. For this reason, in order to increase accessibility, roads to the resources should be improved and access by sea should also be provided.

The results also reveal that the area has inadequate infrastructure. Although the current level of the supporting infrastructure is low, this can be resolved by investment on the part of local government. In this connection, accessible facilities for disabled people and toilet services should be provided, and picnic tables and rubbish bins should be placed at various locations in the area.

This study revealed that environmental degradation is low in the area. In order to develop ecotourism in İnköy, it is essential to plan the sustainable and effective use of resources, and the work necessary for the development of tourism should be carried out to allow local people to earn income through the development of tourism. For example, educational activities, such as short courses on ecotourism, should be organized for local people. Courses that would be beneficial for local people include those that focus on protection of the natural environment, sustainable use of resources that takes into account the balance of protection and utilization, the impact of tourism, behavior toward visitors, running a guesthouse, producing food and beverages, hygiene, and sales and marketing.

These results have significant implications for decision-makers, local authorities, and investors. Decision-makers and local authorities can use them to determine the quality and quantity of resources and their importance for the development of ecotourism, and this will be beneficial in the allocation of planning and management efforts (Priskin, 2001). Four sightseeing routes leading to attractions were also identified using the views of the experts in this study, three of them walking trails and one of them a maritime route. Maps should be prepared and printed in order to make these routes available to the public, and the routes should be marked suitably to international standards.



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ECOTOURISM IN THE DIGITAL CENTURY –

Digital Storytelling, Virtual Travel Itineraries



INTERPRETATION AS AN IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF ECOTOURISM

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ABSTRACT

The article describes the concept, principles and model of heritage interpretation well-known in western countries. The International Ecotourism Society in the latest definition of ecotourism emphasizes the importance of interpretation as a special kind of educational activity. The article presents some cases in the sphere of ecotourism from Belarus based on interpretation and innovative experience development.

Keywords: Ecotourism, interpretation, meaning, experience.

INTRODUCTION

A lot of traditional definitions of ecotourism concentrate mainly on nature protection and social issues. The latest definition of The International Ecotourism Society demonstrates importance of new component such as interpretation. "Ecotourism – responsible travel to natural area that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people and involves interpretation and education" (TIES, 2015).

Interpretation is an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience (Tilden, 2007). Interpretation concept is just crossing the border of the former USSR countries like Belarus. It is known only by very narrow range of professionals and the word "interpretation" is used very rarely. A Soviet style approach still dominates in the most of national parks, museums, guided tours and exhibitions in this part of the world. It usually consists of one-way hierarchic communications, which are reminiscent of academic lecturing, extracts from textbooks and commanded signs. There are only two books about interpretation in Russian (Klitsounova, 2015, Ham, 2015). But the situation is changing. Experience economy and interpretation ideas are entering our country. And there are already some interesting cases in ecotourism sphere. It is very important to show public another type of example based on innovative approach which stimulates personal opinion, thinking and make human behaviour more environmentally friendly.

Why is it happening now in Belarus? There are three reasons for that:

- there is a demand for new innovative ideas in tourism industry which provide for tourism products/services competitive advantage and create added value in hospitality industry;
- there is active well-educated audience – new generation (who use Internet and travel around the globe). They are able to use these new ideas and implement them;
- new institutions have appeared and sort of network for spreading these new ideas has been established in Belarus. Belarusian Association of Rural- and Ecotourism "Country

Escape” and Belarusian State University (Department of International Tourism) were the first ones of them.

Why is it happening in tourism industry? Because it is the most dynamic sector of economy based mainly on private companies looking for new innovative ideas. Many young people decided to work in this field.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of the paper is to demonstrate the role, functions and effectiveness of innovative approach based on heritage interpretation in ecotourism.

Objectives of the paper are:

- to introduce definition, concept and principles of interpretation;
- to describe how new concept of interpretation could be integrated in educational activities in ecotourism sphere;
- to demonstrate best ecotourism cases based on interpretation approach in Belarus.

MAIN TEXT

There are few definitions of interpretation which have to be mentioned for better understanding this concept.

“Interpretation is a mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource” (National Association for Interpretation).

“Heritage interpretation is an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information”. (Freeman Tilden for the US National Park Service) (Douglas, Cable, Beck, 2003).

Environmental education and interpretation are different activities. Both have similarities like similar natural resources and environmental topics, both lead to greater awareness and understanding of environment. But interpretation is connected with non-captive audiences which often are diverse in their ages, backgrounds and expectations and include short-term, often single programs. And the main goal of interpretation is to inspire and enhance recreational experience.

Heritage interpretation has a long story. The process started in US national parks in the beginning of XX century. But this field of knowledge has been structurized in 1960th. Freeman Tilden was the first person to formalize and record the prevailing thinking on the principles of effective interpretation. He did so in his book “Interpreting Our Heritage”, first published in 1957.

1. Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.
2. Information, as such, is not Interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon

information. But they are entirely different things. However all interpretation includes information.

3. Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.
4. The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.
5. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.
6. Interpretation addressed to children (say up to the age of twelve) should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best it will require a separate program (Tilden, 2007).

We added the 7th principle to this list which is very relevant to post-soviet countries. All tourism programs, tours, museums should be accessible for people with disabilities (Klitsounova, 2015).

Interpretation is based on meaning-centered philosophy encapsulated in this definition: heritage interpretation is a communication process that guides visitors to discover meaning in objects, places and landscapes (Douglas, Cable, Beck, 2003; Buhholz, Lackey, Gross, Zimmerman, 2015). Meaning-Centered Model describes the interaction between the key components of an interpretive experience. Visitors, resources and the interpreter or media interact to produce meaningful experience (Figure 1).



Figure 1 - Meaning-Centered Model of interpretation

Interpretation is a guide, leading audiences from physical resources to their underlying meanings, from the tangible to the intangible, from sight to insight. By providing opportunities to connect to the meanings of the resource, interpretation provokes the public's participation in resource stewardship. It helps them to understand their relationships to, and impacts upon, those resources. And it helps them to care (Larsen, 2011).

There are many reasons why national parks and different ecotourism programs are so popular and why people select specific places to visit. Perhaps foremost among the motivations to visit are the themes, stories, and recreational opportunities that they offer. All people who visit sites seek something of value for themselves. They seek to relate their personal interests to the experiences and adventures offered in the places they visit.

Interpretation can form symbiotic relationship between visitors and the places they visit. It acts as a catalyst to initiate and enhance this relationship. The connections made through

interpretive experiences can lead people to take action.

Through interpretation, understanding: through understanding, appreciation: through appreciation, protection (Freeman Tilden, 2007).

This process may go through next six stages:

- dragged along (I didn't even want to be here.);
- curiosity (What is this about?);
- awareness (I'll think about it.);
- understanding (I think I care.);
- care about (I want to help.);
- care for (I will help.).

The development of any ecotourism attractions is today narrowly connected to creation of experience. The Experience Wheel Model has been produced by Lise Lyck (Lyck 2008). The experience wheel acts as a communication tool to disseminate the experience concept and to develop and measure the experience value of products' design such as national parks, museums, trails, etc. There are no limits to the use of the Experience Wheel. It is a universal instrument. The model is shown in figure 2.

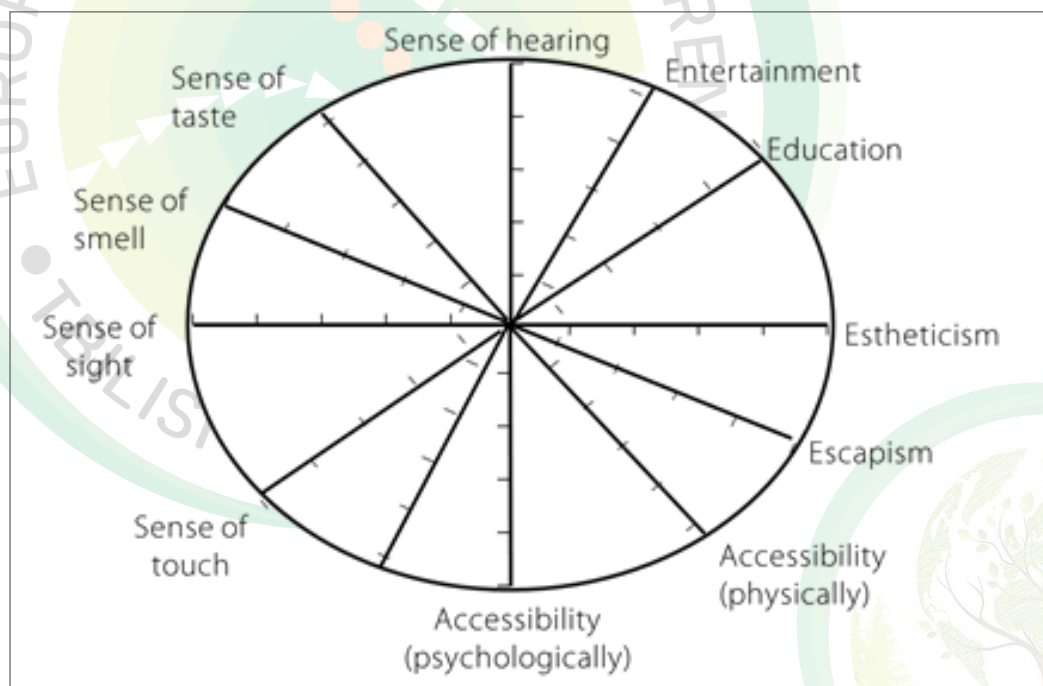


Figure 2 - The Experience Wheel Model

The Experience Wheel Model is developed on the basis of different theories. Pine & Gilmore (1999) emphasize entertainment, education, escapism and estheticism, as elements of an experience that is attractive in relation to specific tourists segments. In addition, the senses of hearing, smell, taste, touch and sights play a central role. These can be coupled with the parameter participation. The value axis of participation is between passive and active participation. Therefore, uniqueness of participation is a key parameters for the quality of the experience. Finally, accessibility can be mentioned as one of a key parameters in relation to the value composition of the experience. Accessibility has both a physical and a psychological dimension. All variables are connected in a balanced scorecard system. This model is recommend to use before creating any of ecotourism.

