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Sustainable Tourism and Social Tourism Impacts – the case of Bulgaria

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ABSTRACT

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More than 20 years after the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro the issue of sustainable tourism development as part of the overall sustainable development is being discussed in numerous academic and practical oriented publications Action..., 2007.. The importance of tourism impacts increased significantly lately in the context of tourism policy and tourism planning and of the widespread sustainable tourism development concept. The equity of economic, social and ecologic tourism aspects is stressed upon. The paper analyses social tourism impacts in particular and their significance for sustainable tourism development in Bulgaria. General conclusions and recommendations for future actions are drawn.

Introduction

In the period of transition to market economy tourism became a fast developing industry in Bulgaria, attracting huge investments and providing many job opportunities. The demand driven development led to a dramatic change in the product type and structure, based on extensive utilization of natural and cultural resources, which resulted in visible impacts on the environment and on local communities.

More than 20 years after the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro the issue of sustainable tourism development as part of the overall sustainable development is being discussed in numerous academic and practical oriented publications Action..., 2007.. This type of research is facilitated by the great number of tourism impact investigations and the need for their management. An important point in the evolution of the development philosophy has been reached and namely that development at present has to be perceived as mastering the existing potential for the improvement of the situation in general, not only as simple growth in the form of quantitative increase in its physical measurement. Furthermore, human activities which can be managed through policies, decisions and legislation thus regulating the way in which these activities affect the environment, are being placed at the core of sustainable development definitions.

The importance of tourism impacts increased significantly lately in the context of tourism policy and tourism planning and of the widespread sustainable tourism development concept. The equity of economic, social and ecologic tourism aspects is stressed upon. The satisfaction of public needs should be placed in conformity with the limited resources as well as with the equality of present and future generations' rights.

Tourism impacts are the effects caused voluntarily or unwittingly by the development and practicing of various tourism kinds and tourist activities thus affecting all types of environment – natural, economic and social. Tourism itself is a product of this environment

but in the process of its development its impacts on it are inevitable. According to their manifestation field Mathieson and Wall 1982. classify impacts into 3 categories: social, economic and ecological physical, natural.. The basic criteria for development sustainability being subject to observation and control stem from this classification.

There is no doubt about the need for such management of tourist activities and their impacts that would incorporate and combine the basic principles of sustainable development:

Integrity of economic development and environment protection goals. From tourism point of view this means the utilization of tourist resources in such a way so that it would simultaneously bring benefits for the local population as well as satisfaction to the tourists without causing serious damage of the natural and social environment;

Fair distribution of the wealth created by tourism product sales and also of the costs for the tourist resources preservation in various regions and countries both among them and among the generations;

Binding quantitative growth with the environment's quality improvement which is in the mutual interest of the local population and of the tourists looking for attractive and unpolluted vacation environment.

Sustainable tourism development should be such a development where the economic and social changes related to it lead to a decrease in the need for environmental protection.

And if we can accept that the main points of sustainable development and its indispensability are quite clear, the implementation of this concept in practice turned out to be a difficult task which could not find its solution in many destinations including Bulgaria. Of key importance for the implementation of sustainable tourism are the instruments applied for the measurement and evaluation of the changes observed – indicators and norms within the corresponding limits which are closely related to the environment's loading capacity evaluation.

Continuous visiting of a tourist destination by a number of tour-

ists during a certain period of time at first this number can be quite small. eventually brings about various changes in it. One of the reasons why these changes have to be monitored is that they may have negative impact on the destination's social, cultural or economic life and on its natural and ecological environment.

Even in the case of positive impacts it is important to monitor the ways in which tourism affects the territory. Measuring changes and submitting this information to people, organizations and institutions responsible for tourism development and management, helps them in taking important decisions about the best way this can be done.

As a result of the increasing numbers of tourist trips worldwide, more and more evident become the problems related to economic, ecological and social tourism impacts. Adequate answers to those issues should be based on systematic and detailed research. Monitoring is a continuous process of observing the dynamics of various processes and phenomena with the purpose of their forecast and management. Another goal is the support of tourism good management as a whole, revealing the dynamics or temporal changes of various processes and phenomena related to it.

