

Hrvoje Carić

Perspectives of greening tourism development – the concepts, the policies, the implementation

Abstract

Sustainable tourism is extensively used as a panacea in the tourism discourse; however, there are still many challenges in its communication, understanding and efficient implementation. The work presented here aims to contribute to those issues by presenting the concept of greening tourism. Greening tourism is a response to the questions of competitiveness and ecological sustainability of tourism, but also the policies of United Nations and European Union. Market demands, available support mechanisms and accumulated experience through innovation by various stakeholders illustrate the potential for more systematic implementation of the concept. More so, it is argued that there is an opportunity to increase the multiplying effect to the local, in this case Croatian, economy by implementing the "greening" of tourism, defined as environmentally responsible, ecologically informative and educational. In other words, the greening tourism means smaller ecological footprint, contribution to the nature protection goals, improved competitiveness and market resilience, creation of new business opportunities, incorporating widespread use through EU funds and increasing profits and benefits for the local economy.

Key words: sustainable development; environmental protection; nature conservation; heritage; Croatia

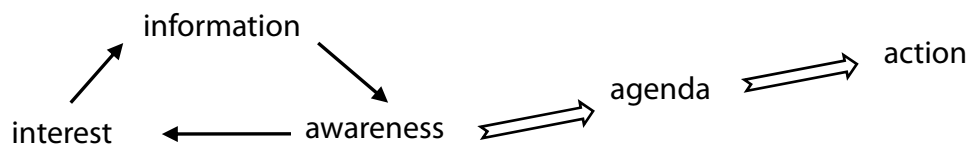
Introduction

After so many decades of sustainability discourse, the greening of tourism seems to be slow, fragmented, and marginal. For example, the "naming game" used in the struggle to distinguishing one's sustainability commitment, or part of it (i.e. focusing on one of the pillars: economy, community, environment) resulted in confusing, often inconsistent and numerous prefixes of initiatives and tourism products and services: eco, nature, rural, alternative, soft, slow, responsible, ethical, pro-poor, green, minimum impact, zero waste, clean/er, eco efficient, community, heritage, local, domestic, quality, etc. With due acknowledgement of tourism providers and destinations that responsibly approached the sustainability tasks, the results were, in general, most often short-lived initiatives, confusion on the demand side, and "green wash" (Carić & Boranić, 2010.). At the same time, academic literature is either arguing inefficiency of large-scale sustainability application in tourism; or illustrating small-scale success case studies with limited methodological contribution for replication.

Regardless on the long presence of sustainability concept and its promotion by leading international institutions and stakeholders, it is still puzzling for professionals, researchers and policy makers how to go about implementing it. Mihalić (2016) argued that there are three requirements or phases in sustainable tourism: the "awareness", "agenda" and "action". Hence, the core of the problem considered here is lack of, or very superficial, "awareness" that results in inefficient "agendas" and "actions". In that sense, the purpose of this paper is to discuss and propose directions and solutions in the form of the greening of tourism approaches and concepts that would provide more clear understanding able to generate the needed change.

Hrvoje Carić, PhD, Institute for tourism, Zagreb, Croatia;
E-mail: hrvoje.caric@iztg.hr

Figure 1
A model for generating change



Source: Adapted from Carić (2009 p. 28); Mihalić (2016. p. 467).

Figure 1 presents a model for generating change that is initiated by an interest and information availability that generate knowledge (i.e. "awareness") that triggers a new cycle for more information on one hand (Carić, 2009, p. 28.) and more concrete action on the other represented here by the triple A model (Mihalić, 2016): awareness – agenda – action. Considering the above, the article is attempting to provide a perspective of greening tourism not only by clarifying the concept (i.e. interest – information - awareness) and depicting current policies behind it (i.e. the "agenda"), but to look into how different sectors in Croatia are approaching the practice (i.e. the "action").

