

Sustainable Tourism Development in Evo, Finland

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Introduction

The concept of sustainable development was introduced by the World Commission on Environment and Development in the Brundtland Report in 1987 (1), defining sustainable development as *"development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"*.

Tourism is one of the foremost economic activities around the world, transporting more than 528 million people internationally and generating 322,000 million USD in receipts in 1994. It is a major economic force, generating in 1995 an estimated 3.4 trillion USD in gross output, creating employment for 211.7 million people, producing 10.9% of world gross domestic product, investing 693.9 billion USD in new facilities and equipment, and contributing more than 637 billion USD to global tax revenue (2). The development and management of tourism without damaging the natural and socio-cultural environment is the responsibility of the world-wide tourism industry.

Tourism in Northern Europe is a rapidly developing industry. In 1996, the number of tourist arrivals to Scandinavian countries increased by 10%, which is a significant growth in Europe. The most important tourist attraction of Finland is its beautiful and untouched natural environment and, according to the development strategy of the Finnish Tourist Board, tourism development is planned with the protection of this invaluable asset in view (3), (4).



Tourism and Sustainability

Though the Brundtland report made no special reference to tourism, since its publication, the role of tourism in the process of continuously misusing the Earth's resources has been analysed and the concept of sustainable tourism appeared.

Sustainable tourism has several – often seriously debated – definitions. According to the definition of the Federation of Nature and National Parks, sustainable tourism is *"all forms of tourism development, management and activity that maintain the environmental, social and economic integrity and well-being of natural, built and cultural resources in perpetuity"* (5). A publication by the Tourism Concern and the World Wide Fund for Nature defines sustainable tourism as tourism which *"operates within natural capacities for the regeneration and future productivity of natural resources; recognises the contribution that people and communities, customs and lifestyles, make to the tourism experience; accepts that these people must have an equitable share in the economic benefits of tourism; and is guided by the wishes of local people and communities in the host areas"* (6).

Though the existing definitions usually differ in their focus or level of elaborateness, the main message of the Brundtland Report seems to be more and more accepted by the tourism industry all over the world.



Evo Recreational Area

Evo Recreational Area is located in the Southern part of Finland. Comprising the Forest and Park Service's hiking and nature protection areas, together with the Evo Institute of Forestry's observation forest and the City of Hämeenlinna recreational forest, the whole area (app. 8000 hectares altogether) constitutes the most extensive forest in the most heavily populated part of Finland.

In the area, educational and research activities have played a significant role for more than one hundred years. Finland's forestry training began in Evo in 1862. In recent years, the Institute has concentrated on teaching associated with the multiple use of forests. The latest advancement is the introduction of tourism courses in the educational programme.

In addition to the Institute of Forestry, the Finnish Game and Fisheries Research Institute's research stations carry out important long-term studies on wildlife issues and fish management. Evo's small water bodies and forest ecosystems are research subjects of the University of Helsinki's Lammi Biological Station.

Evo Recreational Area, with its beautiful and varied natural resources, provides excellent opportunities for several forms of tourist and leisure activities, including trekking, biking, hunting, swimming, boating, spoon and fly fishing in one of the well stocked fishing lakes or ice-fishing and cross-country skiing in wintertime. The area attracts thousands of visitors every year, mostly from the neighbouring urban settlements, but also from other parts of Finland and abroad.

In Finland and consequently in Evo Recreational Area, in accordance with ancient Nordic customs and also current statutory law, everyone has the right

- to hike, ski and cycle in the natural environment, but without harming it,
- to pick berries, mushrooms and flowers (apart from protected species),
- to use waterways for boating, swimming and bathing,
- to traverse ice-covered waterways.

Permission is required, if one wishes to pass through yards, fields, meadows and plantations which might suffer damage, and if one wishes to make a fire outdoors. Camping is only allowed at official camping grounds.

One must not

- disturb or damage birds' nests or nestling,
- disturb reindeer,
- fell or damage trees and take dry or fallen wood, brushwood, moss or anything alike from lands owned by other person,
- erect a tent outside an official camping site,
- litter the nature,
- disturb the domestic peace of others,
- drive motor vehicles in the terrain without the permission of the landowner,
- fish or hunt without proper licences. (7)

National visitors of the area are well aware of the above listed rights and responsibilities. International tourists are informed by brochures and by outdoor information boards. Staff controls visitors' behaviour, if necessary, but usually the information provided proves to be successful means to protect the natural environment.



