

Forum: Baltic Forum

Issue: Promotion of Sustainable Tourism for Poverty Eradication and Economical Development

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Introduction

Modern concept of sustainable tourism requires maintenance of balance between 5 major elements, yet without giving advantage to any of them. These include: economics, pleasure obtained from tourism, society, culture, and environment. The necessity in sustainable tourism is becoming more and more obvious on an international scale, and the Baltic Sea region is not an exception. Every year the need for sustainable development of tourism becomes more and more noticeable as negative effects of tourism become clearer and the positive effects are not as significant as they used to be. What is important is that more than other economic sectors, tourism has the particular potential to be a connecting link between the different countries around the Baltic Sea, not only on a theoretical level but enabling and fostering direct, personal contacts between inhabitants.

Sustainable tourism is the important and perspective source of income for the Post-Soviet countries (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia), and also for Poland. Ecotourism can also become an impulse for development of the Russian regions (such as but not limited to Karelia), which are located far from the center and as a result are drastically less visited than the central regions.

It is obvious that the development of tourism in the world has a considerable influence on the environment. Starting from the visual effect of the architecture of hotels and resorts to noise and air pollution because of increased traffic, water pollution and loss of natural habitats. That is another reason why the implementation of the sustainable tourism strategy all around the Baltic Sea region is so important.

Definition of key terms

Sustainable tourism

Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.

HCT

Hotels, Catering, and Tourism: very labor-intensive and significant source of development and employment.

Background information

Sustainable tourism presumes the ability to create long-term conditions for the proper development of both tourism and conservation of natural resources, social and cultural values of society. However, its goal is to achieve higher standards of living through economic growth and environmental conservation which is a natural fund for future generations. This approach fits into the global tourism trends, which determine the formation of a new tourist brand. Preservation of natural and cultural complexes is a precondition for sustainable development. Despite structural changes due to new technologies, the tourism industry remains a large source of employment, which is significant for several countries of the region, where the unemployment rate has grown rapidly in recent decades (Latvia – about 22%, Estonia – about 11%, Lithuania and Poland – about 10%). As a very labor intensive service industry, the HCT sector has significant potential to contribute to poverty alleviation by developing a value chain approach to sustainable tourism development.

The goal of Sustainable Development is indeed very important for the whole region, with Sustainable Tourism being one of its parts. Based on the Agenda 21 (*see Relevant Treaties and Resolutions*) a project named *EcoRegion* is being implemented around the Baltic Sea region states. By way of eight sectoral platforms, Baltic 21 members carry out joint actions and cross-sectoral activities to pursue Sustainable Development in the Baltic Sea region.

Among the countries of the Baltic Sea region Finland is a successful example of development of tourist branch, particularly ecotourism.

Major countries and organizations involved

All countries of the Baltic Sea region are involved in the issue, since the coordinated efforts and collaboration are needed for the successful development of all the states. Among the organizations involved Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) should definitely be named. This political forum works mostly in three directions: Regional Identity, Safe & Secure Region, and Sustainable & Prosperous Region. The Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) are also the members of the Baltic Assembly

(BA), which is a cooperation between parliaments of these countries aiming at finding a common position in many international issues, including economic, political, and cultural issues.

Relevant treaties and UN resolutions

On 14th of January 2015 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the resolution recognizing the contribution of sustainable tourism to poverty eradication. The resolution, entitled *Promotion of ecotourism for poverty eradication and environment protection* was adopted by the UN General Assembly as well (21 December 2012).

An Action Program for Sustainable Tourism was adopted in 1998. This Action Program emphasized awareness building, transfer of know-how and education, tourism industry, and services and product development and marketing.

In 1996 three International Organizations - the World Travel & Tourism Council, the World Tourism Organization and the Earth Council, joined together to launch an action plan entitled *Agenda 21 for the Travel & Tourism Industry: Towards Environmentally Sustainable Development* - a sectoral sustainable development program based on the Earth Summit results. The document is of particular significance to Travel & Tourism companies, governments, national tourism administrations (NTAs), and representative trade organizations, as well as the travelling public.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

There were numerous policies, regulations, and clear strategies for poverty reduction and economic development all around the world, such as:

- a) Support local employment through the development of job outreach programs that help educate and inform local populations about job prospects in the HCT industry and related sectors;
- b) Strengthen collaboration and communication between the tourism industry and local communities to facilitate the provision of food, goods, services or infrastructure and to help them better understand the needs of the industry; etc.

Speaking about the Baltic Sea region, for the last five years, Baltic 21 Tourism Sector has designed, implemented, and successfully disseminated the activities and outcomes of the Baltic 21 Lighthouse project *AGORA* (2005-2007). The project has demonstrated that sustainable rural tourism can produce economically profitable outcomes while avoiding ecosystem damage. The project developed 'Sustainability Check' for tourism

projects and a toolbox with appropriate instruments. The database *YepaT*, which was developed within the project, provides information about more than 260 tourism projects in the Baltic Sea Region.

Furthermore, the Baltic 21 Tourism Sector and members of the *AGORA* network provided input to the public consultations on the EU Agenda for Sustainable and Competitive European Tourism. A follow-up project, *AGORA 2.0*, which is also a Baltic 21 Lighthouse project and a Flagship project in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, aims at developing heritage tourism, including both cultural and natural tourism, based on the principles of sustainability, and thereby increase the common Baltic Sea Region identity

Possible solutions

First of all, the implementation of the currently adopted measures and ensuring the realization of several projects should be guaranteed. Speaking about the general ways in which the solutions may be discussed and worked out, it is necessary to mention that the development of infrastructure for the comfort of tourists and balance of price and quality of services might lead to a bigger flow of tourists. Moreover, the development of investment projects to raise the funding may help the countries' budgets. Establishment of regional contacts which could soften the problems at the interstate level as well as creation of special economic zones and simplification of a visa regime with the countries which are not the members of the European Union can create favorable conditions for the attraction of investments.