

# INTEGRATED QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN NATIONAL PARKS AS TOURISM PRODUCT

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*Abstract: The management plan aims at becoming a framework for integrating issues connected to nature preservation and protection and those of social and economic development within the national park, as well as triggering a dialogue between the institutions managing the natural and human resources of this area. The management plan of the park is an instrument for determining and presenting all the park policies. Quality needs to be assured all along the tourism chain from first marketing messages through to the provision of accommodation, food, information, orientation. Each one of the ecotouristic products can make an important contribution to the overall level of visitor satisfaction. So it talks about Integrated Quality Management.*

*Key words: management plan, integrated quality management, ecotouristic destination, national parks*

National parks represent a compromise solution between the local actors and the decision-makers at superior levels with the purpose of promoting the socio-economic development in correlation with the principles of environmental protection.

The management plan aims at becoming a framework for integrating issues connected to nature preservation and protection and those of social and economic development within the national park, as well as triggering a dialogue between the institutions managing the natural and human resources of this area.

The park management plan intends to integrate the goals of preservation and protection of natural resources into the preoccupations of local actors and promotion of their common opinion.

The management plan of a national park represents a document co-ordinating and regulating the use of park area resources and the building of the set-ups necessary to the development of human communities and tourism. The management plan also aims at creating an optimum framework for the training of the personnel able to participate in the process of informing the public and local authorities, in order to obtain their permanent co-operation.

The management plans are used in the decision orientation, and in some cases for creating certain multi-task specialised planning teams. They should establish the basis of the park operation as eco-touristic destination

Thus, among the goals of the management plan we may mention:

- Protection and preservation of habitats and species of community and national interests;
- Integration of protection goals of the national park to the central focus of local actors with the observance of the local autonomy;
- Supporting the sustainable development of human collectivities with the observance of the natural and cultural values of the park;
- Promoting the inter-institutional co-operation with the purpose of efficiently solving the problems occurred within the national park area.
- Creating an informational framework for the local population and for their involvement in decision-making.

The management plan of the park is an instrument for determining and presenting all the park policies; it has a comprising character. The plans of the park contain a variety of topics, among which: how to manage tourism, how to reduce the impact and to opportunities to good use. Developing a **tourism plan of the national park, as eco-touristic destination** requires that it should be integrated into other plans for the protected area, such as the management plans of the fauna, area and flora. Although these plans are often

strong points in terms of the way natural resources are managed in the park, they are often weak points also when it comes to describing the touristic goals and the way these goals can be reached. Consequently the issue of tourism in protected areas is very important, to be found in the management plan, in tourism and recreation-oriented policies.

Although one requires a separate plan for tourism in protected areas, its detailing level depends on the complexity of the issues considered. Such a plan may only present in detail the specific touristic management practices to be used, the location facilities, the policies of touristic guiding policies, the level of tariffs for the tourism operations, etc.

The topic can be developed in the future with the help of several specialised plans or strategies with the purpose of managing tourism and recreational activities within the protected area. For instance the visitors' organising plans, the management process of the visitors' activity, the management model of tourism optimising, the limits of an acceptable exchange, the management plan of the visitors' impact.

Due to the complexity of the marketing plan, it is important that the policies and plans be integrated with those at other levels, but the relation between them should be clear, so that all the management actions from different plans be co-ordinated.

Several basic principles that may be used in order to guide the policy of tourism development within the park:

- the natural and cultural environment within the protected area should form the basis for the other values that affect the park and its management. These fundamental aspects should not be neglected;
- tourism in the protected areas depends on maintaining the environment quality at a high level and on the cultural conditions in the area. This is essential in order to support economy and life quality through benefits brought by tourism;
- the management organisms of tourism in protected areas have the role to protect the values for which the area was initially established, but have other purposes also: active management of tourism and tourists, sharing the management responsibilities with the tourism operators, local communities and visitors, providing the opportunities for the economic tourism potential;
- visitors of protected areas hope to find facilities, programmes, opportunities of learning and recreation, but not all requirements can be satisfied, as certain expectations may be incompatible with the park goals and purpose;
- visitors actively search the best quality services they can afford. They do not obligatorily search for the cheapest available opportunities;
- visitors look for diversity in the recreational opportunities they can afford, but not all parks can or should provide any desired service;
- planning should be performed from the inside with the awareness of the regional context of the protected area particulars. This means that different touristic opportunities allowed in other protected areas should consider the tourism requirements and provisions of the neighbouring areas;
- the management process reunites the responsibility of the park managers and of other tour operators.

Another essential aspect when we think of integrated quality management in national parks regarded as eco-destinations refer to **the importance of the services quality.**

Tourists demand more and more quality recreational services and opportunities. Those who benefit from quality services during the working days require the same thing from those who organise their spare time. They want guides who have a lot of knowledge and communication skills, they wish that their hosts make them feel welcome, comfortable and part of the community they visit.

Ecotourism – as a constantly evolving form of tourism – means an increased demand of special recreational and hosting services, all focused on quality. Most park administrations have not set quality goals for those services, they do not have programmes for their monitoring, which casts a shadow of irresponsibility and primitivism on the activities carried on. The managers of protected areas and the representatives of the private sector should offer quality services to visitors, these challenges including a clear establishment of objectives of services quality, programmes for high-quality services providing and

the monitoring of programmes in sites. It is important that this type of sophisticated consumers recognise and appreciate the quality of services, being willing to pay for it.

Providing a quality facility or service for tourists is a fundamental part of developing a sustainable product, especially when dealing with the smaller market segments based on natural heritage.

Quality needs to be assured all along the tourism chain from first marketing messages through to the provision of accommodation, food, information, orientation. Each one of the ecotouristic products can make an important contribution to the overall level of visitor satisfaction.

So it talks about Integrated Quality Management. This approach is based on two key elements: a focus on visitors and the involvement of local people and local tourism business in the management of the destination.

The most obvious way of developing and advertising quality is to set common standards, which are recognised through labels or awards.

Quality standards can be sector specific or generalised, they can be developed locally or form part of national or even international schemes.

Under these circumstances we should refer to the issues connected to the quality strategies in tourism.

For the companies with touristic activities it is not about competition at a local level, but at a regional or global competition. In order to implement a strategy focused on quality we should observe certain *fundamental principles*:

- The close connection between the company and the client lies at the basis of a quality strategy ;
- The company staff should be organised in multi-functional teams oriented towards the client;
- Starting new processes, the necessary procedures in order to fulfil the tasks within the company and results;
- Appealing to the clients in order to know exactly what they expect from the respective company, permanently studying the clients' reaction;
- Employing the best trained personnel and their continuous improvement at the company's expenses;
- The capacity of the firm, of its personnel, to adapt to any new situation occurring within the firm without waiting for guiding lines, the flexibility to act in the right place at the right time;
- A permanent open attitude, a continuous desire of self-improvement from the part of the company's personnel

At present, the tourism companies' managers consider that their main goals consist in improving the quality of touristic products and services they provide. The consumers – tourists will not settle for medium-quality services. For a tourism company intending to remain on the market and to earn profitableness, the unique solution is to adopt the total quality management: „quality is the best insurance policy for clients' fidelity, the most efficient protection against outside competition and the only way to develop and earn profits”.

There is a close connection among the quality of the services provided by a tourism company, the tourist – client's satisfaction and the firm's profitableness. Focusing on the client as the central element, quality represents the ensemble of traits and characteristics of a product or service, consisting in its capacity to satisfy the experimented or implicit needs.

Total quality management is considered at present the most appropriate way to reach the tourist's satisfaction and firm's profitableness. The strategy of quality should be correlated with the permanent reduction of costs.

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