

CHANGING ATTITUDES IN TOURISM - A POSSIBLE WAY TO WIN THE BATTLE WITH THE CURRENT ECONOMIC CRISIS

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Abstract: *The current economic crisis should be viewed as an opportunity to make the changes needed for improving the tourism industry. These changes are necessary for the tourism industry and must be undertaken considering the necessity of transforming the economy into a Green Economy based on the sustainable development principles. This approach will ensure the sustainable development for the Tourism Industry.*

The purpose of the paper is to highlight the importance and the necessity of change in tourism, especially in the present context of economic and financial crisis.

Key words: *tourism, sustainable development, change, attitudes, crisis.*

1. Introduction

The concept of attitude is a fundamental concept for a large number of sciences: psychology, sociology, marketing, management, etc. As regards management, the concept has its maximum importance because it is involved in approaching, understanding and even solving a great number of issues that are systemically correlated. Issues like those related to the efficiency of human actions, to communication, motivation, conflicts and stress specifically correlated with attitude issues.

Sustainable touristic development means, along with the correct and complete evaluation of the touristic potential, the formation and consolidation of a system of attitudes and, if needed, the change of attitudes of all the factors involved in this process: both those related to touristic supply, decidents, investors in tourism,

employees in touristic activities, possible investors and those regarding the touristic demand, the present or potential clients.

2. The Concept of Attitude

The concept of attitude represents a key concept for both personality psychology and social psychology as well. Being an important variable, significantly explaining the human behaviour, many researchers have made efforts to explain attitude essence, structure, formation process, operation or change. [3]

Specialty literature provides many definitions to attitude (over 100) resulted from different angles of approach, thus proving the controversial nature of the concept. The situation is explicable because the term covers a very wide semantic field, having a lot of interpretations, from body posture and external appearance to behaviour, the

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individual's tendency to behave in a certain way.

The first to use the term in psychology is M. Calkins (1862), who understood by attitude a kind of fundamental relationships of the self with objects, relationships like receptivity, empathy, selfishness.

We selected from the wide set of definitions some that allow us to draw conclusions on the significant concept, definitions that are useful for the approach we undertook:

- "an attitude is a trend, pro or con, to an environmental element, which becomes a positive or a negative value. An attitude has meaning only in relation to certain values." (E.E. Bogardus)
- "an attitude is a mental and nervous state of readiness - crystallized according to experience - which exercises a directional or dynamic influence on the individual's responses to all objects with he is in relation to." (G. Wallport)
- "an attitude is a sustainable organization of beliefs towards an object or a situation that predisposes an individual to respond in a preferential manner." (M. Rokeach).

R. Muchielli, the well-known French psychologist distinguishes six meanings of the concept of attitude:

- posture, characteristic of the reaction;
- expression of an opinion;
- consciously designed manner to express a role (e.g. conscientious - detached, severe-indulgent);
- constant and involuntary feature of role playing (they can be of many types: critical, threatening, authoritarian, democratic, comprehensive, etc., with depressing or encouraging effect on the others);
- general predisposition of adopting certain positions and judging in a certain way (we can distinguish perceptual attitudes with selection effects, explained through motivation and perceptual models as well as intellectual attitudes

resulting from mental schemes and fixtures);

- personal structure.

In conclusion, we can state that beyond the different approaches, attitude is a vector invariant which performs a directional and evaluative function on behaviour, a selective relationship of the individual to the world.

If in social psychology, attitudes express circumstantial relations, views that can be changed, in personality psychology attitudes are closely connected to the relational-valuable component of personality, the character. This is defined as "a system of attitudes proper to the subject, constantly expressed by him as his behaviour, having a relevant human and social significance and defining the subject in axiological terms" [2, p. 100]. In this sense, we can distinguish the attitudes towards people and itself, towards labour and profession, knowledge and culture, society and environment, all these being materialized into positive and negative character features.

3. Changing Attitudes

Changing attitudes under the conditions in which they are closely related to individuals' behaviour is a key issue. In social psychology, changing attitudes means addressing the conditions under which individual or collective position changes its meaning or intensity. Psychologists offer different explanations about how to "purchase" attitudes: classical conditionality, instrumental conditionality, social learning through observation and communication of other people's opinions, through information media, etc.

Changing attitudes depends on a number of factors. First, we should consider the functions that attitudes have. Therefore any persuasive call also must target those functions.