Any professional activity, especially, activity connected with mission and its own ideology like interpretation, needs to have an educational system. There is a range of interpretive educational programs, trainings, seminars offered in the USA. Few intellectual centers define the main development tendencies of the interpretive activity. This is first of all, the National Park Service (USA), National Association for Interpretation (USA) and some higher institution facilities: The University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point, Michigan State University, The University of Idaho, The University of San Diego (California), etc. These are places where principal materials, programs, books are prepared. It is the place where new approaches are being developed in order to meet the needs of society.

Today, interpreters can get a professional education in more than 130 university programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels in North America. Several universities in Europe, Australia, and Asia also offer interpretation courses. Teaching of interpretation has a long history. Some undergraduate interpretation courses cover a broad overview of the philosophy, principles, and methods of interpretation and environmental education. Others build on these general concepts and require numerous exercises to develop students' individual performance skills in different styles of interpretive presentations. The interpretive profession has long debated whether a strong grounding in communication or expertise in specific resource subject matter (e.g., forestry, natural science, archaeology, history) is more important. In fact, the work requires depth in both subject matter and delivery theory and skills (Douglas, Cable, Beck, 2003).

The situation in Belarus and in other post-soviet countries is different and heritage interpretation is on initial stage of development. Heritage interpretation is an absolutely new academic discipline in higher education of post-soviet countries. There are only few universities where you can find such course.

Also there are private initiatives based on interpretive principles – Museum of Rural Culture “Dudutky”, private ecomuseums, thematic tourism programs, festivals, etc. They were designed mainly on intuitional level without theoretical knowledge. They proved efficiency of interpretive approaches and attract big interest from tourist's side. We may say that tourism stakeholders demonstrate its interest and use more and more interpretive ideas.

To introduce and develop the concept of heritage interpretation on Belarusian tourism market few steps had to be done:

- 1) to publish and design textbooks, guidebooks and training workbooks;
- 2) to prepare group of experts who can teach heritage interpretation;
- 3) to run series of trainings for guides, national parks, employers, museum staff, teachers from universities, etc.,
- 4) to develop special innovative course about interpretation at university level;
- 5) to create good cases which demonstrates effectiveness of interpretative approach.

Here is the chronicle of activities we did during last years:

2014 – completely new and innovative course “Heritage Interpretation in Tourism” (52 hours) was established at the Belarusian State University, International Tourism Department. In the frame of the course, students receive knowledge about the principles and best practices of heritage interpretation, learn how to interact with the audience and develop creative tourism products. In order to complete the course students have to develop interactive interpretation programs.

2015 – the very first book about the heritage interpretation “Heritage Interpretation in Tourism:

New Approaches in the Experience Economy Era” was published in Belarus. The main idea of the book is to present the heritage interpretation as a new ideology and profession, show the effectiveness of approaches and techniques that lie at its basis. The book’s audience are those who have a lot of ideas and lack of finance, representatives of small and medium-sized businesses who want to be the first in the experience economy and who now have a real chance to outstrip the titans of the hospitality industry.

2016-2017 - the staff of “Country Escape” translated the main methodological materials in the field of Heritage Interpretation, developed by the National Association for Interpretation (NAI) and European Association for Heritage Interpretation (IE). Also Belarusian experts developed their own methodological materials on this topic.

2016-2017 – few training courses on interpretation of natural and cultural heritage were held in Berezinsky reserve. They were conducted by well-known experts of NAI and IE. The training program was based on innovative approaches applied in the national parks and forests of the United States. This activity has been supported by US Forest Services. This organization actively promotes interpretation approach in USA and abroad. We prepared the group of 60 interpreters who started to spread these ideas.

After accomplishing all these steps we started to create museums, Greenways with ecomuseums, festivals, etc. and promote interpretation actively.

Further you will find few cases in ecotourism based on interpretation principles and creative techniques.

First one is the Center of Mythology in Berezinsky Reserve created by “Country Escape” in frame of EU/ UNDP project “Supporting the Transition to a Green Economy in the Republic of Belarus” (2016-2017).

The Berezinsky Biosphere Reserve is the oldest and the only natural area of protection of the highest rank in Belarus established in 1925. It is located some 100 km north-east of Minsk on the edge of the watersheds between the Black and the Baltic Seas. It is a patchwork of boreal coniferous and broad-leaved forests, lakes, watercourses, marshlands and flood plains and represents one of the largest undrained peat bogs in Eastern Europe. It extends to 11,000 hectares. Its wolves, bears and bison populations as well as the rich bird life attract many scientists. There is a network of permanent plots, and profiles for monitoring forest, marshland, and meadow vegetation. The area is also known for its historic sites, such as Slavic tombs, ancient trade ways, etc.

Some 2,200 people of local population live within the biosphere reserve boundaries who use the transition area and specially designated sites for gathering berries and mushrooms, cattle pastures and non-commercial fishing. Some economic benefit derives from tourism. An environmental education center and a nature museum provide information to the visitors.

The Center of Mythology consists of Museum of Mythology and eco-trail “In the Country of Myths” based on mythological characters connected with different biotypes. The mission of the museum is to strength cultural and national identity of Belarusian people, explain natural heritage and promote sustainable nature management using Belarusian mythology.

Belarus has a rich archaic traditional and mythological culture which is about forgotten now.

We use many innovative approaches (sounds, artistic installations, animation, quests, dialogs, different mythological characters) to provoke critical thinking of visitors about our history, mythology and identity different from Russian.

The museum itself consists of three parts and it is based on World Tree concept. The world tree is a motif presented in several religions and mythologies, particularly Indo-European religions, Siberian religions, and Native American religions. It is represented as a colossal tree which supports the heavens, the terrestrial world, the underworld.

Terrestrial world in museum demonstrates local rights, folklore, crafts, etc. According to Belarusian traditions Underworld is not a hell. It is place where our ancestors are accommodated together with their guard grass snake. Heaven – place where birds fly together with ancestors' souls. Belarusians never had pantheons of gods but worship nature. The program proves through stories, legends, artifacts that we have our own mythology and history.

The trail "In the County of Myths" shows our nature from new angle - through mythological characters that live in the forest and protect it. Mythological characters regulated human activity in nature and determined responsible relationships with environment, promoting sustainable norms in nature resource usage. These characters according to our ancestry's beliefs are ambivalent. They could be kind or strict to people according their behavior. They played role of guardian spirit of trees, bogs, rivers, plants and etc.

Different mythological characters on the trail have been created during Plein Air by famous Belarusian designers. The main idea was to tell stories about nature and ecology through the use of mythical creatures' images – Pine Forest Goblin, Mermaids, Bog Spirit, Field Goblin, Grass-snake King, Dragon, etc. We can use this to explain our natural heritage and to promote sustainable nature management.

Further there are description of few most interesting characters.

"Lesavik" (wood goblin) (artwork by Pavel Voinitsky) is a mythological forest lord. People believed that each forest has its owner, who looks after all the animals and birds. It save them from the fire, hunters, etc. "Lesavik" can change his appearance, so it's hard to say how he really looks. He can be a stump and tussock, beast or bird, or even a plant, but most often he looks like an old man with a long beard. "Lesavik" watches if people follow the rules in the forest, otherwise he scares them with the screams.

'Vuzhyny Karol' (grass-snake king) (artwork by Elena Chepeleva) is the mythical keeper of all snakes. He has enormous large size, the ability to walk on the tail. One of the main features is a crown on his head. On the religious holiday Exaltation (14 September / September 27, past.st.), he gathers all snakes and lead them to overwinter. That's why there was a ban to visit the forest at this time. However, people believed that on this day it is possible to find the crown of "Vuzhyny Karol". Those, who finds the crown acquires an unusual wisdom, an ability to understand the language of animals, birds and plants, read the thoughts of others, to overcome the most difficult challenges, to remove all locks and latches. That person also becomes immune to snake venom.

