

## **Tourists' Experiences vs. Local Communities**

### **Designing Sustainable Tourism Policies**

Tourism is a major source of economic revenue, substantially supporting not only tourism businesses, but also the local economy and small local tourism businesses, offering thousands of jobs. As tourism becomes increasingly important to communities around the world, the need to develop tourism sustainably becomes a primary concern. Communities are a basic reason for tourists to travel, to experience the way of life and material products of different communities. Small communities in Europe, and especially in the Mediterranean have a unique and interesting historical heritage, an incomparable geographical concentration of attractive places and indeed a long-standing reputation for high quality services. They are also shaping the 'natural' landscapes which many tourists consume.

Despite the significantly boosting economic growth, tourism development has some adverse effects as it commercializes the cultural and other elements of the places, driving the indigenous people out of opportunistic attempts to exploit the tourist stream and moving them away from other more stable productive options. There is a growing literature focusing on the community impacts of tourism which I will not analyse here.

So, how should we react to the clash between tourist's experiences and local communities? The key-word for the solution is *sustainability*. Sustaining the communities has become an essential element of sustainable tourism. The rationale of sustainable tourism development most of the times rests on the assurance of renewable economic, social and cultural benefits to the community and its environment.

Undoubtedly, a holistic approach to sustainability requires that the improved social, cultural and economic well-being of human communities is an integral component of environmental renewal. We need good practices that catalyse and support the transition to a green, low-emissions and climate-resilient tourism economy, and offers guidance to policy makers on how to move forward. Tourism, as one of the most promising drivers of growth for the world economy, can play an important role in driving the transition to a green economy, and contributing to more sustainable and inclusive growth.

At the same time, there is a need to plan for the development of the necessary infrastructure so that the tourism sector is constantly up-to-date and competitively meets the demands of the country's visitors. The perfect infrastructure and the appropriate training of the staff in the tourist services can ensure that the holiday experience offered to tourists is maintained at a high level. What we should do is to aim at providing value for money. The destinations must simply be the best, the most attractive, able to offer a product which will convince both Europeans and non-Europeans to spend holidays in Europe and to become repeaters.



Communities should create and use unique values and products. Tourists are very much interested in finding things and phenomena at their destinations that are authentic for that area. We may even consider this as one of the basic conditions of a holiday, because the tourist finds himself in an area that is different from his home environment and he wants to experience things that are typical for that area. The Mediterranean with all its great history and archaeology provides knowledge and general education to the tourists.

But how should such products look like? We need products that embrace innovation to respond to consumers' needs, products that meet the highest quality standards, and that are as environment friendly as they can possibly be. The communities should create products that will be a new brand of our European values. However, the growing complexity of communities and the relationships between them pose significant challenges for the sustainable development of tourism. Local community structures can provide the source of both problems and potential solutions in the sphere of sustainable development.

Communities should develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for a sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products. Furthermore, the states should give larger contribution if tourism is embedded in a diverse local economy, making use of local inputs, employing locals, respecting local traditions. The governments and the local communities should respect their tradition and preserve the elements that give their place uniqueness. Financial gain is important, of course, but it should not lead them to commercialize their own identity.



We should find ways in order to reinforce the economy of the local communities. The products of the local communities should find their way on the touristic market. We should create strategic projects which will aim to support the development of new attractions, to spread tourism flows more evenly throughout the country. Innovative projects run by local authorities should be funded. Unfortunately, most of the time the communities face administrative obstacles for their small businesses and lack of awareness of funding opportunities, especially from the European Union.

Today, tourism is an important sign of the European way of life and welfare and equally an important economic activity with a significant potential to generate sustainable growth and employment. In order to achieve the best results, we should involve representatives of the tourism industry, policy makers, the local communities and even representatives of the member-states. Those contributions will be crucial in helping us better understand the challenges. We should also pay attention to those actors who create knowledge, such as universities, research institutes, public and private observatories, to the challenges for European tourism, and facilitate their cooperation. A good idea is the creation of a platform where all tourism stakeholders can exchange views and opinions strengthening their collaboration on the issues of sustainability and competitiveness of European tourism. By doing that, we will be able to create a series of “best applicable practices”.



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