

ALTERNATIVE TOURISM AS A DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Yrd. Doç. Dr. Yüksel ÖZTÜRK*

ABSTRACT

Alternative tourism is the 'new way of thinking' within tourism planning. It implies an indigenous and integrated approach based on the principles of a sustainable development. It has been heavily criticised, for instance as being a small-scale solution to a large-scale problem. Moreover, many authors see it as an idealistic contribution. This paper discusses its relevancy as a development strategy in developing countries. It is concluded that the choice of strategy is a complex one with many constraints. Serious limitations such as lack of capital and expertise, may take the invitation of international tour operators the only development option. Therefore, the tour operators have the best powers of negotiation, and thereby restricting the government's ability to determine development strategy. Alternative tourism requires a controlled, considerate, regulated and slow/thoughtful process - factors that often do not coincide with the tour operators commercial motives.

Key Words: Alternative tourism, developing countries, tourism development, tourism policies.

GELİŞMEKTE OLAN ÜLKELER İÇİN BİR GELİŞME STRATEJİSİ OLARAK ALTERNATİF TURİZM

ÖZET

Turizm planlamasında alternatif turizm yeni bir düşünce olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. Birçok noktadan tartışılmasına rağmen alternatif turizmi uygulamanın çok zor olduğu yolunda fikirler öne sürülmektedir. Bu makalede, gelişmekte olan ülkeler için bir gelişme stratejisi olarak alternatif turizmin uygulanabilirliği tartışılmıştır. Sonuç olarak ortaya çıkan, turizmi geliştirme stratejisinin karmaşık ve belirsizliklerle doludur. Gelişmekte olan ülkeler turizmlerini geliştirmek için ciddi problemlerle karşı karşıya gelmektedirler. Bu problemlerin basında da yabancı tur operatörlerinin pazarlık gücü ortaya çıkmakta, ayrıca tur operatörlerinin gelişmekte olan ülkelerin turizmlerini yönlendirmelerinde de etkili olmaktadır. Alternatif turizmin hedefi

Gazi University, Faculty of Commerce and Tourism Education Besevler-Ankara

turizmin gelişimini kontrol altında, yavaş, çevreyi dikkate alan bir gelişme stratejisi göstermekle beraber bu hedefler çoğu zaman tur operatörlerinin ticari amaçlarına uymamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Alternatif turizm, gelişmekte olan ülkeler, turizm gelişmesi, turizm politikaları.

1. INTRODUCTION

Green, soft, appropriate, small-scaled, sustainable and alternative is all expressions used to describe the latest direction of the tourism development theory. The theory emerged as a reaction to the double edged effect of the tourism industry displayed in the 1970s and 1980s. It represented something new since it sought to bring economic objectives in harmony with the conservation of resources and environmental, social, cultural values.

At the end of the last decade a new 'way of thinking' could be observed. The 'Brundtland report' (UN Commission on the Environment and Development, Our Common Future) was published. As a product of its time, it made an important contribution to the rising need for a global strategy to address environmental issues. In the report, the importance of arriving at a sustainable development was stressed that meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (1). This type of thinking is at the heart of alternative tourism. Alternative tourism implies an indigenous and integrated development. Moreover, soft tourism has been defined as; guaranteed optimal satisfaction of the different kinds of tourism demand for people of all classes within the framework of efficient tourism facilities and in an unspoilt environment, consideration given to the interest of the local population (2).

A diagram can perhaps most easily display the differences between hard (mass) and soft (alternative) tourism (See Table 1).

2. CRITICISM OF ALTERNATIVE TOURISM

Alternative tourism, claiming to be a better way of organising tourism, has been seriously criticised. The volume itself has been seen to be the problem. Indeed alternative tourism was an attempt to solve the negative impacts accruing from large-scaled tourism. It can be argued that the solution offered; small-scaled and gradual development, will not solve the problem of volume (3), and, as the factors causing the growth (rising disposable income, increasing urban population and reduced working hours) continue to develop, the global volume of tourists will become a more serious problem in the future.

Table 1 Differences Between Mass and Alternative Tourism

MASS TOURISM	İOFT TOURISM
Inconsiderate	Considerate
Offensive	Defensive
Aggressive	Cautious
Fast/impetuous	Slow/thoughtful
Long strides	Short steps
Unchecked	Controlled
Unregulated	Regulated
Maximal	Optimal
Excessive	Moderate
Short term	Long term
Particular interest	General interest
Outside control	Self-determination
Least resistance	Greatest resistance
Sector-based	Entirety-based
Price-conscious	Value-conscious
Quantitative	Qualitative
Growth	Development

Source: (2)

One problem is that small-scale tourism in most cases also refers to small-scaled economic benefits. It is often the prospects of economic benefits that initiates development of tourism. To find the carrying capacity, a set of comparisons has to be made. Measuring intangible variables is both complex and difficult. It has been

presumed that mass tourism does most damage, however even the best managed and planned development can originate hostility. Harrison (4) points out that increased scale alone might be a poor indicator of economic, social or cultural changes in societies affected by tourism.

3. SPECIAL PROBLEMS FACED BY LESS DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

The main concern/objectives of many Less Developed Countries (LDCs) are economic development and independence. It is important to note that the LDCs' economic structures are often an inheritance from imperialistic domination (5). They are often producers of raw materials, which is a victim to strong fluctuations in the world price and trade barriers imposed by the developed countries.

Most LDCs have big foreign debts that have to be paid back in 'hard' currencies, nevertheless capital is a scarce resource. The LDCs are therefore in desperate need for development that can produce foreign exchange earnings. Tourism can be seen very attractive in this respect, firstly, as tourism is not subject to trade barriers, and secondly, because it is one possibility for a country with very limited export options.