"Rusalka" (mermaid) (artwork by Tatsiana Gomza) is a mythological character who looks like young beautiful girls in wreaths on brown, white or green hair, with green or blue eyes, dressed in a white robe or green plants. They usually appear in the field, forest, near water.

Mermaid is considered an archaic spirit, which expresses the phenomenon of vegetation and protects plants. Mermaids usually appear in the period of blooming, growing vegetables, trees and grass (the eighth week after the Easter) and disappear in the end of growing season. Mermaids embody fruit-bearing force of water.

“Kladnik” (treasures keeper) (artwork by Alena Atrashkevich) is a mythological character who owns treasures and protects his enormous wealth. But nevertheless he is poor. Kladnik doesn't spend his wealth on his needs. Greed made him evil. He believes that everybody wants to steal his treasures. On the fortieth day after the Easter he goes out of his house to dry treasures, but no one sees it. People believe that usually he is wearing silver coat with a gold belt and a huge lock on it, cap made of gold on his head and a silver cane.

Also in frame of the project we organized special theatre-school for local children who started to participate and perform different characters during tours. We organized contest of best stories and paintings about mythology. You can see all these things in the museum. It is a part of exposition. This center is very popular among tourists and especially school children.

During the project implementation special training “Heritage Interpretation in green tourism” has been arranged in Berezinsky Reserve. Participants of training were mostly young ecotourism professionals from the reserve, other environmental agencies, national parks and reserves who wanted to become advanced green guides. During five days participants practiced in discovering the meaning and theme of “resource”, using props sparingly, evaluating an interpretive walk, changing formations, playing different roles and even to make posters.

According to feed-back participants had got great opportunity to use and develop new tourist products based on new knowledge and tools.

“Now it is impossible to continue with the tours by old methods because I have so many new ideas and themes for Berezinsky.” (Elizaveta Sidorenko, tourism specialist of Berezinsky Reserve).

«I turned from scientist to romantic person». (Ivan Tesul, specialist of the Braslav Lakes National Park).

«We learned how to find meanings of the “phenomena” which hides a lot of secrets, mysteries, surprising and sometimes unexpected revelations.». (Anastassia Reshetnikova, teacher of University).

«Each flower, stone or tree were filled with new meanings and started to be brightened by new colors. Only this way of transferring information could allow visitors to reach harmony with nature. This is the connecting link which will be the integral part of my life from now and forever». (Eygeni Shevchik, specialist of Aziory Reserve). Participants have decided to form a network of nature interpreters and develop this concept in Belarus.

After the training local guides designed very interesting ecotourism program – “night interpretation”. “Bolotnik” (Belarusian bogs spirit) surprised and amused guests by his sudden appearance and outstanding presentation. The aroma of tea with herbs, guitar songs in different languages, magic lit candles floating in glass stands in the forest in darkness have created a very special atmosphere of unity between human and nature. Each participant had to find a “phenomena” nearby in the forest which touched his soul and to reveal its sacred, profound

meaning. A lit candle in a glass and a thought-provoking note helped visitors to look at it with different eyes.

The Center of Mythology is very popular now. It works like “imaginarium” and helps people to form personal relationship with nature and culture heritage.

Next interesting case based on interpretation approach dedicated to Greenways.

In Belarus Greenways are considered as a model which provides not only access to the nature but rather acts as an instrument for economic development of rural and nature areas based on sustainability principles. Greenways also support development of civil society in the country after the collapse of socialism. Greenways act as a tool for ‘creative economy’ and ‘learning arena’ for tourists.

Belarus is one of the first countries of former Soviet Union that started to develop Greenways. The idea of Greenways came to Belarus in 2005, when our country was visited by a group of ecotourism experts from western countries who gave their recommendations for creation of the first two Greenways. The idea was pioneered by the ‘Country Escape’ which started implementation of activities for its development.

Over the past decade, Belarus has made a strong beginning in creating a national system of Greenways which celebrate the country’s rich heritage of natural and cultural resources.

Few projects in the sphere of Greenways development were implemented in Belarus. The most significant ones are ‘Greenways – working out environmentally friendly trails in Belarus’ (supported by OSCE office in Minsk, 2005-2006) and EU/UNDP project ‘Sustainable development on the Local Level’ (2008-2010). They helped to develop eight flagship Greenway initiatives in different parts of the country and to create a network.

Today, Greenways in Belarus are ready to enter a new phase, which will emphasize making Greenways more accessible and attractive to tourists. Greenways are becoming an essential component of strategies for sustainable development of many territories. Dozens of workshops, seminars and meetings have seen genuine interest in the topic of Greenways. Partnership initiative groups were formed and started creating and developing Greenways in many pilot regions.

In Belarus Greenways combine all the three categories defined by J.Fabos: ecological, recreational Greenways and historical corridors. Greenways act as a good platform for new sustainable tourism product. Non-urban area of Belarus possesses significant tourism potential but lacks infrastructure, formulated tourism product, brands, etc. It is Greenways that is a basis that unites various tourism initiatives of local population based on natural and cultural heritage under one theme. The theme predetermines logo, brand and content of a Greenway.

Belarusian Greenways are based on a concept of interpretation in Greenways design - the ‘visitor experience’. In essence, the greenway ‘visitor experience’ involves moving through the landscape, usually by non-motorized transport (walking, bicycling, paddling, riding) along a continuous linear Greenway route that connects sites of natural, historic or cultural significance. The quality of the visitor experience is determined by the environment (for example, the weather or physical characteristics of the trail, roadway, or waterway) and by the information (for example, greenway brochures, websites, tour guides, or interpretive signs) provided to

the visitor to help understand the significance of the sites and region. The goal in designing the ideal 'visitor experience' is to touch all the visitor's senses in a deep and memorable way through interpretation. Chinese proverb says 'Tell me and I'll forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I'll understand'.

The abovementioned concept became a basis for the new model of 'creative economy' that does not require significant financial investments but can generate significant income and, what is more important, can leave a mark in tourist's soul (Ham S., 2015). Tourists receive non-traditional information through informal communicative channels. And this information is something that is hard to forget.

One of the most successful examples which illustrate the points mentioned above is Greenway 'Volozhynskie gostintsy' (from Russian – 'the Volozhin roads').

There are several items that make the Volozhin region an excellent destination for tourists. First, the natural and cultural landscapes are outstanding. The Naliboki Forest is one of the best ecosystems anywhere in Europe. It also contains a fascinating human story that was transformed into the movie "Defiance." There are 184 heritage sites here which are included in state Belarusian heritage list. Second, the region has a number of established homestays that can accommodate tourists. Third, there is a variety of other activities for tourists to enjoy, from the Monkey EcoPark, to river canoeing and kayaking, to hiking and bicycling trails.

Ten years ago initiative group was formed for Greenways designing. It was a bottom-up approach and now Volozhin region benefits from strong local leadership. Initiative group includes around 20 active people – country homestay owners, craftsmen, historians, representatives of local natural reserve, artists, farmers, representatives of museums, etc. This group has become a real team, a motor of Greenways development and managed to win the contest. Volozhin became a pilot territory of international project "Sustainable development on local level" (2009-2011). In frame of this project the route was developed as well as Greenway logo, brand and name (Figure 3). Several banners, signs, booklets were produced and mini-grants program supported local tourism initiatives. Real public-private partnership was established (local authorities, local community, business, NGOs). Nowadays various financial resources are used for Greenways development – donors programs' money (EU, USAID, American Embassy, UNDP, etc.), as well as private and state money.



Some facilities on the ground that support tourism started to be developed. The photos below show one of the most readily available routes of travel in the region, rural roads that can accommodate cyclists and pedestrians (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Different types of roads and their users on Greenway 'Volozhinskie gostintsy'

The Greenway has become an innovative tourism product with a variety of activities, tourist sites and festivals which provide unique visitor experience. Newly created ecomuseums attract particular tourist attention – these are places where one can get acquainted with bee life, taste pancakes with honey, learn to dance and sing Belarusian songs, do something with clay, make bread, tea from herbs, watch birds and animals and the like.

This territory has been announced Territory of Creative Economy and become good example for other regions.

Recently an accessible ecological trail "Belakorac" was opened in Naliboky Reserve, Volozhin district (in frame of EU project "Volozhin without barriers"). Its length is 1,3 km, it contains 9 interactive stands, 6 tactile maps for trails for the blind and visually impaired, 3 accessible gezebos, 6 tactile wooden models, etc.

First group of people with disabilities has visited it and experienced new meanings (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Accessible ecological trail "Belakorac"



Tourism recipes in Volozhin district increased from 11,721\$ (2007) till 300,842\$, number of homestays to accommodate tourists is growing rapidly from 3 in 2007 till 41 in 2017.

