

SOCIAL PARTICIPATION IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Social and cultural effects of tourism are discussed as well as the economical effects of Tourism. Local community and their socio-cultural values are very important for all the shareholders under the effect of tourism. Usage of these values under protection and enabling them to be usable in the future establish the base of sustainable tourism. The researches on how sustainable tourism developments should be showed a great increase in 21st century and the term of participatory tourism planning with the participation of local community and shareholders came into prominence. Development and management of tourism should be incentive and efficient for the participation of the community. Community's participation to sustainable tourism development is of vital importance for reaching a consensus. Community's participation in the development of tourism is a new term in developing countries and it is very difficult to change traditional mentality under these circumstances. In this study a solution is searched for the importance of community's participation in the development of Tourism and its positive and negative effects and the method of integration of community into planning.

Key Words: Sustainable Tourism, Social Participation, Participatory Tourism Planning.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a sector that provides important contributions to the economy of that country. Especially many developing countries use tourism sector as a means for economical development. Tourism activities carried out within this scope have many positive and negative effects. Unconscious use and consumption of natural, historical, social and cultural resources is one of the negative effects of tourism. Reducing the negative effects of tourism and protecting existing tourism resources by using them consciously and being able to leave them to next generations constitute the basis of sustainable tourism concept. It is again the community that benefits from these resources and protects them. Therefore providing the participation of community to tourism development plan also serves to the sustainable tourism development concept. Researches show that shareholders are willing to join to the community based tourism development concept. In this study, firstly sustainable tourism concept and then the necessity and importance of social participation and the ways to provide it are handled.

SUSTAINABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The sustainability concept has attracted the attention of the public with the World Conservation Strategy (WCS) published by International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources in 1980 for the first time.

Sustainability can be described as “to maintain uninterruptedly a society, ecosystem or the function of any system that has sustainability without causing it to deteriorate and decay and without consuming it with overuse or overtaxing the main resources that has vital connections” (Akten & Akten, 2011:371).

The sustainable development concept with its current meaning has described in “Our Common Future” (Brundtland Report) which was published in 1987 by World Commission for Environment and Development. According to the report, sustainable development is described as “meeting the needs of today without conceding future generations to meet their own needs”. Sustainable development has become a fundamental policy, the importance of which is accepted by world with the UN Environment and Development Conference held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The most important contribution of Rio Conference for sustainable development concept is its emphasis on the necessity of the common participation and attempts of local administration units, non-governmental organizations, private sector institutions and individuals in addition to central administration units for the implementation of sustainable development concept (Tosun, 2009:1-2).

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Tourism is a phenomenon that has wide economic, social, cultural and environmental results; it is also accepted as a field of application that is not only an activity that grows by creating positive economic effects but also an activity that may create social and cultural problems causing destruction on artificial and natural environment (Çıracı, Turgut & Kerimoğlu, 2008:91).

Especially developing countries have adopted random policies in order to benefit from the impacts of tourism such as its economical effects of providing foreign exchange, additional income, employment and to improve tourism and ignored natural and environmental values which are the resources of tourism. Destruction of natural and environmental values that are ignored for short term economical benefits has caused self destruction period of tourism start at these countries (Sarkım, 2008:4). Therefore, sustainability concept which is one of the mostly discussed and written articles about, has become one of the most important and delicate subjects of tourism today. The necessity to conserve and provide the sustainability of natural and socio-cultural environment, historical wealth and ecological processes that are the basic resource of tourism for the future of tourism has created the sustainable tourism concept.

Some negative effects such as the increase of settlement in cities, destruction of natural environment, considerable level of environmental pollution, pressure on humans caused by technological developments in parallel with fast increase in the population of the world direct people to the places which conserve their natural and historical beauties, cultural values and distinctive prosperities. This obliges the conservation of natural values that are the basic elements of tourism and ecological processes. Sustainability concept in terms of

tourism means the improvement of life quality of host community, satisfaction of visitors, the conservative use of natural beauties, historical wealth, social and cultural values which are the basic capital of tourism (Ahn, Lee & Shafer, 2002:1).

According to the World Tourism Organization, sustainable tourism means; “It is a development strategy that involves the sustaining of cultural integrity, ecological processes, biological diversity and systems that maintains life by conserving environment without causing its destruction with which humans are in interaction, the continuation of cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life systems and also governing all resources to meet the economical, social and aesthetic needs of people living at this region and tourists and to meet the same needs of future generations” (Kinacı, Pehlivan & Seyhan, 2011:85).

Sustainable tourism means tourism which is economically viable but does not destroy the resources on which the future of tourism will depend, notably the physical environment and the social fabric of the host community (Swarbrooke, 1999:13). In consideration of these descriptions, we can list the requirements of sustainable tourism as follows (UNEP, 2003:7):

- Tourist resources - natural, historical, cultural and others - are preserved in a way that allows them to be used in the future, whilst benefiting today’s society;
- The planning and management of tourist development are conducted in a way that avoids triggering serious ecological or socio-cultural problems in the region concerned;
- The overall quality of the environment in the tourist region is preserved and, if necessary, improved;
- The level of tourist satisfaction should be maintained to ensure that destinations continue to be attractive and retain their commercial potential
- Tourism should largely benefit all members of society.