Pieces of research have shown that attitudes can primarily change due to personal experiences. But nowadays, the magnitude of mass media is so great that the individual can hardly ignore what others think about the majority of things. [1] As a result, most pieces of research are focused on changes that occur as a result of the communication in which one or more people express their points of view. As early as 1959, Jahoda highlighted that the extent to which people feel safe, if their attitudes and beliefs are different to those of the rest of the group, must be taken into consideration. Research shows that there is a limit to which people are willing either to change their opinions so as to comply with others', or to maintain an independent position, these depending on a set of factors among which we can mention: the individual's initial investment in the issue, the measure in which his private opinions differ from the publicly-stated ones, etc.

Persuasion is considered the most efficient way to change attitudes. By a persuasive communication, we understand a message, verbal in most cases, built and organized to convince, addressed to one or more persons so as to make them adopt a particular point of view.

4. Tourist Agencies Employees' Attitude towards the Environment and the Practice of Sustainable Tourism

In their role of travel programme organizers, tourist agencies can conduct a series of actions leading to the implementation of sustainable tourism. In the whole process of making travel programmes, tourist agencies must take into consideration the quality of landscape, the architectural heritage of the areas, the role the tourist has in the transformation and protection of the environment, the used means of transport and all the activities being part of the marketed touristic product; this must not be in

conflict with any of the environmental components.

We aim, through the research conducted to get a meaningful and representative image of the attitudes of the employees of the touristic agencies located in the city of Braşov, related to sustainable development of Romanian tourism. The research aims at observing the way tourist agencies understand to operate in accordance with the environment and if the protection of the environment is a priority for them. In this regard, we will assess agencies staff's knowledge of the measures that can be taken to promote sustainable tourism, the role of decision makers at national and local level in connection with the implementation of some measures so as to protect the environment and the interest shown by the society in general, to environmental issues.

The objectives of our research:

- identifying the degree in which sustainable tourism is considered a priority for the staff of tourist agencies;
- determining the extent to which tourist agencies can take actions to protect the environment;
- analyzing the influence of business relationships with companies that are actively fighting for environmental protection;
- identifying the degree in which tourists acknowledge environmental issues and require products that comply with the principles of sustainable tourism;
- identifying the measures that travel agencies have adopted for sustainable tourism development;
- assessing the advantages of sustainable tourism promotion;
- identifying the most important means of information regarding local environment so as to adapt activity to sustainable tourism.

The hypotheses of the research:

- in Romania, sustainable tourism is considered a priority for travel agencies;

- tourist agencies can start actions to save the environment. Tourists information on environment value and quality is the most used measure in environmental protection;
- business relationships with hotel and transport partners have little influence on the agency's position regarding the environment;
- the customers of tourism agencies are little interested in environmental issues. The host population accepting the touristic phenomenon represents the main advantage for promoting sustainable tourism;
- the main source of information on the environment is represented by county agencies for environmental surveillance and protection.

In conducting such research, we used the primary data obtained through a selective survey among tourist agencies located in the city of Braşov.

The variables of the research – the attitudes:

- tourist agencies' attitude towards the environment;
- tourist agencies' attitude towards the sustainable development of the tourism;
- customers' attitude towards sustainable tourism - the influences exerted by skills, habits and reasons determining a certain demand for tourism products promoting sustainable tourism;
- the impact of the relations with business partners; the measure in which tourist agencies' partners are determined to implement programmes supporting sustainable tourism;
- impact on the company's image – the measure in which the company's image improves after having promoted sustainable tourism.

We conducted a piece of research on a general community represented by tourist agencies of Braşov (38 tourist agencies). [4] The observation unit was the tourist agency and the survey unit was the person

designated by the firm as its main representative.

Of the 38 agencies of Braşov, we selected 34 tourism agencies who are nowadays members of the A.N.A.T. (The National Association of Tourism Agencies). [5] The final number of filled-in questionnaires was 23.

After having analyzed the data resulted from the filled-in questionnaires, the following aspects were signalled:

- 91% out of the representatives of tourist agencies are aware that they can take several actions to protect the environment, this being the first step towards tourism sustainable development. When asked "What measures have you taken to implement sustainable development?", 90% of the subjects responded that one of the measures taken is tourists information about environmental value and quality. This measure is followed according to the responses by the establishment of good behaviour codes to tourists (50%). The third place is occupied by the increase of the financial and practical contribution to the protection of the protected areas, 10% of respondents indicating this measure.
- to the question "Do you run business with hotels and transporters that actively fight for environment protection?", only 15% of respondents replied that they had business relationships with active companies in environmental protection, 35% responded that they didn't have such partners and the rest of 50% did not know whether or not the partner companies had anything to do with protecting the environment. These responses indirectly demonstrate that tourist agencies' business partners don't have a clear position on the environment and therefore those who design tourist programs do not know the position of their partners.
- as regards the information circulation, we concluded that 96% of the respondents

answered that they did not receive information and advice to protect the local environment. We believe that this result explains the tourism agencies' lack of concern regarding environmental protection and sustainable tourism practice, due to the lack of information.