Nowadays Greenway 'Volozhinskie gostintsy' plans to reach new level and according to experts' recommendations it is necessary:

- provide access to unique natural and cultural attractions;
- wayfinding and signage systems should be improved;
- visitor lodging needs upgrading and certification;
- visitor support services are to be developed;
- guided tours should be designed and guides should be developed;
- local food should be promoted;
- local festivals are needed to highlight tourism and generate revenue.

There are some good examples of festivals, based on heritage interpretation approach which have to be mentioned.

One of them – creative ecological festival “Sporava haymaking”. “Sporava Biological Reserve encompasses remarkable diversity of European bogs. These marsh are high in minerals and provide shelter for thousands of unique plants and animals. Sporava is protected nature bog area where unique birds – water warblers (*acrocephalus paludicola*) make their nests . There are only 10000 birds in the world, it is the most rare song-bird of continental Europe. 600 couples of these birds live there but they are in danger. Since 1990 the bog started to overgrow with trees because local population stopped to mow the grass. As a result, birds couldn't make their nest here.

Local ecological enthusiasts found creative solution how to attract attention to this problem and help disappearing birds. They started festival “Sporava haymaking” 11 years ago and now it is an international big event.

The main goal of the festival is to attract attention to disappearing birds and destroying bog which is need a special care – cutting grass and keeping hydrological regime. Event is very popular and has a lot of media coverage. After participation in this activity people change their behavior and started to care about bogs and birds. It is much more effective than lecturing or other kind of traditional information.

One of the main attractions of the festival traditionally became competition between haymakers. In order to hold the victory, the participants had to manually swath an area of 300 sq.m., This is not only a fun activity, not only a competition, but a way to strengthen unity between man and nature.

To arouse interest to this topic among youth, organizers of the event arranged championship in «Football on the bog».

For little participants and attendees, the festival featured a wide range of interactive entertainment. Educational workshops, small competitions, funny clown shows and horse rides were called upon to raise the awareness of Belarusian bogs among children.

An authentic atmosphere of the festival is supported by folk dancing, traditional singing and Belarusian handicraft, brought by local masters from all over the region.

Another interesting ecological event is fest “Cranes and Cranberries” on the north of Belarus in Yelnya Reserve, Miory district.

The national wildlife/landscape Yelnya Reserve is the largest and one of the most outstanding conservation sites. It is one of the oldest natural sites in Belarus – its origin goes back to the ice age. Human activity has had very minor impact on its development, which has made possible the survival of many unique plants and animal species.

The site conservation received international recognition. Yelnya became a Ramsar site and an important bird area in 2002, and an internationally significant plant diversity site in 2005. Yelnya is designated as a national core site within the network of conservation areas system designed by the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus.

The area is also known for its rich harvest of cranberries at Yelnya marsh. In addition, every year the district becomes a “guest house” for more than 5000 cranes and 10000 geese which stop for rest at the Yelnya marsh during the autumn migration. These are two unique features which have attracted visitors to the annual fest “Cranes and Cranberries”.

The fest helps too attract attention to bogs, show the importance of this area for birds – cranes and geese, buy cranberries and taste some local specialties with ferries. After participating in different activities (working along ecotrails, birdwatching with special equipment, trying berries, participate in local folk programs) people becoming in their behaviour more responsible and starting to care for this bog. For example, the Coca-Cola company after visiting this fest created a special longlasting program dedicated to protection of Yelnya bog. It demonstrates its social responsibility.

Few cases mentioned in the article develop new approaches in ecotourism sphere in Belarus, country with soviet background. It is critical to develop interpretive ecotourism products which stimulate people to care about environment, to find their own opinion and connection with nature and culture resources, respect different views, look for different meanings and revelation, promote sustainable development value.

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TOURIST GUIDES – KEY ACCELERATORS OF LOCAL DEVELOPMENT, RESPONSIBLE TOURISM AND CIRCULAR ECONOMY

MAJA ČAMPELJ⁴³

ABSTRACT

Tourist guides are local hosts and cultural ambassadors who are telling the story and communicating the essence of a destination to the visitors and at the same time they can efficiently promote and accelerate sustainable development and responsible tourism. Many times, being the only representative of local population and destination, who tourists are going to meet on their whole journey, they trust the guides, believe their side of the story and follow their recommendations more than any other source of information. Furthermore, engaging stories they hear from the tourist guides are the ones being shared with their significant others, being the family or digital communities on social media.

As such, tourist guides are in a possession of a communication power than no other communication channel of the brand has but are many times one of the most underestimated branches of marketing mix of the destination.

When educated, well trained guides are sharing their stories about local people, traditions, traditional products and cultural specialties, they are able to build the cultural bridge for tourists and they are magnificent accelerators of circular economy, which have mutual benefits for tourists and locals alike. On one hand, tourists get the authentic experience and build meaningful connections with local population they are in search of and on the other hand local community get the support and acceleration of much needed circular economy.

KEY WORDS: tourist guides, tourist guides training, responsible tourism, local development

INTRODUCTION

1,322 billion people being tourists in 2017 and expected growth by 4-5% in 2018 (UNWTO, 2018) set tourism in the third position among all the export industries in the world. Comes as no surprise, that if the World wants to move towards more sustainable development and wants to achieve at least some of the Sustainable development goals by 2030 (UN, 2018), tourism industry and its professionals play vital role. Sustainable development, sustainable tourism, responsible tourism, green tourism and eco-tourism concepts are well discussed and represented in academia and governmental policies at least over the last decade and it may seem at a first glance that we have achieved a lot, but on the other hand, Carić (2018) is pointing out that regardless on the long presence of sustainability concept and its promotion by leading international institutions and stakeholders, it is still puzzling for professionals, researchers and

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policy makers how to go about implementing it. Moreover, the challenge is, how to get all the stakeholders onboard and achieve synchronized, devoted work towards the same goals, making responsible tourism mainstream practice and not just utopic concept imposed from international organizations and academia.

This contribution to the 5th European Eco tourism conference in Tbilisi, Georgia is an attempt to show, how working constantly and closely with tourist guides, educating and training them, including them in decision making processes and informing them about the tourism strategies and policies of the destination, can not only enhance visitors experience, create meaningful connection and engage tourists deeper with the destination, but can more importantly help accelerate local development, responsible tourism and circular economy. As a result, we may expect greater understanding of culture, values and importance of cultural and natural heritage and connection with destination, which will encourage the appreciation and responsibility from the visitors. Tourist guides, who possess the right set of knowledge, skills and attitudes, are aware of the responsibility and communication power they have and are able to conduct their job with the highest level of professionalism possible in favor of their destination, are indispensable part of marketing mix for any responsible and sustainable destination in today's tourism industry.

To start with, the changing and ever evolving roles of tourist guides will be presented briefly in order to understand the influence that tourist guides' profession has in the whole tourism system. As already Rabotić (2010) found out, this profession is commonly perceived as an ancillary, repetitive and mass tourism activity, although it can be a very effective and powerful tool in the construction of tourist experiences. Irigüler and Güler (2016) make a comparison that tourist guiding profession is the 'Cinderella' of the tourism industry.

With very fast development of tourism industry and orientation towards circular economy and responsible tourism and strong desire to local development from tourism, a clear need for renewed tourist guides' training is evolving. After a brief presentation of current training system of tourist guides mainly in Europe with its issues, disadvantages and challenges, presentation of G-Guides model follows. Its' main goals are implementing sustainability knowledge into tourist guides' training, raise awareness about responsibility in tourist guiding and empower tourist guides to be a competent interlocutor in the tourism industry. Part of the support and contribution to these goals from G-Guides is also the initiative for first international and independent award for responsibility in tourist guiding Green Microphone – voice of responsible tourism.

WHO IS TOURIST GUIDE OF 21st CENTURY?

In 1985, Cohen (in Lovretnjev, 2014) would find two roles of modern tourist guide. Back then these were path finder and mentor to visitors. Still today too many tourist guides are focusing on this first role, when they are trying to lead tourists geographically to the attractions, while this role is no longer of any use for modern tourists due to advanced modern technology, where most visitors would have this information on their fingertips. On the other hand, second role mentioned by Cohen, being the mentor to the visitors, is becoming more and more important as presenting and interpreting the sight, creating the mood in which tourists can experience and feel the destination or attraction (Lovretnjev, 2014) is vital role, which is evolving in time. Well trained, knowledgeable and competent tourist guides, with the ability to deliver the brand promise promised by tourist destinations can also be an enormous advantage and unique selling proposition of a destination (Čampelj, 2014).

Some authors name as many as 16 different roles of a tourist guide, but to understand the role of a tourist guide in local development, responsible tourism and circular economy, firstly the roles of local host, cultural ambassador, public relations representative and promoter of local products (Pastorelli, 2003) will be taken into consideration. Secondly, sustainability communicator and engaging storyteller are added as two new roles. Both are becoming vital in delivering satisfying experience for the guests, encouraging responsible tourism and bringing sustainable development to the local communities and destinations.