The World Tourism Organization says that sustainable tourism should make optimal use of environmental resources respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders (Dale, 2005:50). Sustainable tourism development is to make tourism more compatible with the needs and resources of destination area. In case that shareholders fulfill their responsibilities successfully, sustainable tourism can offer a broader approach for tourism applications and create the opportunity to control the growth rate and scale of tourism (Eagles, Bowman& Tao, 2001:6). Trends, responsibilities and some future principles are determined for better understanding of sustainable tourism concept and succeeding a tourism development compatible with nature (Beyhan & Ünügür, 2005:80). Mentioned sustainable tourism principles are as follows (Sharpley, 2009:62):

- Minimizing environmental impacts
- Achieving conservation outcomes
- Being different
- Achieving authenticity
- Reflecting community values
- Understanding and targeting the market
- Enhancing the experience
- Adding value
- Having good content

- Enhancing sense of place through design
- Providing mutual benefits to visitors and hosts
- Building local capacity

The aim of sustainable tourism which meets the needs of today's tourists and host regions by reserving and increasing the future opportunities (Akten & Akten, 2011:371) is to increase the tourism capacity and the quality of touristic products without affecting the natural environment and human resources that feeds sector negatively (Akış, 2001:17). We can list the benefits of sustainable tourism with the light of this information as follows (Swarbrooke, 1999:10):

- Sustainable tourism encourages an understanding of the impacts of tourism on the natural, cultural and human environments.
- Sustainable tourism ensures a fair distribution of benefits and costs.
- Tourism generates local employment, both directly in the tourism sector and in various support and resources management sectors.
- Tourism stimulates profitable domestic industries – hotels and other lodging facilities, restaurants and other food services.
- Tourism generates foreign exchange for the country, and injects capital and new money into the local economy.
- Tourism diversifies the local economy, particularly in rural areas where agricultural employment may be sporadic or insufficient.
- Sustainable tourism seeks decision making among all segments of the society, including local populations, so that tourism and other resource users can coexist. It incorporates planning and zoning which ensure tourism development appropriate to the carrying capacity of the ecosystem.
- Tourism stimulates improvements to local transportation, communications and other basic community infrastructures.
- Tourism creates recreational facilities which can be used by local communities as well as domestic and international visitors. It also encourages and helps pay for preservation of archaeological sites and historic buildings and districts.
- Nature tourism encourages productive use of lands which are marginal for agriculture, enabling large tracts to remain covered in natural vegetation.
- Cultural tourism enhances local community esteem and provides the opportunity for greater understanding and communication among peoples of diverse backgrounds.
- Environmentally sustainable tourism demonstrates the importance of natural and cultural resources to a community's economic and social well-being and can help to preserve them.
- Sustainable tourism monitors, assesses and manages the impacts of tourism, develops reliable methods of environmental accountability, and counters any negative effect.

There is an economical and social development in sustainable tourism. It is clear that countries which leave environmental concerns aside with developmental purposes make progress but this progress is short-term and an environment with destructed natural resources slows down the economical improvement in the long run (Selimoğlu, 2004:8). Sustainable tourism which is considered as a process that provides all tourism types rather than only one type to have a environmentally-conscious structure requires social responsibility, economical efficiency and ecological sensitivity in every step (Akşit, 2007:444-451).

All stakeholders (tourists, local community, private sector, public institutions, non-governmental organizations) must take joint actions to provide sensitivity. “Community Based Tourism” in which public participation is provided is very important.

Experiences of community-based tourism (CBT) seek to achieve sustainable development, so that communities can improve their living conditions without disappearing and without irreversibly damaging the environment. The aims of CBT are multiple and ambitious: “communities’ empowerment and ownership, conservation of natural and cultural resources, social and economic development, and quality visitor experiences” Hence, there is clearly a need in each specific case to develop community participation, power redistribution, collaboration processes and social capital creation (Ballesteros, 2011:657).

According to Gunn and Var (2001), some communities think tourism separate from community; however tourism clearly gathers community together. An achievement cannot be succeeded with the tourism conducted according to this view point, because compatibility between tourism and community’s economical and social life cannot be achieved (Gunn & Var, 2001:20).

The controlled development of tourism industry depends on the good will and help of community because the local community is the part of this product. If development and planning are not conducted in a compatible way with local demand and capacity, resistance and hostility destroys tourism industry as a whole (Timothy, 1999:373).

Local community and its values are important for the tourism and tourists. Tourists gain important experiences by acknowledging the socio-cultural properties of society at the places they visit (Güneş, 2004:502).

There is a growing interest on how to provide tourism developments to be sustainable in 21st century. As a result of the growing interest to the community development and sustainability, it is realized that local community has an important place and more importance is given to the subjects of social participation and shareholders cooperation in the studies executed. Also, tourism researchers attract attention to the need of community based tourism development for the achievement and sustainable tourism development (Hasse, 2003:1).