Monitoring can be an invaluable means for tourism management in various destinations. For this purpose there should be a corresponding mechanism through which the community would be able to effectively manage and regulate all problems revealed through the monitoring process itself.

As a result of the monitoring the community has to undertake appropriate measures. If this does not occur all activities that have been carried out would be extremely ineffective and could cause a substantial waste of labour, money and time. After a certain period of time the conducting of a new monitoring evaluation would reveal the effectiveness of the measures undertaken and in which direction have they been helpful.

Social Tourism Impacts

Since 1982 when Mathieson and Wall defined the multifaceted effects and impacts tourism has on the environment – physical, economic, social and cultural, many books and articles related to their research, analysis and various manifestations were published, for example: Butler, 1993; Ashworth, 2004; Hall and Brown, 2006; Vodenska, 2006; Beskulides, 2007; Dredge and Jenkins, 2007; Sharpley, 2007; Kollick, 2008; Wang and Pfister, 2008; Wilson, 2008; Simpson, 2009 and so on.

The best studied tourism impacts are the economic ones but a lot of attention has been given to the social tourism impacts in tourist destinations. Publications can roughly be divided into three groups by the investigated tourism impacts in them:

- impacts on the destination as a whole;
- impacts on local residents' lifestyle;
- impacts on local arts and culture

All of them can be both positive and negative.

The list is quite long so here we shall note only that lately there has been a general shift in this field of scientific research toward more specific problems in this area – social impacts and destination decline Diedrich and Garcia-Buades, 2009., residents' perceptions and social impacts of various tourism types Lee et al., 2010; Nunkoo and Ramkisoon, 2010, Tyrell et al., 2010, etc...

The interest towards various manifestation of social tourism impacts in general is still very much alive in newly emerged tourism destinations – Petra, Jordan Alhasanat and Hyasat, 2011., Iran Aref, 2010., Korea Shin, 2010., some smaller destinations in Italy Brida et al., 2011. and Portugal Vareiro et al., 2013., etc.

New perspectives of theoretical research and generalization are

also sought in some publications Chen and Chen, 2010; Choi and Murray, 2010; Andereck and Nyaupane, 2011; Vargas-Sanchez et al., 2011, Yu et al., 2011, Assenova and Vodenska, 2012, Deery et al., 2012; Nunkoo and Gursoy, 2012; Kim et al., 2013, etc...

Recent tourism development in Bulgaria reveals its growing role and significance in all economic and social areas. At the same time tourism impacts wanted or not. are much more complex and ambiguous and sometimes a serious disparity between the wanted and the actual tourism development occurs, thus posing a lot of questions about the social and economic expedience and the necessity of further fostering tourism expansion in certain destinations.

With the growing number of tourist trips the problems related to social tourism impacts are becoming more and more evident. Adequate answers to those issues should be based on systematic and detailed research. Unfortunately with some exceptions this issue has not yet been discussed in detail in Bulgarian academic publications. This paper is an attempt to identify social tourism impacts in Bulgaria as perceived and evaluated in a local residents' perspective.

Research Methodology

The objective of the present investigation is the manifestation of social tourism impacts in Bulgaria and local residents' attitude towards them. The subject of research is the evaluation of these impacts by the local population as well as the factors bringing about this particular assessment.

Local population's attitude towards tourism and tourists and its factors are investigated through a field survey in 16 Bulgarian municipalities. A written standard anonymous questionnaire is used. It was developed after a detailed and in-depth study of questionnaires published in international scientific sources while bearing in mind Bulgarian population's characteristics and specifics.

Widely used is the analysis of the averages for the evaluation of the different impact groups which are calculated as the arithmetic mean of the positive or negative impacts in each impact group. Mean values for each group of municipalities were obtained as the arithmetic average of the individual municipalities in the group. As with any generalization, whether quantitative or qualitative, certain amount of information is lost, so the analysis of the impact assessment is carried out not only on the basis of their average values, but also by separate impact groups - positive or negative.