Greening tourism

Tourism is in an entangled relation with environmental sustainability and negative externalities, maybe more so than most of other business sectors. Reason for that is the existence of multiple aspects and levels of interaction such as: destination management quality, different environmental responsibility levels of tourism providers, effectiveness of the formal environmental management systems (for example poor waste management that generate environmental and health risks) and systems in charge of spatial planning and nature conservation.

The most obvious and readily perceived are seasonal and time-location focused pressures of big numbers of tourists on the most attractive, often sensitive, and geographically limited resources. At the same time, the dimensions of anthropogenic pressures are becoming more globalized. Climate change represent the most obvious example with consequences such as warming and sea level rise, invasive species and meteorological anomalies. The new global issues are as significant although less visible, such as acidification of oceans, micro plastics in marine food chains, ship emissions of eco toxic heavy metals, black waters, and underwater noise. There is an obvious dependency of tourism on the quality of the environment. Degraded environment means degraded attractiveness and competitiveness and some of those that contribute negatively are excluded from the causality and its consequences. For example, international shipping and air carriers create negative externalities that, business wise, do not suffer from immediately; more specifically, they do not bare direct consequences from ecosystems they degrade nor climate conditions they alter. Therefore it is important to stress at this point that ecological footprint of tourism is to the largest degree related to the transport because the arrival to and from a destination for most of the travel is producing significant air emissions. Most prominent global environmental consequence (and not the only consequence) of this is the climate change, and tourism contribution on the global scale was indicated ten years ago at 5%, out of which 40% belongs to the air travel, 30% to the car travel, and 20% to the accommodation (World Tourism Organization [UNWTO] & United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], 2008). When the growth of tourism in the last decade is considerate along with the new trends, such as environmentally intensive cruise tourism, it is obvious that the environmental aspects define the tourism of today and tomorrow.

It might be safe to assume that underneath those environmental problems is the growth paradigm. In the era of a sluggish economics that hit Adriatic – Ionian region in particular, the growth paradigm is rarely, if at all, challenged. This growth paradigm is advocated especially strongly by the construction lobby who has a vested interest in the construction of apartments for holiday markets. The phenomenon is so strong that in Croatia it has become known as "apartmentization" or, in other words, the consumption of space (most often on the narrow and limited coastal strip) rooted in the idea of "never-ending" development. This growth-focused mindset is aggressively resisting discussions of how much the tourism is enough for a destination or what is the optimal for a specific context. Environmental footprint of a destination depends on its capacities to deal with environmental impacts. The way an administration manages waste, waste waters, energy and water consumption, define not only the environmental sustainability but market competitiveness as well.

Tourism's contribution to the global and EU BDP is around 5% (UNEP & UNWTO, 2012; European Commission [EC], 2010) while in Croatia the contribution is surpassing 10% with the cumulative impact of 14,3% (Institute for Tourism, 2014), indicating systemic problems in the Croatian economy. Considering this leading position of tourism the article is focused on the following questions: how to make it environmentally sustainable by decreasing its ecological footprint; how to make it more competitive with products and services that are based on the key attractors – natural heritage and preserved landscape? These questions are tightly linked to the economic sustainability because, by advancing environmental and societal sustainability, ground is created for strengthening local economy. Next paragraph is investigating sustainability policies that should address those issues and enable greening of tourism development.

The sustainability concept in the green policies

Relevance of the sustainable development concept is related to its practical implementation. There cannot be efficient application without informed management based on monitoring of exact parameters and indicators. Existing use of the Brundtland sustainability definition (World Commission on Environment and Development [WCED], 1987) in the environmental, nature conservation and tourism policies have not produced significant change in practice. The concept of sustainability as proposed by Brundtland's report would be more practical if it was based on more tangible indicators, rather than broad, general formulations. Foremost, the term "needs" remains illusive in the practical sense considering that the needs of today are shaped by the consumerism doctrine, i.e. ever increasing spending, while the needs of "future generations" remain unfathomable and ignored. Therefore, Carić (2015) proposed that sustainable development definition needs to include a proposition that consumption should not surpass the regeneration or production: *consumption < production* ⇔ *sustainability*.

