



Ecotourism and Sustainability in Environmentally Fragile Poor Areas: a Case Study in Prespa Park

(Resource ID: 299)

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This teaching resource is allocated to following University:

AUT - Agricultural University of Tirana

Institution:

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<http://www.sustainicum.at/en/modules/view/299.Ecotourism-and-Sustainability-in-Environmentally-Fragile-Poor-Areas-a-Case-Study-in-Prespa-Park>



Individual work
Group work



11 to 30
students



up to 1 semester



English, Shqip

Please note: module with excess length - more than 7 lecture units required!



The aim of this learning material is to: provide a synopsis of the current issues facing ecotourism in AL-Prespa; analyze the potential of ecotourism as a strategy for sustainable development, and to suggest ways to improve current ecotourism practices and policies. It argues and concludes that if ecotourism is properly developed it can not only attract tourists, but can also generate more revenue

for the inhabitants of the region, and that environmental protection rather than economic growth is of vital importance in nature-society interactions in environmentally fragile poor areas.

Introduction

Commonly cited, ecotourism is travel to fragile, pristine, and usually protected in order to understand local culture and natural history with safety measures in place that minimize negative impacts on the ecosystems and on the local cultures areas. Emphasis is commonly placed on the responsibility to promote and ensure conservation of the natural environment, promote the economic welfare and minimize adverse socio-cultural impacts arising from contact between visitors and residents. The promotion of ecotourism in AL-Prespa, is essential for the economic development of the area and the preservation of its historical, cultural and ecological identity. Ecotourism must account for environmental, social, and economic implications, in order to succeed.

Environmental Sustainability

Sustainable environmental practices reduce or eliminate damage to natural ecosystems (flora, fauna, air, water, soil) while also providing benefits to the natural environment (conservation, protection, enhancement of visible landscape). Given that ecotourism can generate some negative environmental impacts in AL-Prespa, some activities contributing directly to the conservation of natural areas are as follows: conducting environmental impact assessments; using no pesticides; using renewable energy; habitat re-generation programmes with local communities; designating certain proportion of the company income for conservation purposes, or charging extra fees to tourists for conservation etc.

Social Sustainability

It has been argued that the most significant problems resulting from increased tourism are its socio-cultural impacts. So, social sustainability is necessary to educate and create awareness among stakeholders, like local communities and entrepreneurs, on how to implement social sustainable strategies and the importance of such development. Sustainable social practices do not harm the social structure of the local community or the cultural heritage of the destination. Practices such as using products/services purchased locally, tourists being informed of ways to minimize their negative impact on a local community/lifestyle prior to visiting, provide multiple socio-cultural benefits. Such benefits include

provision of opportunities for access to resources, awareness of local culture and host community, and empowerment of local communities in decision-making. In all cases cultural activities in AL-Prespa are carried out with the active involvement of host populations.

Economic Sustainability

Sustainable economic practices continue to provide economic returns for the long term (e.g., financial or in-kind contributions to reduce visitor impacts, donation or sponsorship for conservation/community initiatives, provision of training and employment for local residents). Such financial profits benefit the owners of the operation as well as employees and community members. Ecotourism in this area also provides a number of economic benefits. Ecotourism is not only an important source of revenue, but also it plays a dominant role as a driver for economic development. Ecotourism in AL-Prespa is also seen as an important instrument to ensure economic development and has the potential to improve the living conditions of poor rural communities. The community benefits in AL-Prespa are secured directly through employment for related services, and indirectly through the use of local services, the purchase of local goods and crafts, and contributing to local infrastructure development.

Teaching Tools & Methods



Mini-project



Written material



Video

Integration of Social Stakeholders

The ways that main stakeholders (ecotourism organizations, tourism entrepreneurs, tourists, protected area managers, environmental NGOs, local and regional authorities, development agencies and social partners working or no in the field of ecotourism and sustainable tourism) are integrated in the teaching resource process, are as follows:

- Participating actively with others partners who operate in AL-Prespa community in a SWOT analysis for identifying the strengths and weakness, opportunities and threats, and proposing guidelines and strategies for ecotourism development in AL-Prespa,
- Participating actively in a field survey and a set of interviews to examine

the relationship between ecotourism practices/activities and sustainability,

- Developing a workshop held with local community members and scientists, and local experts related to ecotourism in AL-Prespa with a set of practices/activities and aggregating them into three groups on the basis of their environmental, social and economic sustainability context,
- Ranking the practices/activities in lessons with students where they are involved. For this reason, in each lesson, according to their topics, stakeholders are invited to share and discuss their opinion and experience with students in order to get feedback and reach a consensus on each discussed problem.

