

ECOTOURISM – A MAJOR FACTOR IN THE PRESERVATION OF FLORA AND FAUNA BIODIVERSITY IN BANAT

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Abstract: *Ecotourism, also called soft tourism, ecological tourism, green tourism, differs from other forms of tourism by its more direct and close relationship with the natural and cultural environment. It is practiced mainly in protected areas; however, to preserve flora and fauna biodiversity, we need to observe a few principles of environmental conservation. Therefore, hunting tourism and scientific tourism activities should be planned without influencing negatively the flora and fauna: the main goal should be to preserve natural area biodiversity in Banat.*

Keywords: *ecotourism, biodiversity, flora, fauna, Banat*

INTRODUCTION

Because of the overdevelopment of tourism, the last decades of the 20th century produced and developed a new concept, ecotourism, and an activity that supposes particular care for the environment and the existing ecosystems, which implies the following [1,3]:

- Controlling the consequences of tourism activities with a view to rationally use tourism resources;
- Taking measures for the conservation and development of its quality in the areas belonging to tourism routes or waiting to be included in such routes, and avoiding hazard factors.

The notion of **ecotourism** was defined at the National Seminar on Ecotourism organised by experts in Environment from Canada in 1991. The conclusion of this meeting was that **"ecotourism is a travel experience that can highlight nature by contributing to the conservation of ecosystems and observing the integrity of host communities"**. **Ecotourism, besides anchoring in the area of sustainability, is parallel to economic integration and generates development strategies**. Thus, the notion of **ecotourism** is to be found in sustainable rural-urban development, in infrastructure modernisation, in the use of non-polluting sustainable forms, together with some legal measures. Among the bodies that defined the concept are:

- PNEF – European Federation of National and Nature Parks;
- The Talamaca Society for Ecotourism and Conservation from Costa Rica: „**ecotourism** is more than just books and albums on fauna, than binoculars, than folk art posted on hotel and restaurant walls: it is the constant fight for the protection of landscape, with support of peoples' cultural traditions";
- The International Union for Nature Conservation: **"ecotourism** is a responsible ecological travel in nature unspoiled areas for relaxation and appreciation of the nature and of any cultural feature, past or present, in the area, which promotes conservation, with a low negative impact and that has benefits for the communities involved";
- The World Nature Federation.

These organisations consider ecotourism as a useful tool in ensuring the conservation of exceptional cultural and natural goods through special protection policies.

Some researchers define ecotourism as a **form of alternative tourism**; others [4,9] define it as **trips and visits that are ecologically sustainable for nature (flora and fauna) enjoyment and appreciation, that promotes nature conservation, have a low impact on nature and include the involvement of local populations** [5,10,12] or as **nature tourism, theme tourism, hunting tourism**.

Ecotourism is also called **soft tourism, ecological tourism or green tourism**, which shows clearly that ecotourism is different from other forms of tourism due to its more direct and closer relationship with the natural and cultural environment. Ecotourism appeared on the North-American continent at the middle of the 1980s, because of the increasing demand for wild nature tourism in the most fragile areas of the planet. [2,6, 14]. No matter the definition adopted, we can draw the conclusion that **ecotourism is practiced in particular in the protected areas** – the basic resource for the development of this form of tourism, with accommodation for the tourists in rural B&B or on agritourism farms close to the nature reserves.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

To ensure the desiderata of ecotourism, we need to observe a few principles that underlie viable strategies long term. To do so, we developed measures that need to be implemented for the conservation of flora and fauna biodiversity in the Banat area, a region with mountains, hills (plateau), plains and even moist areas (a small delta).

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ecotourism as a nature experience contributing to the conservation of flora and fauna ecosystems in the area addresses a small niche of researchers and tourists that know or have some idea of endemic plant species and of threatened animals, and relies on the principles of sustainable conservation. To do so, we need to develop and implement a few principles that reduce the negative impact on nature areas through destructive actions (hunting tourism, scientific tourism, green tourism, etc.).