Decisions of social participation approach is rarely seen in developing countries. The type of participation is related with traditional planning and tourism development level of the community at that period and there is no universal type that can be applicable everywhere (Li, 2006:132-133; Hemati, 1999:7).

Participation of society in tourism planning in community based tourism means “Gathering of community leaders, local community, other shareholders (sectoral representatives, non-governmental organizations) and their holding meetings in which tourism development targets are discussed and exchange of ideas is carried out” (Timothy, 1999:373; Bahaire & White, 1999:248).

Community participation as tourism development strategy bases on community needs and decisions. From a wider perspective, participant development approach is to provide community to determine their own tourism policies. This shows that the needs of community can be known in the best way by community itself. Within this perspective the below questions may arise (Tosun, 2005:336);

- What is the relationship between food and accommodation which are the basic needs and the local community living in touristic area, is the community willing and ready to participate?
- Does the community need a skill or education to be given correct and meaningful information?
- How community participation will be provided under political or economical instabilities?
- Who and what will arise the desire for community's participation in tourism development planning?

Participation is not a target for local communities but it is important to be aware of the improvements in the field of tourism and create opportunities. The fundamental target for community participation to the tourism development planning is to permit participants to control tourism development and other local issues (Tosun, 2005: 337). The participation of local community to tourism decisions provides sustainable tourism development since it abolishes the superiority of international tour agencies and elites at national level (Aslan, 2008; Croall, 1995; Bramwell & Sharman, 1999; Timothy, 1999).

Researches (Akdu and Şahbaz, 2010; Timothy, 1999.) show that local community and other shareholders are willing to participate in tourism development and they can join the training and seminar programs related to this subject. As a result of various researches conducted at the destination in relation to the effect of tourism on community and the attitude of community, it is determined that the participation of community and more community based approaches gain importance. Community participation to the process of tourism development is important for the below reasons (Tosun, 2000: 616);

- Creating common sense,
- Long term success of touristic destination,
- Providing strong community support which is important for the tourism development,
- Providing the establishment of good relations between tourist and the local community,
- Increasing the benefits provided from tourism for the national improvement.

There are some methods used to ensure community participation. The details of these methods are as follows (Dresen et al., 2002: 28-30; Miskowiak, 2004: 14-18; MTC, 2010: 18-20).

a) Awareness and Training Methods: Methods of community participation has been created for community to be aware of planning and participation activities and to provide them to participate more.

- **Community announcements and notices:** This method needs the least legal necessity for announcing the community participation opportunities. It is posted on billboards where the community is present or published in newspapers.
- **Exhibitions:** Maps, pictures or texts are arranged as posters and announced at the places where traffic is intense and community gathers mostly.

- **Direct mailing:** This is the method of sending the written information collectively and creating awareness. If message to be sent is easy, the best understood and easy method is direct mailing.
- **Community calendars:** In this method, working calendar is filled with information about planning methods, important meeting dates and pictures or photographs provided by students or adults in working area.
- **Other methods:** News posts, community education meetings, web sites, media relationships are other awareness and education methods that provides community participation.

b) Input methods: These are the methods created to collect the community opinion. Below methods may be given as examples (Randolph, 2004: 66; Dresen et al. 2002: 29; MTC, 2010: 18-20; SPC, 2011: 8);

- **Open houses:** Means the use of exhibitions, donations and other material to reveal the opinion of local community about planning. It helps retrieving the information of community on planning orally or written.
- **Listening the community:** It is an official meeting held to provide technical information, to get the approval of official investigation and proposals.
- **Choice and opinion research:** It includes preparation and presenting of three dimensional graphic and projection of planned region, taking real photographs of region for preparation of design alternatives and taking the opinion of community for their choices and opinions related to the subject. This method is used to identify the common visual choices of the community.
- **Opinion research (Survey method):** Survey is used to gather information from many people systematically or to learn the point of views of people. It can be said that providing the input is relatively easy but analyzing and interpreting is hard. Sample, must be chosen carefully to represent the population. Questions must be simple and short and must not contain slang.
- **Focus groups:** These are small groups formed of 6-12 persons to determine the information about problems, values, beliefs or sample cases. Participants chosen mostly according to their special interests or knowledge.
- **Creating the vision:** It is requested from participants to create a vision about community values and describe written, orally or by pictures or by combination of these how they want to be seen in the future.

CONCLUSION

Sustainable tourism concept is a concept that sets forth the delivery of the environmental, economical and social resources to next generations without any destruction. The local community and the local enterprises are the most affected sides from the development of tourism activities in a region. Within this context, opinions and proposals of local community and other shareholders are important for the conservation of natural, cultural and historical factors especially in touristic region and in its surroundings. From this point of view, the controlled, systematic and balanced improvement of tourism sector may be provided by more responsible behaviours of all shareholders to each other, and by developing a balanced plan that takes the demands and expectations of local community into consideration, minimizes the mistakes, reconciles the interests of enterprises and local

community as a result of social participation. Thus, long-term important successes can be achieved and conservation of resources and their delivery to future generations can be provided within sustainable tourism concept.

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