Such an approach calls for identification of indicators and parameters for an informed decision making. These indicators need to include different sectors and disciplines, as the backbone of efficient management for sustainability. To this end, the European Commission has developed "ETIS - European Tourism Indicators System for Sustainable Destination Management" (EC, 2016) that is encompassing four areas: destination management, economic value, social and cultural impact, environmental impact. This EU policy direction is a result of the formal processes dating back to 2007's Treaty of Lisbon, article 195, where it is stated that the EU shall promote competitiveness of European tourism. The EU Policy Framework "Europe, the world's No 1 tourist destination - a new political framework for tourism in Europe" (EC, 2010) emphasizes promoting: development of a sustainable, responsible, and high quality tourism; image of Europe as a group of sustainable, high quality destinations; and

competitiveness of European tourism in the correlation to sustainability of natural and cultural environments and local community. In addition, the 7th Environment Action Programme "Living well, within the limits of our planet" of 2013 have declared important objectives and issues that resonate with the issues discussed here: natural capital; resource-efficient, green and low-carbon economy and sustainable cities; safeguarding from environmental risks; knowledge and evidence base policy making; environmental externalities and international environmental challenges (EC, 2013). Implementation of EU environmental policies is relying, among others, on the concepts of circular economy, green infrastructure and ecosystem services aimed at decreasing pressures but also protecting the potential to develop green economy (EC, 2015). Initiatives and tools for greening of tourism are visible and diverse sources of funding are available to support Commission's intentions, such as the *Guide on EU Funding for the Tourism Sector* (EC, 2014).

For the last two decades, international organizations and initiatives have been promoting tourism sustainability globally. For example, in 2001 the UN General Assembly of 2001 have inaugurated Global Code of Ethics for Tourism aiming to bring attention to the need to decrease negative tourism impacts and strengthen tourism's contribution to environmental, social and local economic sustainability (UNWTO, 2001a). United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) have continuously implemented activities that further the tourism sustainability issues raised by the Code with publications that consider variety of themes such as local authorities (UNWTO, 1998); protected areas management (Eagles, McCool & Haynes, 2002; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2014; International Union for Conservation of Nature [IUCN], 2015); ecotourism case studies (UNWTO, 2001b; UNWTO, 2003); indicators for destinations, hotels and tour operators (UNWTO, 2004; Global Sustainable Tourism Council [GSTC], 2013b; GSTC, 2013a); and green economy opportunities in tourism (UNEP & UNWTO, 2012).

Based on the above mentioned and other activities aimed to direct and steer tourism toward sustainability United Nations have declared 2017 the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development and put attention on tourism's links to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Millennium Sustainable Development Goals (UNWTO, 2015a, b). There are several goals of the 2030 Agenda that tourism can make a significant contribution (UN General Assembly, 2015): decent work and economic growth (Goal 8); responsible consumption and production (Goal 12); conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development (Goal 14). It can be concluded that UN is considering issues of tourism and sustainability to be of global relevance and significance.

In the Croatian context, strategic documents such as Spatial Development Strategy 2030, Nature Protection Strategy and Action Plan and Tourism Development Strategy 2020, promote responsible, green, and sustainable tourism development. However, the analysis of the legislative implementation, which was recently adopted as the standard practice of the State Audit Office, looked into the impact of the tourism strategy and concluded that there is a need for more consistent and efficient delivery (RH DUR, 2016).

In respect to the environmental sustainability, the National Environmental Action Plan (official gazette NN 46/02, 78/15) audit reports warn that more systematic approach in destination management is needed. This corresponds to the goals of the Tourism Development Strategy 2020 and political initiatives that advocate transformation of the tourism board system into destination management system that could then work on existing platforms such as the European Tourism Indicators System for sustainable destination management (ETIS). It is important to stress here that there are only a handful of attempts to measure environmental impacts of tourism in Croatia. Besides above-mentioned general

environmental assessments by the Croatian Environmental Protection Agency (tourism indicators are only partially monitored) and focused and limited scientific analysis (Carić 2010, 2016; Carić & Mackelworth, 2015), there was no attempt to produce strategic environmental impact assessment that would detect pressures and evaluate consequences based on which a guidelines to the Croatian tourism environmental sustainability.