LOCAL HOST

Researchers Weiler and Richins (1990 in Chowdhary, Prakash, 2008) have long maintained that tourist guides contribute a better quality travel experience for the tourist. Many times, local tourist guide is the only person from the destination, who tourists may encounter during their travel and is therefore the one and only person who can serve as a representative of a destination and local population. Irigüler and Güler (2016) remind that tourist guiding has a critical importance in terms of promoting the natural and historical wealth of a country. Well trained guide, with the right skills and communication knowledge is like a painter with many colors in position to draw the desired image of a destination and to facilitate the experience of a destination for tourists as well as to make contacts with other members of society. New friends and images from the destination, that puzzle together into travel experiences and grow into long lasting memories are later passionately shared with the important others. No destination or business should underestimate the power of word of mouth and recommendations not only online, but also off line.

CULTURAL AMBASSADOR

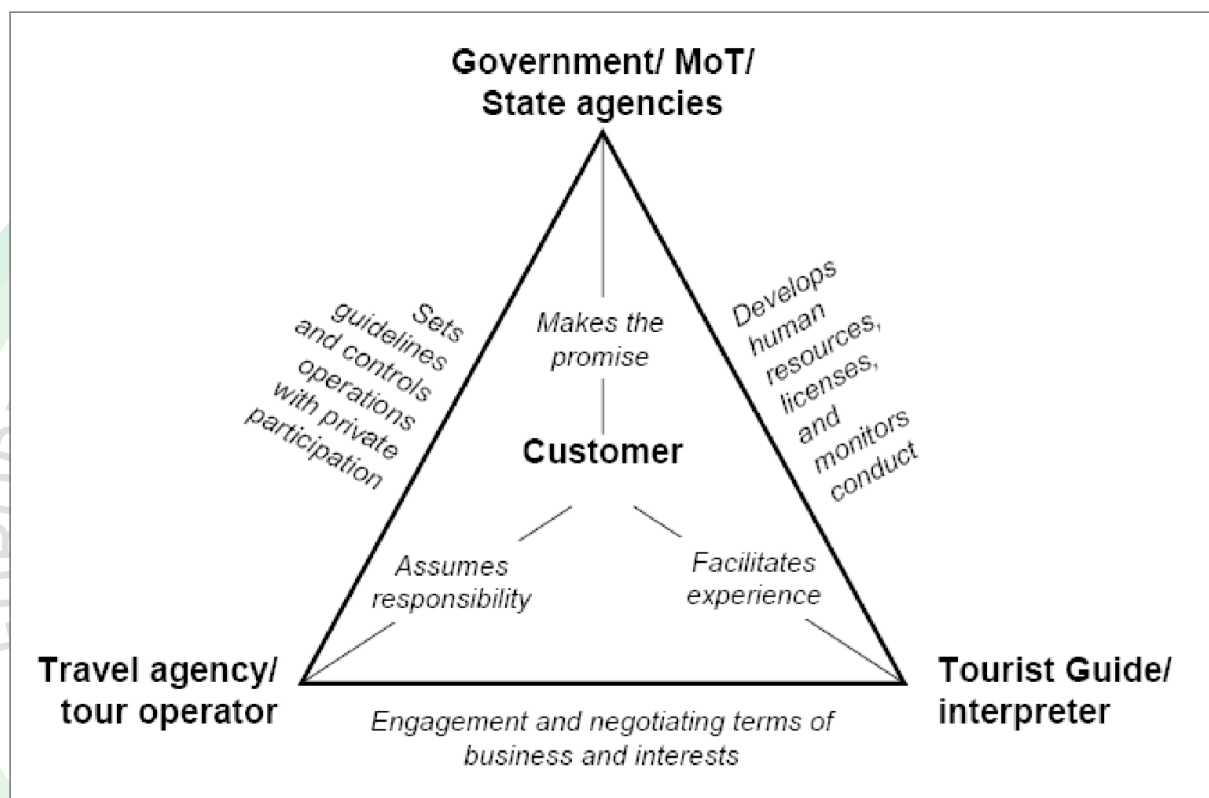
Times, when tourist guides were only communicating facts and figures and providing factually correct information about the sights are long gone. Today, the role of a tourist guide is to interpret the sights and create the experience, to help visitors enjoy the attractions and heritage in the cultural context and most important to reveal meanings. When meaning is revealed, and visitors are able to embark on the journey of a learning experience, the extreme power of interpretation comes to light and deeper connection with culture and its members is created. This is than a first step towards relationship, respect and appreciation, which in long term all bring the protection of cultural and natural heritage. Tourist guides can in this way support and help in responsible tourism practices and evoke respectful behavior of tourists on the destination. Songhsan, Weiler and Asakher (2015) findings that cognitive interpretation outcome has a greater impact on tourist satisfaction and sustaining visitor arrivals than affective interpretation outcome, whereas satisfaction with the guided tour experience directly affects behavioral intention and largely mediates the effect of cognitive interpretation outcome on behavioral intention, would add to that. And as Knudson (1995 and Pond, 1993 in Christie and Mason, 2003) are pointing out, tour guiding is an educational activity that is part of the process of interpretation and interpretation is an indispensable tool for achieving the goals of ecotourism (Weiler & Ham, 2001 in Christie and Mason, 2003).

PUBLIC RELATION REPRESENTATIVE

Chowdhary and Prakash (2008) tell us that tourist guides' profession is one of the few

professions in tourism having direct interaction with tourist and the power of influencing their perceptions, behavior and decisions. They also suggest the model of interaction between the main stakeholders among themselves and toward customers from where it is clear, that tourist guides are the ones facilitating the experience, while governments are making promises and tour operators assume responsibility.

MODEL 1: Interaction between the main stakeholders



Source: Chowdhary and Prakash, 2008

From the marketing point of view, leaving tourists without the local tourist guide to wander around, this is opportunity missed for facilitated experience, opportunity missed to deliver what has been promised, opportunity missed to communicate the right message and opportunity missed for two sided in person communication. In today's competitive business world, it is hard to think of successful company or brand which would invest a lot of money in research and development, marketing and sales, but would leave the production and delivery of the product or services to whoever comes by first. And this is exactly what many destinations and tour operators alike are doing each and every time they refuse to search for and work with properly trained, highly skilled and well-informed tourist guides and decide to hire or let the incompetent guides, who have no knowledge and information about the destination aims, goals, values and promises to take the communication power in their hands and be the representatives of a destination.

ENGAGING STORYTELLER

In times of artificial intelligence, virtual reality and hyper information tourists are more than ever traveling the world in search of a real life, people and their inspiring stories. But even though we are hyper informed, and it seems we can google everything anytime, also Rabotić

(2010) agrees that it may happen that, without tourist guides, existing destinations remain either unavailable to visitors or not properly understood and valued by them. This is extremely important to take into consideration when we are talking about how to present and share the unique stories of a destination and its' people. Online marketing strategies and presence will only get a destination on the tourist map for travellers and tourists but why they will travel the world for is the live stories that can be experiences first hand. It is professional competences of a tourist guide that can make or break tourists' experiences with tours and memories of a destination (Al Jahwari et al., 2016; Mak, et al., 2011; Frochot & Batat, 2013 in Yi-Chien, MeiLan and Yi-Cheng, 2017). When a tourist guide is able to be an engaging storyteller, stories can be understood, remembered and shared.

PROMOTOR OF LOCAL PRODUCTS

It is easy to agree with Carić (2018) that sustainable development in tourism practices, and beyond, makes sense only if all three components of sustainability (social, environmental and economic) will be clearly synchronized, empowered and represented. To repeat the fact from the beginning, tourism is the third largest export industry in the world (UNWTO, 2018) and is therefore understandable, that economic component of tourism should be practiced to equal extend as the other two. Only in this way the sustainable tourism development of the destination is possible. Also, Pattanaro and Gente (2017) add that since the publication, in 1987, of the United Nations' Our Common Future report (WCED, 1987), it is generally accepted that sustainable development needs a convergence between economic development, social equity, and environmental protection.

Pereira and Mykletun (2017) point out that tourist guides have the unique opportunity to improve visitors' knowledge, understanding and appreciation of a destination and thus contribute to sustainability. To exemplify this, when tourist guides are able to interpret the local traditions, customs, cuisine, handicrafts, history and heritage to the visitors, the desire for the consumption of local products will rise and will contribute to the local economy. Moreover, when tourist guides are aware of the importance and intentions of a destination to move towards circular economy, they are therefore able to promote businesses and local suppliers who are devoted to this new model of economy. This brings us already to the next role of a tourist guide.

SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATOR

As it was already mentioned, sustainability and its principles are only valuable and will give results we aim for when they become mainstreamed and are in use during every day tourism businesses and tourist. Pereira and Mykletun (2012 in Pereira and Mykletun, 2017) argue that the voice of tourist guides is an innovative tool for transferring sustainable principles to inspire tourists and potentially influence changes in behaviors and attitudes. Rabotić (2010) further says that tourist guides are front-line professionals who, unlike any other tourism players establish a close, intense and influencing contact with visitors at the same time protecting interests of sustainable tourism. But at this point it is important to acknowledge that Pereira and Mykletun (2017) are finding out that guides' effectiveness in this respect will to some extent depend on the quality and relevance of their training. To contribute to a visitor's perception and affect attitudes regarding sustainability, adequate training in these subjects is an essential prerequisite for guides.

It should therefore be a primary focus for all the stakeholders in tourism to provide sufficient knowledge with creating relevant, contemporary and adequate training for tourist guides, which would represent a core knowledge and form the solid base on which sustainable development and reputation of a destination can be build.

TOURIST GUIDES TRAINING AND EDUCATION

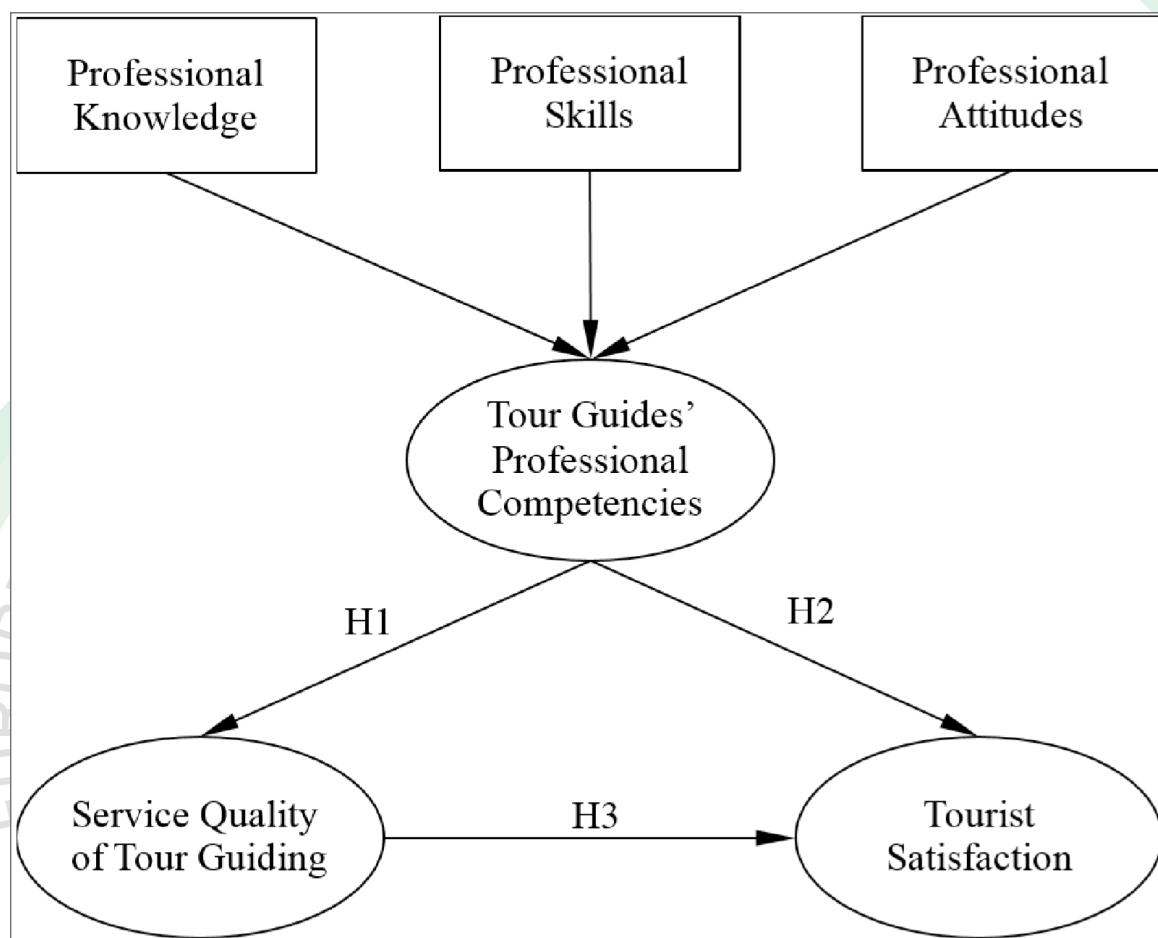
According to the Regulated Professions Database of Europe (EU Commission, 2018), the profession of tourist guide is regulated in 13 EU states: Austria, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and in Slovenia. In Slovenia, Italy and Croatia tourist guides can apart from a national license obtain also a regional license (EU Commission, 2018). Conditions to obtain the license are very similar in all above mentioned countries (at least 18 years old, secondary education, the final exam, language knowledge) but there is a big difference in mandatory training and its' content. This fact alone is a big disadvantage for tourists who can never know what level of services they can expect and on the other hand even bigger disadvantage for the destinations who are neglecting and missing the opportunity to communicate with its main and central stakeholders – tourists. This difference is exemplified with the fact, that in Slovenia there is no mandatory training to obtain the national license and language level is the level of high school with no verification needed (GZS, 2018). On the other hand, in Greece, two and a half years and more than 1600 hours of training with several languages with C2 level knowledge is needed to perform as a tourist guide (Lovretnjev, 2014).

As Pereira and Mykletun (2017) were finding out while studying the training programmes content in 8 different EU countries, the issues of sustainability are not sufficiently integrated in tourist guide training programmes. Europe's traditional curricula in guide-training programmes may have lagged behind in addressing guides' educational needs to prepare them to address this area so there might be room for improvements in how tourist guides may contribute to visitors' understanding of sustainability issues, both in the place visited and in general. Poudel and Nyaupane (2013) study adds that the positive change in tourist attitude and behavior indicated that interpretation can be an effective and desirable tool in sustainable tourism.

The above shows that there is an obvious need and call for a change in tourist guides training content in order to empower tourist guides to be able to provide a good quality service and to support the efforts of destinations and governments in moving towards responsible tourism, local development and circular economy.

First step was already done, when the need to show the relationship between the work of a tourist guide and tourist satisfaction emerged. The causal relationship between tourist guides' professional competences, service quality of tourist guiding, and tourist satisfaction has been proved in 2017 by Yi-Chien, Mei-Lan and Yi-Cheng with exploratory research where the impacts of professional competencies on service quality and tourist satisfaction has been researched. The causal relationship from tourist guides' professional competencies to service quality in the below shown research model (hypothesis H1) was confirmed. This implies that tourists who perceived higher levels of tour guides' professional competencies will perceive higher service quality. Hypothesis H2, effectively drawn from tourist guides' professional competencies to tourist satisfaction, was also confirmed as well as hypothesis H3 where the direct effects drawn from service quality of tour guiding to tourist satisfaction were researched. From that we can sum up that the construct of service quality apparently directly influences tourist satisfaction

resulting also from tour guides' professional competencies (i.e., tour guides' professional knowledge, skills and attitude).



MODEL 2: The causal relationship between tourist guides' professional competences, service quality of tourist guiding and tourist satisfaction.

Source: Yi-Chien, Mei-Lan and Yi-Cheng, 2017.

This above shown model is very useful to understand the causal relationship between the tourist guides' professional competences, quality of service and tourist satisfaction, but does not answer to an overall important question, what are the professional competences that are needed for modern tourist guides who aim to support local development, promote responsible tourism and participate in destination circular economy.

Pereira and Mykletun (2017) are pointing out that tourist guides' contributions to image and sustainability can be significant and the findings of their study (2017) legitimize developing courses in sustainability for full integration in tourist guiding programmes to increase guides' level of professionalism. At the same time, they are warning, that the lack of continuing training opportunities, or a system that requires knowledge refreshment for practicing professional tourist guides supports the unlikelihood of the concepts of sustainability becoming a central part of the competencies of today's tourist guides.

IMPLEMENTING RESPONSIBLE TOURISM AND SUSTAINABILITY IN TOURIST GUIDES' TRAINING – CASE STUDY G-GUIDES TRAINING FOR RESPONSIBLE TOURIST GUIDES

From all the described emerging and theoretically supported needs in the area of tourist guides' training as well as from the extended work in practice a new training curriculum for tourist guides has been developed in 2016 by Čampelj under the brand name G-Guides: green, global and great tourist guides (Čampelj, 2016). The contribution of such work to responsible tourism has been recognized also by UNWTO (2017) in the year of sustainable tourism for development by publishing the news about the initiative on their website (UNWTO, 2017).

In order to provide guidelines, framework and support for tourist guides who are aware of the responsibility toward responsible tourism, local development and circular economy they have while conducting their job, The Code of conduct for responsible tourist guides has been written by Hudnik and Čampelj in the same year (Čampelj, Hudnik, 2016). This Code of conduct is also part of the training and serves as a basic orientation for new and existing tourist guides, who want to contribute with their work to responsible tourism, local development and circular economy.