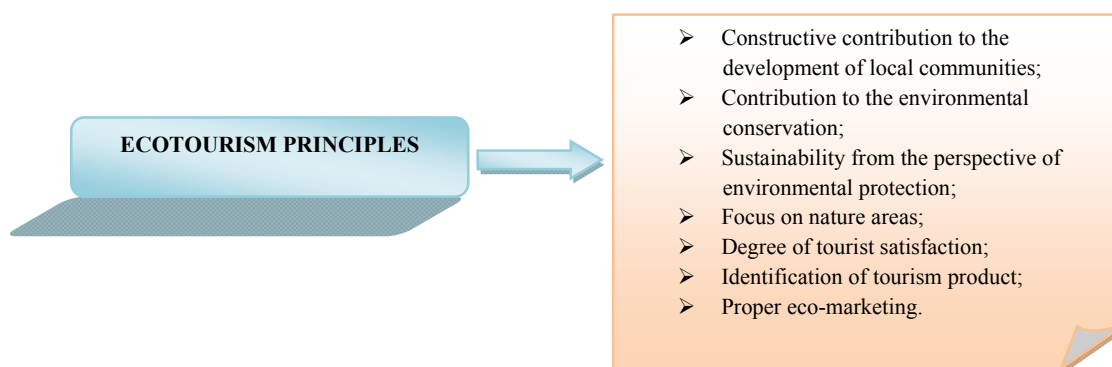


Figure 1. Ecotourism principles

- **Constructive contribution to the development of local communities.** Ecotourism offers sustainable contributions to the development of local communities. In most cases, the local community is part of the ecotourism product. The benefits from ecotourism and the use of local facilities should return mainly to the local community. Ecotourism activities and their planning should ensure the diminution of the negative impact on local communities and on their lifestyle, and also on flora and fauna, offering, at the same time, long term constructive contributions to these communities; therefore, ecotourism should also emphasise the natural component of the area visited and contribute to the preservation of this component. [7]
- **Contribution to the environmental conservation.** Ecotourism contributes positively to the conservation of the protected areas. This involves the participation to the conservation of nature areas or of hunting funds (endemic species) offering constructive ways for the good management and conservation of these nature areas.
- **Sustainability from the perspective of environmental protection.** Ecotourism activities and their planning should provide the best practices in hunting tourism and a proper planning from the point of view of nature conservation and sustainable development. Tourism activities should be planned and carried out with a view to conserving and emphasising the natural and cultural environment through the acknowledgement and application of practices characteristic to sustainable tourism. [8,11].
- **Focus on nature areas.** Ecotourism focuses on the direct and personal experience in the nature; it is practiced in nature and it relies on its use, i.e. its geomorphological, biological, physical, and cultural features. Therefore, **we can conclude that it is essential in the planning, development, and management of ecotourism.**
- **Degree of tourist satisfaction.** Ecotourism products meet tourist expectations. We need to take into account that, in general, potential ecotourists have a high level of education and expectations. Thus, **the degree of satisfaction related to the ecotourism product is essential, the experience meeting or even overcoming the tourists' expectation level.**
- **Identification of tourism product.** Ecotourism offers opportunities for nature experiences that lead to a better understanding of, appreciation of and joy to discover and protect the nature and local traditional culture for both visitors and local community. Ecotourism products attract those tourists that wish to interact with the environment, to broaden their horizon of knowledge, understanding, appreciation, and pleasure. Those who develop or coordinate ecotourism activities should provide the proper level of understanding of natural and cultural values of the areas visited, usually with properly trained staff and of proper information both before and during the experience. The level and type of interpretation is planned, designed, and provided to meet the interests, needs, and expectations of the client, including a wide range of opportunities for personal and non-personal interpretation. At the same time, as far as destination and ecotourism products are concerned, it is important for the members of the local community to have access to information and to offer interpretation within the ecotourism programme developed in the area.
- **Proper eco-marketing.** Eco-tourism marketing provides clients with complete (cost of a hunting day, cost of a visit of the hunting funds, etc.) and responsible

information that lead to the increase of respect for the natural and cultural environment of the areas visited and for the tourist satisfaction level.