"Green" foundations of Croatian tourism

Experience economy discourse is shaping trends over the last couple of decades. In tourism, it is observed through the prism of the "new tourist" who is buyer of new life experiences, stories, physically and intellectually active, willing to participate, inclined toward the travels that would contribute to his/her personal growth. New tourist represents significant segment actively advocating sustainability and is willing to choose tourism destinations and products that consider sustainability standards.

Experience of nature is the most important tourism attractor as indicated by, both, international and Croatian surveys. UNWTO reports on quality of nature and landscapes as being amongst most important motivational factors in international travels, while visiting nature attractions motivates 20% arrivals to Croatia and related satisfaction with nature is amongst highest rated (Institute for Tourism, 2017).

Biological and landscape diversity are the foundations of Croatian tourism attractiveness and its comparative advantage on the global market. Only few countries in Europe have more than two biogeographic regions, while Croatia has four. Besides that, Croatia has, in spite of its relatively small area, sixteen different landscape types, is third in Europe in number of plant species, and third in fish species in Mediterranean (Ozimec, 2014). Nature protection area take almost 9% of total area (12.25% of land and 1.94% of territorial sea), while Natura 2000 ecological network encompasses 36.53% of territory which is double the EU 28 average (Državni zavod za zaštitu prirode [DZZP], 2016).

Synergistic practices of humans with nature are present in different models and methodologies such as UNESCO MAB – man and biosphere program, ecosystem services, citizen science, green and traditional building, agro-biodiversity, permaculture, bio dynamic and ecological agriculture etc. These all can be used for development of tourism products and services, especially in the domain of interpretation and education of importance of species and habitats or traditional heritage (agriculture, building, lifestyle, etc.).

According to the latest research on motivation, activities, satisfaction and spending of tourists in summer period in coastal regions (Institute for tourism, 2017), visitors express least satisfaction with culture, entertainment, shopping and sport. This reaffirms the need to develop innovative products and services to match the existing demand for natural, traditional, historic and archeological heritage.

Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant demand for green tourism as environmentally responsible and ecologically informative, coupled with a need for decreasing tourism environmental pressure. At the same time, green tourism will achieve financial savings through optimizing systems and processes of waste management, energy efficiency, water consumption, and wastewater management. There is also significant potential and need to develop new heritage based products and services that are built upon existing local resources and inform and educate on the key heritage values. The next paragraph will discuss challenges and possibilities of implementing green tourism concept through illustrations of existing practices.

Concept and the practice of green tourism development

"Greening" of tourism is necessity that can make tourism more competitive, enable innovations, applications of advances solutions, employment, and increase tourism income within the Croatian economic system. Therefore tourism must become the key part of green and circular economy concept that is advocated by EU and UNWTO (EC, 2015; Vella, 2016) by the means of placing in the focus the decrease of ecological footprint (emissions and pollution, consumption of water, energy and other resources) and goals of protection and tourism affirmation of nature, tradition, and cultural heritage. In short, green tourism is environmentally responsible, ecologically informative and educational.

More concretely, green tourism development requires continuous and systematical measures and analysis of the impact of tourism activities in order to avoid, decrease, or mitigate negative environmental impacts. The improvements of environmental sustainability of tourism encompasses different levels, from destinations to service/goods providers and most of all planning and legislative processes. Furthermore, green tourism development assumes quality and competitive tourism product based on the heritage and presence in all relevant types and aspects of tourism within or outside protected areas. In Croatia there are activities on different levels that apply and promote the concept of green tourism (or greening of tourism). Below are examples of different levels and fields, from policy right through to those directed to science - research, local, and activist contexts.

