

Adapting the European tourism indicators system to Braşov – tourist destination

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Abstract: *The industry of tourism contributes mainly to the social and economic development of a destination. However this development has to be made in a sustainable manner, with an emphasis on preserving the area where it is practiced. In order to evaluate the sustainable development of a destination, the European Commission developed an Indicators System that measures and monitors, at a local level, the processes of sustainable development and communicates to the interested parties its progress and its future performances. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to identify the set of indicators from European Tourism Indicators System that are relevant in evaluating the sustainable development of tourism in Braşov. In order to achieve this objective 3 focus Groups were conducted among 30 specialists in this field. The results can serve as a guide for managers and local communities involved in the development of tourism in the county.*

Key-words: *tourism, sustainable development, European Tourism Indicators System, Braşov, tourist destination*

1. Introduction

Tourism as a separate part of the tertiary sector is closely linked to the level and growth of the general economy and more particularly to trade, transportation, construction and agriculture (Surugiu, Frenţ and Surugiu, 2009, 355). Researchers together with tourism operators support the idea that tourism is a tool for economic growth, overall sustainable development and job creation, economic and social cohesion. (Chasovschi, Năstase and Hildebrandt 2008, 37)

One of the main preoccupations of the researchers in the field of tourism is to understand how tourism can offer a sustainable experience for visitors and assure a sustainable future for the destination (Page, 2006).

More exactly, sustainability of tourism takes into account several aspects, such as using the natural resources in a responsible manner, considering the natural

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impact of the touristic activity (waste management, water pollution, the effect on biodiversity etc.), protecting the patrimony, together with the natural and cultural integrity of the destination while assuring the sustainability of jobs created through tourism and evaluating its impact on the local economy. In order to monitor the tourism at a specific destination, the authorities rely on a very limited set of statistics such as the number of arrivals, the number of people working in the field and tourists satisfaction. Whereas these statistics alone don't reflect the full impact of tourism.

Therefore with the purpose of measuring sustainability of tourism at a specific destination, the European Commission developed the European Tourism Indicators System. The aim of this system is to measure and monitor, at a local level, the processes of sustainable development and to communicate to the interested parties its progress and future performances.

The indicators were structured in the form of a guide, which contains 27 basic indicators and 40 optional ones. They can be used individually, or integrated in the existing monitoring system of the destination. It is very flexible, and can be adapted according to the local needs and issues in order to fully fit the destinations profile. Applying the indicators help identify the areas that need improvement, while creating performance standards. These aspects are very important in the case of Braşov county as well.

Therefore the aim of this paper is to identify those indicators from the European Tourism Indicators System that are relevant in evaluating the sustainable development of tourism in this area, and can serve as a useful tool for managers and local communities involved in the development of tourism in the county.

2. Research methodology

In order to identify the indicators from the European Tourism Indicators System that are applicable to evaluate the sustainable development of tourism from Braşov County, 3 focus Groups were organized with 10 participants each.

The focus group is an interview between a group that has a specific topic and is conducted among a specific category of participants.

Krueger (1994) describes it as a group interview that is organised with the aim of obtaining information regarding a specific area in a well prepared and appropriate environment. The discussions are conducted by an experienced moderator. The interactions are comfortable and often pleasant for the participants, because it allows them to share their opinion and to get access to new ideas and perceptions. The members of the group have the possibility to influence each other as a result of the ideas that are formulated during the discussions. The members of the groups can also encourage each other, fact that can lead to synergies and the creation of new information and ideas.

Usually the focus groups are comprised of 6-12 people each, and in order to analyse in detail a specific topic a minimum of 3 focus group need to be organised with different participants. The subject of the focus Group has to be familiar to member of the groups. The length of each discussion can vary between one and three hours depending on the complexity of the topic and the amount of information that needs to be generated. In case of this research, all the participants who took part in it, are specialists in the field of tourism such as hotel managers, travel agency owners, specialists in touristic NGO-s PhD and Masters Students.

They were chosen based on age, gender, and occupation, which was established by applying a recruitment questionnaire prior the research. The discussions with each group lasted 90 minutes, with a 15 minutes break after the first 45 minutes. All the discussions were recorded, and analysed in detail.

3. Research results

According to the results, at the level of the first group 17 indicators were chosen unanimously, while 16 in the case of the second and 11 in the case of the third.

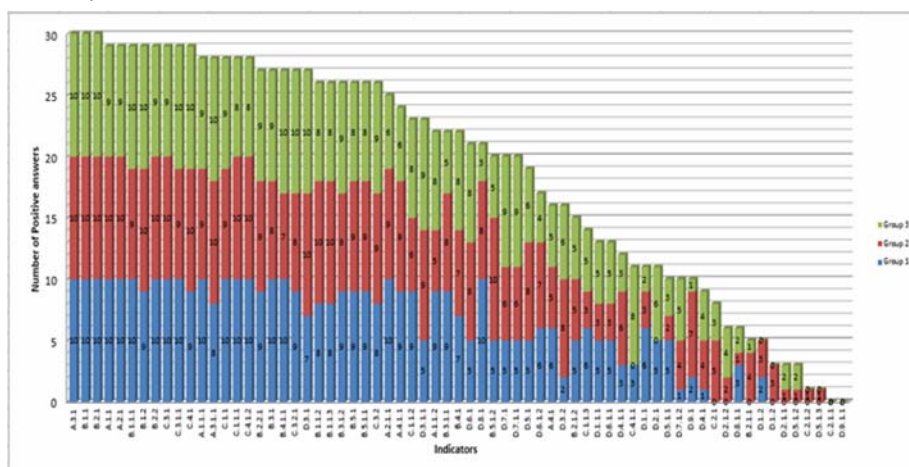


Fig.1. The distribution of the responses regarding the European Tourism Indicators

At the level of the entire research, there were identified 3 indicators that obtained the maximum number of points in case of all 3 groups. As shown in Figure 1 the following indicators were considered to be the most important by the specialists: the percentage of visitors that are satisfied with their overall experience in the destination (A.3.1), the number of tourist nights per month (B.1.1), and the average length of stay of tourists (B.2.1).