For a tourism activity carried out on hunting funds to be considered **ecotourism**, for instance, it needs to have the following nine features:

- **Be beneficial for wildlife and environment.** The question if the environment (not just the humans) have had or have benefit can be measured or assessed socially, economically, from a management point of view, or politically; last but not least, **the environment should benefit in the sense of its sustainability and ecological integrity**;
- **Ensure first-hand experiences in the natural environment.** Visiting zoos does not represent an ecotourism experience (even though they can contribute to the development of the interest of a person in ecotourism). Information centres can be considered a component of ecotourism activity only if they lead people towards a first-hand experience in the nature such as marking ecotourism routes, watching animal behaviour, assessing flora and fauna, taking photos of wild animals in their natural habitat, etc.;
- **Focus on intrinsic rather than extrinsic values.** Facilities and services provided can have important features, but they should not be presented as a main attraction, but rather together with their ecosystem;
- **Be environment-oriented**, not man-oriented;
- **Involve actively local communities in tourism activities** so that they can benefit from the hunting tourism thus contributing to **the increase of nature resources for the tourists and the local community**;
- **Involve considerable preparation and ask much knowledge from both leaders and participants.** The satisfaction from an ecotourism experience is strongly felt and expressed through emotions and feelings;
- **Measure the degree of success and satisfaction in terms of education and/or appreciation, not in terms of entertainment**;
- **Avoid degradation of vegetal and animal resources.** In other words, ecotourism experience does not include consumption or erosion of the natural environment. (Sports hunting and fishing can, for instance, be considered Nature Tourism, but they are, in most cases, included in Adventure Tourism, not Ecotourism).
- **Promote positive ethics** concerning the environment and improve participants' activities without disturbing the birds during nesting periods or mammals during oestrus and mating.

There are five levels of ecotourism [13]:

- **Zero level** is the lowest ecotourism level. It supposes that tourists are introduced to or getting aware of the fragility of the ecosystem they are visiting.
- **Level One** supposes that an important amount of the tourism income reaches directly the protection of the ecosystem (transport taxes qualify here).
- **Level Two** supposes that ecotourists engage personally in environmental protection (some of them plant trees, some others clean the environment, others prevent poaching or promote endangered plant and animal species).
- **Level Three** supposes that a specific tourism system has no negative effect on the environment. The system should ensure both domestic transportation and accommodation, and transportation to the destination (to the hunting farm). This level should show that the total effect of a tourist's presence is either neutral or positive).

- **Level Four** supposes that the total effect of a tourist's presence is positive. The effort of the hunting funds administration to use the proper technology, a low energy consumption, recycling, organic agriculture, sustainable harvesting methods, and the development of personal contribution to the restoration of the ecosystem can be used to the benefit of positive aspects of the tourism impact.
- **Level Five** is the **perfect level in ecotourism**: it is a trip in which the entire system is used to protect the environment. This means that the promotion, transport, accommodation, and use of waste products in the tourism system must be taken into account. This level should be the goal of ecotourism supporters be they tour-operators, tourists, or resource management agencies, farmers, rural B&B owners, researchers, NGO volunteers, or hunting guides.

CONCLUSIONS

Through ecotourism, tourists should contribute to the conservation of flora and fauna ecosystems if they observe the principles of ecotourism and if their activities do not have a negative impact on plant and animal species.

Ecotourism contributes to the development of the communities and to the sustainability of the protected areas. Ecotourism offers experience opportunity in the nature that lead to a better understanding and appreciation, and to greater joy in the discovery and protection of the traditional local nature and culture.

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