Tourism Development in the Area

Tourism development in the area has several objectives: to utilise the existing potential, to provide better and more comprehensive services to tourists, to diversify the area's profile and to generate additional employment and income for local inhabitants. The process of tourism development is a gradual one, in order to maintain or improve the present quality of the environment and to ensure permanent consensus among the parties concerned (Evo Institute of Forestry, City of Hämeenlinna, research stations, private owners). All the participants of the tourism development process are well aware of the value of natural resources in the area, and with the professional contribution of the Evo Institute of Forestry, the environmental impacts of the development are evaluated before implementation

In the following, tourism development in Evo Area will be analysed on the basis of sustainable tourism guidelines having been developed by The Ecotourism Society and by The Ecotourism Association of Australia (8).

- ***"Sustainable tourism should not degrade the resource and should be developed in an environmentally sound manner."*** The main resource of tourism in Evo is the surrounding natural environment, i.e. the forest. The limited number of visitors, the awareness of the majority of visitors concerning their rights and responsibilities in the nature, together with the permanent control of the staff of the Forest and Park Service and that of the Evo Institute of Forestry ensures that the main resource of tourism is well preserved in the area.
- ***"It should provide first-hand, participatory and enlightening experiences."*** The public access that Finnish customs and law provide for visitors in the area, entitles everyone to explore nature's wonders by themselves. All the forms of tourism – hiking, cycling, fishing, skiing, etc. – require active personal involvement. The limited number of visitors in the widely extended area guarantees the high level of recreational experience.
- ***"Sustainable tourism should involve education among all parties – local communities, government, nongovernmental organisations, industry and tourists (before, during and after the trip)."*** Most of the parties involved in Evo – the Institute of Forestry, the research stations, the Forest and Park Service – are highly qualified in environmental protection. The operation of the Institute of Forestry provides opportunity for further education for all parties involved in environment-related fields, and the introduction of the ecotourism educational programme will extend the expertise of the Institute. Tourists are continuously informed on their rights and responsibilities in nature, both by the Finnish Tourist Board's brochures and by the Forest and Park Service.
- ***"It should encourage all-party recognition of the intrinsic values of the resource."*** In Evo, all parties seem to be aware of the value of the natural environment. The forest is very important to Finns, it is their economic and spiritual support, a part of their heritage, an inseparable part of life. Though it is almost impossible, maybe the obvious enthusiasm of visitors can further increase the recognition of the values of the area's natural resources.
- ***"Sustainable tourism should involve acceptance of the resources on its own terms, and in recognition of its limits, which involves supply-oriented management."*** The basis of gradual tourism development in the area is the current range of natural attractions. The existing and planned tourist services fit very well into the wilderness concept and the number of visitors does not exceed the carrying capacity of the area. There is no willingness on behalf of any party involved to develop large-scale and potentially dangerous tourist activities.
- ***"It should promote understanding and involve partnerships between many players, which could include government, nongovernment organisations, industry, scientists and locals (both before and during operations)."*** In Evo Recreational Area, as several participants are involved in the planning and development of leisure and tourism services, mutual understanding is one of the most important preliminary criteria of success. As all the parties are aware of the necessity of co-operation, partnership and understanding already exist in the area, and common activities in tourism development can lead to their further enhancement.

- ***"Sustainable tourism should promote moral and ethical responsibilities and behaviour towards the natural and cultural environment, by all players."*** The public access provided by Finnish customs and statutory law – the so called *"everyman's right"* involves a high level of personal responsibility and responsible behaviour towards nature. Otherwise, all the players included in tourism development operate in a socially and environmentally responsible way, due to their professional knowledge concerning the environment and their personal commitment to nature.
- ***"It should provide long-term benefits – to the resource, to the local community, and to industry."*** Tourism development can help to the protection of the natural environment in the area by utilising it in its current form, and, in this way, providing an alternative to forest harvesting. In addition to limited economic benefits, the recreational area offering various leisure activities to local residents also contributes to their quality of living. The gradual and planned development of tourist services ensures the long-term sustainability of the tourism industry on the area.



Conclusions

The presentation of Evo Recreational Area aims to illustrate sustainable tourism development. Though being small-scale, this kind of tourism is less likely to deteriorate its resource, the natural environment, the main factor in the sustainability of tourism development in the area seems to be the awareness of all the participants of the intrinsic values of the resource itself and their willingness to co-operate in order to preserve these values for themselves and for the future generations.



References

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