Strength

- It actively involves the students applying their learned theoretical and methodological skills on the topic
- It emphasizes the role of ecotourism in expanding support for protected areas,
- It helps with the building of a new partnership between business interests and the protected area
- It promotes positive environmental ethics and fosters "preferred" behavior in its participants
- It is oriented around the environment in question and not around man,
- It concentrates on intrinsic rather than extrinsic values,
- It involves considerable preparation and demands in-depth knowledge on the part of the students into the problem solving process which requires thoughtful and creative decision-making
- It provides the students with a synopsis of the current issues facing ecotourism in environmentally fragile poor areas to critically examine the impacts and challenges of ecotourism; to analyse the potential of ecotourism in an environmentally fragile poor areas as a strategy for sustainable development, and to suggest ways to improve its current ecotourism practices and policies.

Weakness

- Occasional issues of confidentiality,
- Lack of information needed to pay attention to the environmental management of ecotourism
- Lack of information on the need to balance the development of tourist assets with conservation of the very values that attract visitors; a produced-oriented approach for identifying the products of value to the tourist and then marketing them

- Lack of information on a mutually beneficial symbolic relationship between those responsible for tourism and those responsible for conservation of the environment
- Lack of information on community-based management of the case study area,
- Stakeholders are not directly involved to discuss their achievements, findings, recommendations etc. with students.

Learning Outcomes

After completing this teaching resource, the participants should be able to:

- promote environment protection, provide environmental education, conserve local plants and wildlife, increase public environmental consciousness, foster healthy attitude and behavior towards nature, encourage donations to contribute to protection of local natural resources
- promote active participation, enhance intercultural appreciation and communication between host communities and tourists, foster socio-cultural respect (e.g., education to raise awareness), understand and provide information to tourists about the environmental and cultural impacts that may occur and minimization of impacts, provide aesthetic/spiritual enjoyment for residents and tourists,
- contribute to lasting local economic development, retain the earned profits within local communities, promote consumption and production, finance the establishment and maintenance of the protected area, and use natural resources efficiently,
- analyze the potential of ecotourism in AL-Prespa as a strategy for sustainable development, and suggest ways to improve current ecotourism practices/activities for AL-Prespa.

Relevance for Sustainability

The relevance for sustainability of this teaching resource is linked with the fact that ecotourism is seen as activity:

- Focusing primarily on the natural environment as the attraction contributing actively to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, and improving the well-being of local people
- Generating economic benefits for local communities, organizations and authorities managing natural areas, providing alternative employment and income opportunities, financial benefits and empowerment for local people,
- Encouraging community empowerment through participation of local

communities in its planning, development and operation, and contributing to their well-being

–Promoting cultural education and awareness through building environmental and cultural awareness and respect, interpreting the natural and cultural heritage of the destination to visitors, providing positive experiences for both visitors and hosts.

Related Teaching Resources

No specific previous knowledge / related resources required

Preparation Efforts

High

Preparation Efforts Description

Preparation time: 4 x 11 hours (= 44 hours in total!) –Identification of fragile poor areas that are seeking to develop ecotourism, –Gathering, processing and analyzing the required data on social, economic and biophysical background of case study, –Organization of site visits scheduled for a) literature survey, b) field survey, c) seminars and workshops, d) presentation of results and recommendations.

Access

Free

Assessment

Case study teaching can be accessed through multiple assignments, such as presentations, project reports, or contributions to discussions. The following questions will be of relevance:

- Have students understood the case challenges?
- Are students able to apply their learning?
- Are students actively engaged in team work and can they successfully contribute to the decision-making?

Credit/Certification Description

N/a

Sources and Links

<http://www.prespanationalpark.gov.al>

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