Evaluations of social impacts of tourism are analysed both within the impact groups already identified and within separate municipalities and municipality types. This is done with a view to a better and detailed clarification and definition of the key factors influencing their values and to a more specific and targeted formulation of the problems facing tourism development and its impacts in Bulgaria. In the analysis of the results from respondents' answers a value of 0.5 for the standard deviation is accepted.

Municipalities were chosen in a way as to include both territories with a well developed tourism industry and a steady tourist flow and municipalities at the start of their tourism development. At the same time they represented the four main tourism types in Bulgaria – seaside, mountain, spa and cultural tourism.

The municipalities selected for analysis are very diverse, they are located in different parts of the territory of Bulgaria, covering various natural and anthropogenic landscapes and also have different areas and population numbers.

They fall in several tourist regions of the country, characterized by varying degrees of tourism development. This selection of municipalities is aimed at the inclusion in the study of areas with varying stages of tourism development and various tourism supply, including also the presence of large tourist resorts – Pamporovo and Borovetz.

In the selected municipalities 20.4% of all beds and 23.6% of all possible overnights in the country are concentrated. About 20% of all nights 2009. and 31.7% of all visitors to the country are registered here. In these 15 municipalities are generated 32.3% of all accommodation revenues and 11.4% of those generated by foreign tourists.

One and the same questionnaire was used for respondents employed in the tourist industry and for the rest of the local population. Two sample types are used – a single stage areal sample and a simple random stochastic. sample. The scale types used are: ordinal rank. scale, Lickert 5-stage scale, nominal scale, interval scale, the scale of Gutmann.

Interviewed were 4 397 representatives of the local population. The study covered representatives of all age groups over 16 years - people with varying educational background, field of activity and impact of tourism on their income. The tourism employed are about 16.7% of the respondents, but tourism turned out to influence directly or indirectly the income of 38% of them. Interviewed are also key stakeholders in the municipalities - mayors and officials of local administrations, representatives of local and regional tourism associations and other NGOs, tourism entrepreneurs and local people actively involved in tourism development.

The survey is conducted using the personal interview method by students in the “Tourism” program of Sofia University. Information from surveys is processed with the help of SPSS. For the purpose of the analysis traditional tourism research methods quantitative and qualitative assessment, structural analysis, etc.. were applied. The analysis of the relationships between respondents’ answers and their relevant factors was based on the correlation coefficients between the assessments of positive and negative tourism impacts and the chosen indicators of the factors under study.

Limitations to the present research are to be expected but not proven. in two directions: first, the wish of local residents to give a good overall picture of their municipality reporting a more favourable tourism development in their area, and second, the novelty of the survey topic and the insufficiency of informed knowledge for many of the respondents.

For better comprehension and systematization in the present research two main groups of factors have been outlined:

Internal factors, related to the destination’s population characteristics, and

External factors, related to the destination’s actual tourism state and development

As major internal factors the main socio-demographic and economic characteristics of the local population are examined: age, gender, educational and professional structure, length of residence in the municipality, employment or family member employment in the tourist industry, contacts with tourists.

As major external conditions and factors of the tourist destination state and the degree of tourism development in it are taken:

- Level of the destination’s tourism development;
- The stage of the destination’s tourism development life cycle;
- The prevailing tourism type in the destination

Discussion of Results

Tourism social impacts in the selected 15 municipalities are generally evaluated by local residents as positive – mean value of positive impacts is 3.67 5-stage Lickert scale.. The highest mean value observed is 4.07, and the lowest – 3.01. The highest value received is for the statement “Tourism contributes to better knowledge and understanding of other people and customs” – average value 4.01 and highest absolute value 4.35.

In 12 out of 15 municipalities the average values are above 3.50

but in three of them they are between 2.50 and 3.50. It has to be noted that all these 3 municipalities are developing sea recreational tourism which is highly seasonal and the pressure of tourism on the local population is very strong and temporally highly concentrated.