Example of integrating green tourism concept in the policy

Between 2000 – 2015, the Croatian Ministry of Tourism have financed over one hundred smaller projects related to the natural heritage to the value of 8.5 million Kuna (cca. 1.2 mil. Euro). This effort was continued in 2016 with the Action Plan for Green Tourism Development intended to create synergy with different sectors (for example waste, energy, nature protection, water management, spatial planning, traffic, etc.). Action plan was designed on the premise that the green tourism can lead the way to the much needed transition to the green and circular economy and have defined three groups of activities for achieving environmental sustainability and valuing natural heritage: partnership and capacity development, support, and managing green tourism development. The following is a review of activities of the action plan (Ministry of tourism, 2016 p. 24, 58):

1. Partnership and capacity development

- stakeholder informing and awareness raising on sustainable tourism practices;
- exchange of experiences and knowledge through networking and platforms;
- local partnerships for mobilizing private and civil sectors aiming to raise quality and diversity of tourism offer;
- development of capacities for planning and development of tourism based on the natural heritage;

2. Support

- sustainable use of nature heritage in tourism so all stakeholders (business, visitors, community) could benefit;
- state of the art interpretation of traditional heritage of rural areas through wider promotion of local heritage concepts such as eco museums;
- green certification in tourism – as the market instrument and the framework for systemic improvements of business practice;

- investments in the development of necessary tourist and communal infrastructure that will ensure successful interpretation of the heritage and its preservation from the unwanted tourism impacts;
- promoting sustainability on the destination and local community level;

3. Management

- monitoring, measuring and improving environmental sustainability of tourism on the levels of destinations and regions;
- monitoring, measuring and improving use of nature heritage in tourism;
- standardizing quality, tourism products networking and promotion on the designated markets;
- promotion of green tourism offer.

Example of broad scale infrastructure setup of for nature heritage interpretation

EU Natura 2000 Integration Project (NIP) goals were: (i) providing support for nature conservation institutions (in charge of national parks, nature parks and county level protected areas) in implementing goals of European ecological network NATURA 2000; (ii) strengthening capacities for monitoring state of biodiversity and reporting according to the EU requirements; (iii) involving wider group of stakeholders in the process of managing Natura 2000 network. During the period of 2011 – 2016 most significant portion of the funds were allocated for infrastructure (visitor centers, educational trails, information and interpretation platforms, etc.) that enable quality understanding of nature heritage (Ministry of Environment, 2016).

Example of destination management based on the sustainability indicators

In 2014 Mali Lošinj have joined the group of around hundred European destinations in the EC pilot activity of establishing ETIS system and received in 2016 an awarded Sustainable and Responsible Management of Destination. In the process of establishing tourism sustainability indicators Mali Lošinj build upon 27 obligatory and 40 tentative indicators and accumulated total of 130. The destination management plans are to improve the system of monitoring, improve the indicators (especially those authentic for the destination) and continue the work through NECSTour - The Network of European Regions for Competitive and Sustainable Tourism.

Example of a small family hotel environmental sustainability

Hotel Vila Dvor Omiš is composting biodegradable waste and produce approximately 2,000 liters of humus annually that is used in the hotel's vegetable garden. Water savings realized back in 2007 have realized decrease of water consumption by 30% and the current indicator is 228 liters per overnight (including restaurant and laundry). Besides optimal use of insulation and sensors, hotel is being cooled with the heat exchange system that uses nearby river Cetina. Electric energy is produced with the 24 kW photovoltaic system of and warm water is produced by 5 kW solar water heating system, making the carbon footprint savings of 30.8 tons of CO₂ a year (estimate by SolarLog). In 2012 elevator was enabled with 3.9 kW electric energy production (during the decent) making the annual production of cca 60 kWh. Čurlin family, who is managing the hotel and participated in the design of the above, represents almost ideal example for all accommodations types (hotels, private apartments and houses). It can serve as the model for decreasing ecological footprint that simultaneously generates financial savings.