As not a single hour of training for tourist guides is needed to obtain the national license for tourist guides in Slovenia (GZS, 2018) but at the same time national tourism strategy 2017 – 2021 (Ministry of economic development RS, 2017) assumes that Slovenia will become green destination for demanding tourists with the highest level of professional services, there is an obvious gap that needs a bridge between the set goals and implementation strategy.

With full awareness of the importance of tourist guides' profession and its influence on tourists' behaviour as well as to support the goals of Slovenian tourism strategy, to help orientate the destination Slovenia towards responsible tourism, to promote local development and to bring benefits from tourism to local community, the new training content for tourist guides has been developed in 2016. First it was supported and partly implemented by smaller destinations in Slovenia but in 2017 gained the importance when Higher Vocational College for Hospitality and Tourism Bled recognized the value and benefits of such training content and decided to renew and upgrade their existing training for regional tourist guides in the region of Julian Alps with the content proposed by G-Guides. A clear vision, strong desire for responsible tourism in the region and a lot of work by the whole team of G-Guides and training department of Higher Vocational College for Hospitality and Tourism Bled has contributed to the realization of first renewed training in 2017. It was a great success to bring all the important tourism stakeholders in the region onboard and not only to get support and recognition but also to encourage their cooperation in the training process of tourist guides.

In table 1 the content proposed by G-Guides regarding responsible tourism, local development and circular economy can be found. Already Pereira and Mykletun (2017) found out it was difficult to gather information about the training content because most training institutions were unwilling to share their programmes, which they regarded as their own competitive advantage. Hereby the relevant part of the training content is shared with strong wish to contribute and provide a base for as many destinations as possible to start understanding and using tourist guides as one of the most powerful communication tools and advocates for sustainable local development, responsible tourism and circular economy.

TABLE 1: Tourist guides' sustainable and responsible tourism training modules

MODUL	CONTENT
1 SUSTAINABLE AND RESPONSIBLE TOURISM - BASICS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Basics of sustainable development ● Definitions and terminology ● History of sustainable tourism development ● Triple bottom line approach in tourism ● Sustainable development goals
2 RESPONSIBLE TOURIST GUIDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Acceleration of responsible tourism, local development and circular economy with tourist guiding
3 DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE DESTINATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Levels of sustainable development of destination ● Tourists' expectations from sustainable destination ● Sustainable and responsible tourism products ● Acceleration of responsible consumption on a destination
4 WORK AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF TOURIST GUIDE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cooperation with other stakeholders ● Responsibilities of a tourist guides' professionals ● Positive impacts of responsible work of tourist guides ● Negative impacts of the irresponsible work of tourist guides
5 SUSTAINABILITY AS UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Elements of sustainability turned into USP ● Sustainable development and circular economy as a key opportunity for destinations
6 CODE OF CONDUCT FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURIST GUIDES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Code of conduct for responsible tourist guides
7 IMPORTANT INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO TOURISM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Important projects and actions on global level
8 COLLABORATION AND COOPERATION OF LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cooperation between tourist guides and other stakeholders ● Including local stakeholders into our story ● Creating authentic experience with the cooperation of local stakeholders and engaging storytelling
9 TYPES OF MODERN TOURISTS AND THEIR EXPECTATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Motives for travelling ● Expectations of modern tourists ● Influence of digital technology on the work of tourist guides ● Types of modern tourists ● Intercultural differences ● Segmentation of modern tourists
10 BEST CASE EXAMPLES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Case studies of responsible tourist guiding practices
11 COMMUNICATING SUSTAINABILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How to communicate sustainability ● Examples ● How to avoid negative connotative meanings of sustainability
12 PRAKTIKUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Practical use of the knowledge ● Guiding with all the principles of sustainable tourist guiding

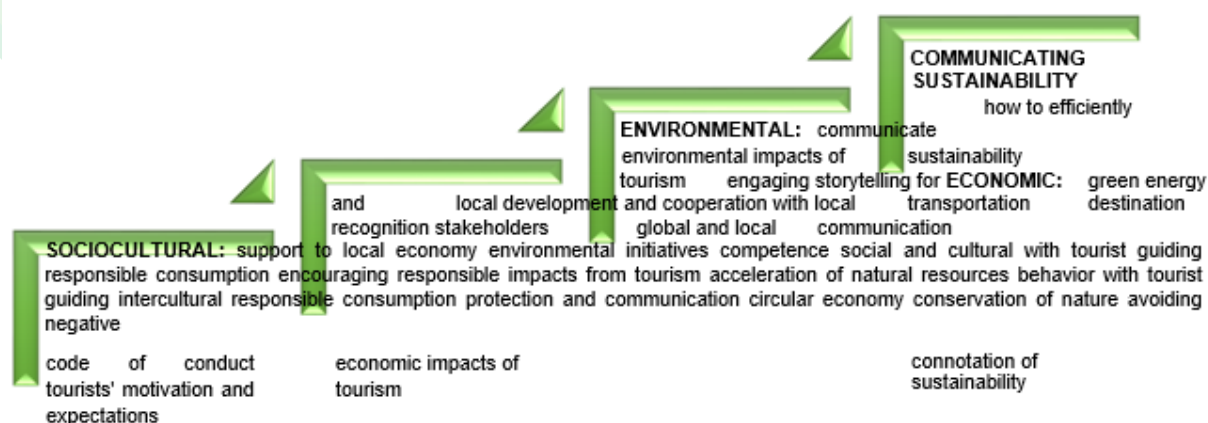
Source: G-Guides, 2016

The above content is only one part of the training which encourages tourist guides to think and perform sustainability and responsible tourism from the early stage on. These modules are the first part of the tourist guides training for the regional tourist guides of Julian Alps and are followed by the second part that is focused on improving tourist guides' communication and guiding skills as well as their attitudes. This second part later enables tourist guides to communicate their knowledge and improve their attitudes toward tourists. Knowledge, skills and attitudes together form the set of tourist guides' professional competences (Yi-Chien, MeiLan and Yi-Cheng, 2017) that are needed for the sustainable development of destination as well as for supporting circular economy and local development.

The modules are based on triple bottom line approach to sustainable development and aim to cover the understanding and importance of its three pillars, namely economic, social and environmental component of it. Moreover, it aims to provide the understanding of importance of connection and balance between all of them and to specifically point out the vital role that tourist guides have in the wider tourism industry.

With its content modules' content cover three important areas and provide the knowledge that is thought together with skills and attitudes in theory and practice to assure the highest understanding and the ability to perform in tourist guiding profession. To sum up the three pillars of triple bottom line approach are represented in this training curriculum with topics being thought on theoretical as well as practical level at different times but covering the components presented in model 3.

MODEL 3: Triple bottom line approach in tourist guides' training with sustainability communication for tourist guides component



Source: Čampelj, 2016

First tourist guides in the region of Julian Alps finished renewed training on Higher Vocational College for Hospitality and Tourism Bled in early 2018 and were licensed in April 2018. The internal satisfaction survey (Higher Vocational College for Hospitality and Tourism Bled, 2018) showed that overall satisfaction with the new tourist guides training was 4,7 out of 5 among all the participants of the training. Satisfaction was also expressed by the involved tourism stakeholders with 2 different results. First one was including the participants of this training in the local tourist guiding and second was the support and contribution for the next trainings.

With understanding that this training is only the beginning and was in its full extent offered only to new tourist guides in one region of Slovenia, the mission of spreading the awareness of important role tourist guides have in responsible tourism, the idea of global award for tourist guide, voice of responsible tourism Green Microphone was born (Hudnik, 2017). The main goal of the award that will be given annually to tourist guide who contributes the most towards responsible tourism and sustainable development of a destination is to recognize the efforts and work of all tourist guides who are connecting worlds every day through their stories and guiding. Tourist guides are cultural brokers, sustainability communicators, unforgettable experience creators, educators and ambassadors of responsible tourism for all and are therefore voice of responsible tourism. The award gained recognition also from House of the European Union in Slovenia and UNWTO (2018 a) which published the details on their website.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this contribution to the 5th European ecotourism conference was to point out the changing and evolving role(s) of a tourist guide profession. Furthermore, the aim was to show, that tourist guides although many times not recognized as such, do have a central and vital role in the process of tourist experience with destination. Their interpretation skills, ability to project desired destination images and connect tourists with the destination and its people with engaging storytelling can lead to more understanding, appreciation and protection from the tourist side which consequently results in more responsible tourism, support of circular economy, responsible behavior and consumption and finally in local development.

Constant training and education are essential in strengthening the professional competences of tourist guides, but it has been found out with studies and researches (Pereira, Mykletun, 2017), that subject of sustainability is not sufficiently represented in European tourist guides training curriculums. This same fact has been already previously recognized by Čampelj and Hudnik (2016) who created training content for tourist guides with focus on sustainability and responsible tourism in order to help destinations and tourism businesses use the tourist guides as sustainability communicators, accelerators of local development and promoters of responsible tourism.