The evaluation of negative social tourism impacts is quite low – mean value 2.17. The difference between the highest mean value – 3.01, registered again in a seaside municipality and the lowest mean value – 1.50, is greater than the difference between the average positive values 1.51>1.06.. The highest mean value 2.45. is given to the statement “Tourism increases local crime” which receives also the highest absolute value – 3.14.

Only two municipalities register general mean values of the negative social tourism impacts above 2.50 and both of them are developing high class seasonal tourism types – seaside and winter ski-sports.

There is a very pronounced dependence of social tourism impacts evaluation in various municipalities on the degree of tourism seasonality in them. The highest average values for positive social impacts are observed in municipalities with prevailing cultural 3.92. and spa 3.79. tourism. In winter ski-tourism municipalities this value falls to 3.65 and the lowest one is observed in seaside municipalities 3.37.. This difference about 0.55. indicates that tourism seasonality plays a significant role in local residents’ perception and evaluation of social tourism impacts.

On the other hand the highest mean value for negative social tourism impacts is observed in seaside municipalities – 2.51, while the lowest one is received in impacts where cultural tourism is prevailing – 1.87. The difference between these two values is 0.64 which indicates greater differentiation among the municipalities and greater social discomfort of seaside municipalities’ population.

Among the internal socio-economic. factors influencing the distribution of responses it was revealed that 2 factors can be considered to be of greater importance – the level of respondents’ employment in tourism correlation coefficient 0.91., followed by their professional structure 0.78..

The difference between positive and negative social tourism impacts values is quite high – 1.5. The standard deviation of all statements’ responses is less than 0.5 which allows the admission of responses’ consistency and reliability.

Regarding the role of various internal and external factors for local residents’ evaluation of social tourism impacts the following conclusions can be drawn:

- The level of the destination’s tourism development does not generally influence local residents’ evaluations;
- The stage of the destination’s tourism development life cycle plays a significant role for local residents’ evaluations;
- The prevailing tourism type in the destination is of no importance in forming local residents’ social tourism impacts evaluations;
- The greatest influence for social tourism impacts’ evaluation in Bulgaria is exerted by the seasonality of the prevailing tourism type. This can be explained by the fact that excessive concentration of tourists and various tourism activities in a relatively short period of time causes a significant spatial and temporal concentration of predominantly negative social tourism impacts in municipalities with prevailing summer seaside recreational and winter ski-sports tourism. Perennial tourism types – cultural and spa tourism impacts are more evenly distributed in time and space and do not demonstrate any extreme values.
- The higher level of destination’s tourism development is characterized by more pronounced perception of both positive and negative social tourism impacts;
- The stage of the destination’s tourism development life cycle is the best indicator for negative but not of positive impacts perception

- The most important role in differentiating respondents' attitude is played by their level of employment in tourism, followed by their professional structure. Tourism employed both directly or indirectly. respondents are more positive about tourism than any other group in the host community but sometimes good knowledge of tourism and tourism business present a cause for quite high evaluations of negative social tourism impacts.

- Respondents' attitude is least influenced by their gender, followed by the duration of residence in the municipality. Still residents born in the destination are more positive about tourism than newcomers;

- Close contacts with tourists is not associated with manifestation of only positive or only negative attitude towards tourism

- Negative values are influenced by much smaller number of internal factors 2 to 3. than positive ones 4-5 out of 7..

Conclusion

Social tourism impacts are numerous, varied, complex and diverse. They are a result of the complexity of tourism itself and the numerous tourism-related elements of the environment.

Studying and forecasting tourism impacts are vital for tourism policy, regional development and regional economy. Of particular importance is their consideration at various spatial and hierarchical levels, since one and the same impact can be manifested differently at international, national, regional or local level and within the same territory or the same social community.