With the exception of one person, in each case, it was considered to be relevant in evaluating the sustainable development of tourism in Brașov county: the percentage of the destination with a sustainable tourism strategy/action plan, with agreed monitoring, development control and evaluation arrangement (A.1.1), the percentage of tourism enterprises/establishments in the destination using a voluntary verified certification/labelling for environmental/quality/sustainability and/or CSR measures (A.2.1), the relative contribution of tourism to the destination's economy (% GDP) (B.1.1.1), the daily spending per tourist (B.1.2), the occupancy rate in commercial accommodation per month and average for the year (B.2.2), the percentage of commercial accommodation with rooms accessible to people with disabilities and/or participating in recognized accessibility schemes (C.3.1), the percentage of destination served by public transport that is accessible to people with disabilities and people with specific access requirements (C.3.1.1), and the percentage of the destination covered by a policy or plan that protects cultural heritage (C.4.1). With a total of 28 positive responses the following indicators were also considered important: the percentage of residents satisfied with their involvement and their influence in the planning and development of tourism (A.1.1.1), the percentage of repeat/return visitors (A.3.1.1), the number of tourists/visitors per 100 residents (C.1.1), the percentage of residents who are satisfied with tourism in the destination (C.1.1.1), the percentage of the destination's biggest events that are focused on traditional/local culture and assets (C.4.1.2), the average price per room in the destination (B.2.2.1), direct tourism employment as percentage of total employment (B.3.1), the percentage of tourists who register a complaint with the police (B.4.1.1), the percentage of visitors satisfied with the accessibility of the destination for those with disabilities or specific access requirements (C.3.2.1), and the waste volume produced by the destination (D.3.1). The last 5 indicators, mentioned before, obtained 27 positive answers. With the exception of 4 people in each case, the number of 'same day' visitors in high season and low season (B.1.1.2), the daily spending per same day visitor (B.1.1.3), the percentage of tourism enterprises providing student internships (B.3.1.2), the percentage of tourism enterprises actively taking steps to source local, sustainable, and fair trade goods and services (B.5.1), the percentage of the destination covered by a policy promoting local, sustainable and/or fair trade products and services (B.5.1.1), and the percentage of visitor attractions that are accessible to people with disabilities and/or participating in recognized accessibility schemes (C.3.2) were also considered by the specialists as being relevant.

Based on this research, a number of 27 indicators were chosen to evaluate the sustainable development of tourism in Brașov County. It also is important to mention that the indicators referring to the percentage of tourism enterprises where the general manager position is held by a woman (C.2.1.1), and the number of days beach/shore closed due to contamination (D.9.1.1) were not considered at all applicable in case of Brașov county.

4. Research limitations

The main limitations of this research are the ones characteristic to most of the focus groups. Therefore, the disadvantages of this research methodology include the fact that the available time to express their opinion, in case of each participant is limited, the possibility of misunderstanding of some aspects, and that this method does not include the detailed motivation behind the option of choosing one indicator over the other. The fact that the participants couldn't remain anonymous, may lead to some psychological phenomenon that may affect the validity of the answers.

Another very important aspect of this research, which derives from its qualitative nature is that the results cannot be generalized at the level of the entire researched population.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

Based on the research, it can be concluded that, at the level of all 3 groups, 3 indicators, namely the percentage of visitors that are satisfied with their overall experience in the destination, the number of tourist nights per month and the average length of stay of tourists (expressed in nights) were chosen by all of the specialists, these being the most important ones in evaluating the sustainable development of tourism in Braşov County.

From the rest of the indicators the ones obtaining more than 26 positive answers were included in the model, resulting in a total of 27 indicators. This number being comprised of 14 basic and 13 optional indicators. Most of the indicators that were chosen, are part of the B section of the European Tourism Indicators System that refers to the economic value of the tourism, followed by indicators from section C (Social and Cultural Impact) and section A (Destination Management). From section D (Environmental Impact) only one indicator was chosen to be relevant in case of the tourism in Braşov County.

It is important to note that two of the indicator referring to the length of stay and the nights per months are already monitored, however the level of tourist satisfaction is not recorded and analysed at the level of the County. This indicator is measured only by some of the businesses that operate in this field and is measured only in relation to that specific business. Therefore, finding ways to measure and monitor the tourist satisfaction at the level of the county is essential, and it can also offer a better understanding of what the tourist need and can lead to the innovation of the touristic product in Braşov.

There is also the need of developing a sustainable tourism strategy/action plan that encompasses both the private and public sectors, together with encouraging the tourism enterprises to obtain certification/labelling for environmental/ quality/ sustainability and/or CSR measures.

At the level of the destination it also recommended to improve the access for people with disabilities, more exactly to introduce more bus lines that allow wheelchair access, easier entrance to the touristic attractions and accommodation units. The local have to be included in the touristic planning process, and their level of satisfaction regarding the presence of tourist is also relevant. Therefore this aspect has to be measured on a regular basis. Promoting local products is also very important in assuring the sustainability of the destination, therefore, tourism enterprises should be encourage to provide source local, sustainable, and fair trade goods and services. Inspire of the fact that the indicator system for Braşov includes only one indicator concerning the environmental impact, this aspect should not be neglected. More exactly a monitoring system that measures the waste volume produced by the destination hat to be implemented.

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