In addition, LDCs are faced with several constraints in trying to develop tourism. Since they lack the basic inputs: capital, technology, expertise, infrastructure, experience, information etc., they will not be able to enter the international market. This leaves them with two possibilities. The first one is trying to develop the necessary inputs within the country, and the second one is attracting international tour operators and foreign investors.

It is logical that multinational companies to operate on a commercial basis, and will not involve themselves unless there are profit possibilities to be made. It should be kept in mind that international tour operators are the interpreters and co-ordinators of tourist demand (6) and this gives them tremendous power within the international system. Furthermore, international tour operators are key operators in

the system since they possess; an international distribution system, market connections, market 'know-how', control over tourism flows, marketing skills, financial resources, established image and reputation. These are the reasons why international tourism, consisting of homogeneous products in a competitive market, is dominated by multinational companies with headquarters in developed countries.

In practice, the LDCs can not influence international tour operators in any major way. The LDCs need capital which is not easy to obtain. The tourism industry is very competitive and tour operators can always go elsewhere. Therefore, the question for many LDCs is whether or not tourism is a viable option. A decision to attract foreign companies to develop the tourism sector will have severe political implications. It causes dependency and a situation where a major part of the economy is run by commercial multinational enterprises.

4. ALTERNATIVE TOURISM -IS IT A TOURISM DEVELOPMENT OPTION?

Most governments promote tourism since they want to obtain foreign exchange earnings, create employment opportunities, attract development capital and achieve economic independence. Can alternative tourism as a development strategy fulfil these objectives? LDCs have to take their policy decisions within the constraints of the international tourism system. Does this leave them any real options to choose what strategy to follow?

Host countries must realize that, when satisfying international demand, there are many other priorities to consider. Jenkins (7) points out that any country seeking establish an international tourism sector might have to give precedence to the priorities of the foreign visitor. If the country chooses an alternative tourism strategy, because it wants to retain as much as possible in the country, it would have to control the development. The problem is that international tour operators do not have to accept the terms, and as Wheeler (3) argues that tour operators have the

strongest bargaining power of the two. An example of this can be taken from Costa Rica where a rise in the fee to enter the Tortuguero National Park was planned since much money was needed for conservation purposes. The tour operators responded by considering a boycott in protest to the increased fee (8). Moreover, the hotel sectors in Kenya and Tanzania are another example displaying the consequences of differentiating policy choices. Kenya has an 'open door' policy toward foreign investments, while Tanzania encourages domestic ownership but with a number of management contracts with foreigners. The result is that Tanzania holds a higher percentage of profit, on the other hand a lower level of tourism revenue due to the inability of providing the required international standard (4).

An additional argument is that the same high quality infrastructure and superstructure are needed to develop both alternative and mass tourism. Therefore, the need for capital input in the infant stages is almost the same, but with the small volume of alternative tourism the economic benefits are bound to be less than with the economies of scale associated with mass tourism, and still the investments would have to be paid off.

5. SOLUTIONS?

Different strategic plans and policies are needed at different development stages. Could alternative tourism be an option at one of these stages? Would it be possible to introduce alternative tourism when the destination has become more established, the local economy more mature and the country therefore with more negotiating power? Is it possible to convert the situations?

Turkey is an interesting example. Turkish tourism was developed in the 1980s with the help of foreign investors and marketed as a cheap mass tourism destination. Not surprisingly the unplanned development has outcome in negative effects on culture and environment. Recently, an initiative has been taken by the Turkish government towards a more planned and responsible development. Criteria

for licences have been set, two-way communication with the international tour operators sought and integrated planning of the industry implemented.

The change of attitude and environmental awareness within the population of most developed countries are perhaps the best hope for a change. Cooper and Ozdil, (9) expressed that alternative tourism is largely consumer rather than industry driven and may lead to 'politically correct' or acceptable forms of tourism. Tour operators in Turkey are now to a greater extent teaching tourists about the lifestyle and culture of the locals, but not only because tourists want to learn. 'Responsibility' has become a market tool, and perhaps that is the only realistic way of implementing alternative tourism!

6. CONCLUSION

The choice of development strategy is one with political, social, economic, environmental and moral offspring. There is no correct answer, the choice will depend on the country's assets, political systems, size, culture, development stage, external environment and so on. In order to benefit, a tourism policy which incorporates a comprehensive and unified tourism model is necessary (10), but whether this leaves the government the room to choose the tourism policy it wants is another question.

Does the structure of international tourism industry and the problems most LDCs faces give room for alternative tourism as a development strategy? And perhaps more important; is alternative tourism a realistic strategy worth pursuing? Will alternative tourism live up to the expectations of economic prosperity? Can you give control to the local community and still develop economic muscles internationally?

The logical answer is that we cannot have both at the same time. Some organisations like CART (Centre for the Advancement of Responsive Travel) wants

to combine safety and value for visitors, with real and lasting improvements for people in the host country (11).

Alternative tourism has values that are worth adopting, but it is clearly and idealistic solution. In most cases LDCs do not have the powers nor means to implement this ambitious strategy. They are in a terrible dilemma; as long as multinational organisations determine the effective demand, governments will be faced with a dual between dependency, social and political costs on one hand and missed economic opportunities on the other.

Alternative tourism is a positive contribution as a 'way of thinking'. Even more positive is the fact that it seems to be advocated by pressure groups and consumers. To be an environmental company has become more and more important, and the media's influence must not be underestimated.

Whatever point of view is taken on alternative tourism as a realistic development strategy for a country, the decision is still influenced by factors which are exogenous to LDCs.

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