Conducting research on the impacts exerted by tourism on the environment both natural and socio-economic. is related to a number of difficulties which can be overcome step by step. Most essential of them are those concerned with getting reliable information. Despite these objective difficulties, it is necessary to develop a methodology for their monitoring, forecasting and management.

One of the ways for better investigation of the diverse tourism impacts, their identification, management and forecast is through the application of modern methods for processing and analyzing large masses of spatial data. Such an approach is the assessment of tourism impacts by studying the attitude of local residents towards them. This approach provides completeness to the impact study, is based on primary information and allows on the one hand, the construction of an overall picture of the impact manifestations at various spatial levels, comparison among the various impact groups, and on the other hand - the identification of areas or impacts that require more in-depth and detailed study with the implementation of more sophisticated and specific methods

The review of known research on tourism impacts at national and regional level confirms the need of systematic investigations using standardized methodology with a view to obtaining comparable results both in spatial and temporal aspects..

Following the above reasoning the aim of the conducted investigation was to evaluate tourism impacts in Bulgaria through the research and analysis of the attitude of local residents towards them, identifying the main factors affecting it, and on this basis to formulate strategic guidelines for their study, monitoring and management with a view to future sustainable tourism development in the country.

The evaluation received in this study can serve as a baseline from which the future measurement and management of changes occurring as a result of tourism development can be performed. The establishment of such a baseline, as well as the approbation of the proposed for this purpose methodology, enables the future monitoring, detecting and forecasting of positive and negative changes in tourism impact evaluations, provides guidance for in-depth and detailed studies of specific social tourism impacts and draws the attention of planning and managing organisations to the regulation of

certain desired or undesired tourism impacts.

A major contribution of this research is the model developed for collecting primary information and for conducting a comprehensive assessment of tourism impacts at local and regional levels. It takes into account the known theoretical and practical requirements and constraints arising from the present informational deficit concerning tourism impacts in the country. Its practical applicability lies in the fact that it can be taken as a basis for further development, improvement and adaptation depending on the specific needs and existing conditions for its implementation.

The conducted survey revealed the important role of local residents' opinion for the general and the detailed perception of tourism impacts at a local level. It was found out that both internal and external factors external factors being more significant. are of importance for the formation and the differentiation of local residents' attitude towards tourism and tourists.

The analysis of the results obtained led to the formulation of the following general conclusions:

- The main factors and their role for local residents' attitude towards tourists and tourism are established.

- It is confirmed that in Bulgaria the factors for local residents' attitude towards tourists and tourism are the same as those revealed and discussed in international academic publications.

- The manifestation of the various groups of positive and negative tourism impacts in Bulgaria was revealed.

- The results obtained can serve as an initial baseline of Bulgarians' attitude towards tourism and tourists against which the occurring changes can be measured and long term trends can be outlined. This will be of great importance for future tourism policy and future sustainable tourism development in the country.

The following key directions for future investigations and applied research of tourism impacts in Bulgaria can be outlined:

1. Development of a system of methods and practical measurable indicators for the study of various social tourism impacts, taking into account the specifics of the predominant tourism type seasonal or perennial;

2. Targeting research primarily on economic tourism impacts – both positive and negative;

3. In-depth and detailed study of the attitudes of local people and their reactions to tourism development in various destination types;

4. Further study of factors for the manifestation of various tourism impacts, especially negative ones;

5. Preliminary assessment of potential social tourism impacts in implementing new tourism projects and taking mitigating measures;

6. Monitoring social tourism impacts and their dynamics in the temporal and spatial aspects;

Objective and continuous social tourism impact assessment is needed, so that government authorities responsible for tourism planning and development as well as various tourism industry representatives can understand the full and multifaceted effects of tourism development in the country. As a result, some widespread ideas and concepts about the existing or prevailing positive tourism impacts may be refuted. This will bring about a whole new reinvention of the real possibilities of tourism to be an important positive factor for economic, environmental and social well-being of host tourist destinations in the country. In this way such types and forms of tourism development may be encouraged, which will comprise more of the "benefits" of tourism without the accompanying "harm" it may cause.

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