- to the question "What benefits do you think that promoting sustainable tourism has for a tourism agency?", 90% of the respondents answered that the main advantage was represented by the fact that it attracted more foreign tourists. Respondents considered that foreign tourists were more sensitive to environmental issues than Romanian tourists. Another advantage is that sustainable tourism would bring less conflicts and greater acceptance of the tourism phenomenon from the host population (55%);
- concerning the other pieces of information obtained after having processed the questionnaire, they were scaled with the Likert scale: a score from 2 to -2 for the 5 steps of the scale is given (totally agree, agree, neither, disagree, totally disagree) and then it is multiplied by the frequency of the responses;
- to the question "What do you think about the following statement: sustainable tourism is a priority for Romania?", the score (0.9) shows that those interviewed considered sustainable tourism as a priority;
- to the question no. 7, by the application of the Likert scale, we achieved a score of -0.65, which means that subjects disagree with the statement "tourist agency's customers are increasingly aware of the importance of environment protection and thus, they require ecological products";
- the score obtained to the question "How would you rate the importance that your staff gives to environmental issues?" is of 0.7 showing that respondents agree to

some extent with the attitude shown by agency's staff towards environmental issues. We can say that the attitude of travel agencies' staff towards environmental issues is a positive one;

- to the question no. 9, a score of 1.65 was obtained indicating that respondents fully agree with the statement "a good environmental reputation enhances the company's reputation".

5. Conclusions

- the interviewed subjects agree that sustainable tourism is a priority for Romania, which confirms the hypothesis from which our approach started.
- 91% of our respondents assessed that they could perform a series of actions to protect the environment, meaning that they were aware of their alternatives. Staff's attitude towards environmental issues is a positive one, once again confirming our hypothesis.
- 85% of tourism agencies do not have or know if they have business relationships with companies actively fighting in the environment protection, meaning that hoteliers and transporters do not affect the travel agencies' activity, their concern for environment protection not representing an important criterion in choosing their business partners.
- from the point of view of tourism agents, customers are not interested in the environment, hence they do not influence their opinion in such a direction. Therefore, our hypothesis is once again confirmed.
- in proportion of 90%, tourists information on environment value and quality is used by the respondents as a means of implementing sustainable development. As 50%, they use the establishment of good behaviour codes to the tourists and only as 10%, the increase of the financial and practical

- contribution to the protection of protected areas (hypothesis confirmed).
- 90% of companies' representatives considered that attracting more foreign tourists is the main advantage of sustainable tourism promotion, whereas 55% consider that another advantage is the greater acceptance of the touristic phenomenon by the host population; 30% of respondents believe that a potential benefit for promoting sustainable tourism is the growth of the total number of tourists that the agency would benefit from. Subjects totally agree that good environmental reputation improves the company's image.
 - 96% of tourism agencies do not receive sufficient information about the local environment, so the assumption that travel agencies receive assistance from the county agencies for environmental monitoring and protection is not confirmed.

After the completion of the research, the general conclusions can be drawn: most of tourism agencies are aware of the importance of environment protection and of the benefits of tourism sustainable development, but due to the lack of cohesion with different institutions and governmental bodies involved in environment protection as well as with unselected forward and backward business partners, using criteria so as to ensure sustainability of tourism development, they limit themselves to a general tourist information about the environment without taking into account the specific features of an area or region.

Changing mentalities, opinions and attitudes is also required for the decision-making bodies which must guide themselves in their actions according to the principles of sustainable development. The race towards spectacular and the hope for rapid and huge gains that have destroyed many tourist areas often came in front of these principles.

Moreover, changing mentalities and attitudes is also required for local bodies, municipalities, local councils which should be involved in all the stages of sustainable tourism development, from the tourism potential diagnosis to the development of viable and effective projects.

By changing mentalities, attitudes and behaviours of the entire Romanian tourism system, the present situation may be avoided, we witnessing an exodus of Romanian tourists to resorts in other countries at similar or even lower rates where they are offered superior conditions in terms of accommodation and services.

Change is required at the level of the tourist agencies which could contribute by their promoted offers and by their employees' attitude and behaviour to "educate" tourists in the spirit of sustainable development.

An effective promotional activity to encourage tourists' responsible behaviour towards their relation with the environment and with the host community they interact with during their stay, could bring real benefits both to the visited touristic destinations and to the tourist agencies through a more positive image. At the same time, this change of attitude can also lead, on a medium- and long-term, to the increase of the number of tourists which ask for the tourist agencies' services.

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