Tourism carrying capacity

Carrying capacity analysis are crucial for picturing more precisely risks and deliberating development and management options, especially in nature protection sites. From that perspective research community conducts various activities and projects out of which are the most visible those of Institute for tourism (island of Vis, Dubrovnik, Bol, Crikvenica, Kamenjak, Split-Dalmatia County), Archeological faculty (island of Mljet, Dubrovnik, National Park Plitvice lakes) and Institute Ruđer Bošković (National Park Krka and Nature Park Telašćica). The carrying capacity research take under consideration aspects of: visitor crowding perception in correlation to the recreation activities, satisfaction, motivation and spending; environmental risks; ecosystem services and spatial planning parameters and indicators.

Civic society as the promoter of sustainability and public interest

Across Europe civic society is active as an advocate and safeguard of public interest and resources but also as tourism innovator. There are number of projects where nature and traditional heritages are sustainably utilized and here are presented those that on the basis of their long term effort and credibility create added value contents and protect key values.

Eco center Zlatna Greda was established in 2003 and was made fully operational in 2015 by Green Osijek NGO and year later a tourist agency was established to offer ecotourism and nature based educational programs that operates under social entrepreneurialship principles. The house has the 46 bed accommodation and restaurant. It hosts the first adrenalin park in the region with a picnic site. Uniqueness of the offer is based on the lesser known and unchartered locations of northern Nature Park Kopački rit, Danube flooded forests, and activities that combine ecology, education, adventure and divertissement (canoeing, hiking, photo safari, bird watching, adrenalin park, gastronomy).

Blue World Institute (BWI) is conducting of activities related to research and protection of bottlenose dolphins conducted through decades long Adriatic Dolphin Project, marine environment education, and first Marine Educational Centre. Besides lecturing, public events, publications, exhibitions, etc., BWI develops and implements innovative methods of public participation in environmental and endangered species protection through citizen science models – development of web platforms for smart phones by which citizens and tourist can report their sightings of individual species and inform themselves on values and importance of the sea ecology.

It is becoming more visible in Croatia the importance of civic initiatives in advocating transparency of governance in planning and decision-making processes but also contributing to better protection of resources and public interest through juridical mechanisms. Maybe the most visible, in the recent period, were the recent achievements of the Srđ is ours initiative and Green Action NGO that have via public advocacy campaigns tackled the importance of standing up to the development projects that have no clear purpose of contributing to the sustainability of local economy and community. Furthermore, through legal mechanisms they managed to successfully litigate prevention of mass tourism projects that were based on illegal rescripts: spatial plan manipulations, environmental impact assessment, and building permits. This represents important example (even precedent) for all that deal with public interests and resources in Croatian context because it stresses significance of civic activism use in synergy with informed use of legal mechanisms.

Conclusion

This article emphasizes the need for continuous improvement of all elements necessary for application of sustainable, responsible, "greener" tourism. As it is illustrated by examples, sustainable development

in tourism practices, and beyond, makes sense only if all three components of sustainability will be clearly synchronized, empowered and represented. In order to spark and aid wider awareness it is necessary to communicate more clearly the purpose of sustainability but also its role in greening of tourism. Sustainable development in tourism practice should communicate simply and clearly – what is not good for the environment and local community, is not good for tourism; or how much tourism is enough for sustainability?

Greening of tourism in the Croatian context should consider three key priorities:

- (1) increasing the multiplying factor of tourism for Croatian economy with application of the concepts of green and circular economy, hence the green tourism concept;
- (2) diminishing the ecological footprint because it is simultaneously environmentally sustainable and cost-efficient
- (3) developing innovative products and services based on the heritage values (nature, tradition, culture, history, architecture, archeology) can:
 - be very competitive on the market
 - contribute to the goals of nature and environmental protection
 - contribute to the sustainability of local communities
 - find contribute through EU funds and create new business opportunities.

Although the above priorities can be seen in the strategic and legislative documents but also with other key stakeholders (administration, destinations and sights, academia, civic and business initiatives) there is still a need to work on the implementation of continual improvement mechanisms. At last it can be concluded that there is human capital that can carry out the green agendas horizontally and vertically, but also that decision and policy makers must find the mechanisms for motivating, supporting, frame-working and most of all protecting from un-transparent and particular interest.

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