All the work that has been done so far is only a humble start and a first step towards more responsible tourist guiding. The question how to get more destinations, public and private companies, schools, training institutions and professional tourist guides associations to understand the need to change the existing content of the trainings is still part of discussion with no single answer.

Further research is suggested in order to clearly understand and show the causality between the content of tourist guides' training, the content and quality of tourist guiding and its direct impact on tourist behavior and responsible tourism.

Whoever has ever guided tourists or has been with a local representative on the unknown destination and can think of recommendations given about the best food supplier, the easiest way of transportation or local craftsmen making unique local souvenirs, knows that this causality exists. For the others it still must be proven by academic research.

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BELARUS – THE COUNTRY OF GREENWAYS

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Belarus is a country of forests, crystal clear rivers, hospitable people who respect traditions and take care of their land. Greenways, as a framework of alternative transport network, link towns and villages. While traveling along them on a bicycle, on foot, by canoe or on horseback, you can enjoy the beauty of our landscapes, learn about our customs, crafts, songs and dances, taste local cuisine, improve your health and become a true friend of nature. Movement on the development of Greenways is based on the advanced system of pathways, protected natural areas, powerful recreational infrastructure, and support of local and national authorities and local community. Greenways have become a brand of Belarus and attract a significant number of Belarusian and foreign tourists.

The idea of Greenways came to Belarus in 2004, when our country was visited by a group of international experts headed by Dominika Zareba who gave their recommendations for creation of the first two Greenways in the country – “Blue Necklace of Rossony” and “In the Land of Yellow Water-lilies and Grey Erratic Boulders”. The idea was pioneered by the Belarusian Association “Country Escape” which acceded to EGWA and started implementing activities for development of the national greenways (www.greenways.by).

Objectives of Greenways in Belarus:

- Supporting and strengthening local communities: development of local entrepreneurship, creation of new jobs and additional sources of income, preservation and revival of traditional crafts.
- Protection of natural and cultural heritage, natural landscapes.
- Use of local resources - means of accommodation, catering, excursions, local industrial and agricultural products.
- Development of cooperation between regions, cities and rural settlements and their dwellers.
- Assisting local communities in enhancing their socio-cultural identity and improving the quality of life.
- Dissemination of information and creation of the possibility of more in-depth understanding of the region, its issues, local initiatives, events, holidays, etc. by tourists
- Promotion of non-motorized transportation and related environmentally friendly forms of tourism, recreation and sports.
- Creation of enabling environment for traveling in the region via the most environmentally friendly means of transportation: walking, cycling, canoeing, horseback riding, etc., using public transportation instead of a personal vehicle.
- Formation of trend for active lifestyle, improvement of health and safety during travel.

Blue Necklace of Rossony, In the Land of Yellow Water-lilies and Grey Erratic Boulders, Volozhynskiya Gastcintsy, Zelva Diary, Janov Ring, Vodar Belavezzha, In the Land of Live Water Greenways are the most dynamically developing projects in Belarus today. Here are some best cases of the newest events at Belarusian Greenways.

«Annenski Kirmash» Festival

One of preconditions for the success of a Greenway are interesting calendar events that attract tourists and mass media to the region and have informational aftermath throughout the country. A testimony to this fact is “Annenski kirmash” (“Anne’s Fair”) on Zelva Greenway. This fair was a great success when held on August 25, 2018 in Zelva. This city has a 760-year anniversary these days. “Annenski kirmash” now is a brand of Zelva region and a bright event on the Zelva Diary Greenway. It was founded by Anthony Sapieha approved by the Polish King August II in honor of St. Anne on July 25. Probably that is why the fair is called Anne’s. It used to last for one month; annually the fair was attended by some 3000 people. Some researchers argue that the Anne’s Fair was one of the largest in Europe and the only more important was the famous Leipzig fair. Visitors came to Zelva from France, Saxony, Bavaria, the Netherlands, Italy, Denmark, Sweden, Turkey and Persia. Specific issue was horse-trading. Horses were sold by thousands. Therefore it is no coincidence that the coat of arms of Zelva features a horse, which is a symbol of life and victory.

They tried to revive the fair a few times. And this year with active participation of local authorities and population it turned to be a great success. The Fair opened with a costume show – Sapieha himself arrived in a carriage with his retinue. For one day the entire city become a borough of the XIX century - signs, costumes, games and fun matched the style of the period. Several sites worked in Zelva: the stadium was the venue for equestrian events, “crafts city” satisfied everyone’s needs for souvenirs, hospitable tables of local catering service were offering local cuisine (by the way, benches and tables were made according to special design), and the service center was busy all day sewing costumes of flax for everyone who could not buy them from fair booths.

Guests had a great fun - pillow fight, running on stilts, catching fish with one hand, puppet-theater Bathleyka, riders, circus, brass band and fireworks. Fair was attended by about 4000 people; turnover of local trade surpassed all expectations. The service center earned their monthly rate, and the entire turnover of one Fair day was equal to the ten-day turnover of the district. Fair proved its economic efficiency.

In the last century they said that people of Zelva have eleven months of boredom and one month of live. Today the fair is becoming a major event in the life of the district. Perhaps this is the event that tourists from around the world may want to visit. And Greenway would enable them to stay here longer.

Eco-museum «Viaselny karavai»

Eco-museums are “pearls” of the Greenways, making them unique and leave an indelible imprint on the soul of eco-tourists. These are the museums of lifestyle, museums “without walls” that involve visitors in creation of unique situations and things, whether it is a Belarusian dance, a towel, a pot or a loaf.

Eco-museum «Viaselny karavai» (“Wedding round loaf”) in Motol village first greeted its guests on Greenway “Yanov Ring”, during the culinary festival “Motalskya prysmaki” on August 27, 2010. Wedding round loaf, its baking and decoration, thematic songs and dances – all this makes a unique ceremony currently being included into the UNESCO List of Intangible Heritage.

Eco-museum is located in a traditional house of Polesie, which retained all the interior decoration. Tourists are invited to dress in clothes from self-woven cloth taken out of the “grandmother’s chest” and take part in baking and decorating of the loaf. This process is remarkably entertaining. The so-called “knots” are decorated with oats, high cranberry, periwinkle, and with paper flowers. All this is accompanied by songs and dances. After the decoration the remaining straw is scattered on the porch of an unmarried boy. This is a sign for the soon wedding.

Tourists visiting the museum took back unforgettable memories and a firm intention to come back with friends. And the ceremony «Viaselny karavai» has itself become the most popular and demanded in Motol.

«Lepelsky Tsmok invite friends» Festival

The 155 km trail ‘In the Land of Yellow Water-lilies and Grey Erratic Boulders’ is ideal for enthusiasts of traditional Belarusian ethnography and folklore. Those interested in active recreation will enjoy cycling routes, local environmental education walking trails, and the opportunity for boating. The main backbone trail is a circular route running through Lepel – Barsuki – Latygalichi – Krasnoluki – Volosovichy – Lepel. Rest stops along the cycle route are linked to natural, historical and cultural attractions. Some of them are associated with opportunities to experience traditional folklore initiatives.

The trail’s name: ‘In the Land of Yellow Water-lilies and Grey Erratic Boulders’ refers to the history and nature of the Lepel Region. Ancient Balt people called their villages ‘Lepels’ or ‘Yellow Water-lilies’ in recognition of the natural beauty of the area. The greenway introduces visitors to outstanding natural sites and habitats. The greenway’s logo, created by a local artist Galina Zhuravleva, symbolizes how natural resources of the Lepel Region contribute to sustainable tourism.

«Lepelsky Tsmok invite friends» festival is the brand of Lepel. First - no one has any doubts that the Lepel Tsmok exists, and second, the event is held on fifth time this year on very special date (18.08.2018) and invariably causes interest not only among local residents, but also among numerous visitors. Music, dances, culinary contests, guests from Polish Greenway “Amber Trail” with their program, different attractions and photos with the Host - Lepel Tsmok made this event really exciting and popular. It is a tool for long-life promotion of this Greenway.

Ensuring sustainable operation of Greenways in Belarus:

- Development of Greenways should be based on the international principles of sustainable development and implemented on the basis of:
- sustainable use of natural resources, preservation of biological and landscape diversity;
- preservation of cultural values and traditions, identity of the local culture;
- ensuring economic efficiency of the routes, both on local and regional level through creation and promotion of a competitive tourism product.
- sustainable use of natural resources ensured by:
- identifying environmentally justified number of tourists and visitors taking into account anthropogenic resistance of natural systems;
- providing adequate development of natural areas used for tourist activities;
- compliance with the established rules of conduct by travel agents, tour operators, tour guides, tourists and visitors, which would prevent and minimize the negative impacts while visiting sensitive natural objects.

