2. Ecotourism product development - from planning to sustainability - The module has been developed by Mrs. Liliya Terzieva – Lecturer and Researcher at the Academy for Leisure Studies at NHTV Breda University of Applied Sciences, the Netherlands

The ecotourism product development is considered as a strategic planning process that has the following key characteristics:

- systematic or represents a logical sequence of steps
- an opportunity to evaluate alternatives
- community-based and supports community economic development
- iterative and dynamic
- integrated and comprehensive

The Ecotourism planning process consists of eight basic phases (Campbell, Lisa M. “Ecotourism in Rural Developing Communities.” Annals of Tourism Research (26)3: 534-54), 1999):

- Phase I Mission Statement and Goal Setting
- Phase II Resource Inventory and Analysis
- Phase III Market Analysis
- Phase IV Product Market Matching/Theme/Concept
- Phase V Overall Development Plan
- Phase VI Ecotourism Product Development
- Phase VII Market Strategy
- Phase VIII Implementation Strategy

**PHASE I: MISSION STATEMENT AND GOAL SETTING**

**MISSION STATEMENT**

Traditionally, regional economic development and business planning was designed to respond to immediate economic and political needs. Creative contemporary planning, however, provides the opportunity to instead value the exploration process and paint a picture of what is possible. The mission statement provides clarity and direction to the planning process and shapes the final product. It deals with what is important and deeply cared about; the opportunity to serve a need; the values to be protected; what business the organization is in; overall purpose for community existence.

The following is an example of the transition from Mission to goal to objectives:
The natural and cultural resources are the attractions of the ecotourism product. A comprehensive inventory and analysis is essential before defining the development potential. Special emphasis is placed on the unique features and areas of state or regional significance. All resources are inventoried for their attractiveness, ability to draw visitors, accessibility, integrity and contribution to environmental and cultural protection.

They can be grouped according to:

1. natural or environmental
2. community
3. heritage or historic
4. cultural
5. outdoor recreation
6. tourism services
7. special events
8. information/interpretive services

PHASE III: MARKET ANALYSIS

In order to match the available ecotourism market to the resource base of a region or community, it is necessary to undertake a comprehensive market analysis. There are two sources of market demand that can contribute to determining an ecotourism product.

(a) primary research, including questionnaires and interviews with the travel trade;
(b) secondary or desk research including the analysis of written data or both the local markets as well as the international tourism markets;

a) PRIMARY RESEARCH
Primary research generates data, directly from the travel trade or consumers that is used to shape the ecotourism product. It is gathered by:

- informal observation of the ecotourism market
- surveys or interviews with members of the travel trade (wholesalers, tour operators and local suppliers such as hotels and resorts, guides, adventure tour operators, NGOs, etc.)
- questionnaires distributed to visitors in your region/province/community that potentially represents the ecotourism market

b) SECONDARY RESEARCH
Secondary or desk research is provided by the literature and survey results that have been prepared by others. At the regional, provincial or community level, it may include:

- visitor exit surveys
- surveys of the adventure market since there is very little available data on the ecotourism market
- adventure travel surveys in other provinces or regions
- market research from consumer magazines that provide nature-based tourism
- national/regional planning agencies, travel associations, city/municipal or provincial tourism offices

PHASE IV: RESOURCE / PRODUCT MARKET MATCHING

PRODUCT/MARKET MATCHING/THEMES

A. PRODUCT MARKET MATCHING

PMM is a technique that is frequently used to match the inventoried resource base with the identified existing and potential market segments. The results of the matching will also enable the organization to estimate the level of visitation. This will determine if additional infrastructure and services are needed.

COMPETITIVE PRODUCTS

Depending on the location, the competition may be in an adjacent province or region, or another country. It is important to appreciate that similar ecotourism operators in an adjacent area may be a collaborator or contributor to your overall package.

An analysis of the competition may include the following sample format:
**Competitor A**  
**Product Components**  
**Competitive Features and Special Appeal**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Market Origins and Volume</th>
<th>Price Structures</th>
<th>Marketing Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**PHASE V: OVERALL DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

This phase is very important and is essential to preparing a professional, marketable ecotourism product. Here is a matrix to use in preparing your development plan to ensure a basis for future development framework.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues/Concerns</th>
<th>What has been done</th>
<th>What needs to be done</th>
<th>By Whom</th>
<th>Budget</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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**PHASE VI: ECOTOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT**

Once the various products have been identified for the community, it is then possible to create overall ecotour packages that can be promoted to travel and tour operators both domestically and internationally. Ecotourism product development generally takes four steps including:

1. *Preparation of Daily Itinerary*
2. *Securing all services and suppliers*
3. *Establish Price Structure*
4. *Developing a partnership with tour operators and wholesalers*

The following process demonstrates how a typical tour package is developed, how suppliers are identified and how costs are estimated. Typical cost estimates are provided for most tour components; however, they would be finalized with the selected suppliers before a final net tour cost is prepared. Finally, since many tours will be marketed through local or international tour operators or wholesalers, the process is outlined to achieve this result.

*Phase 1. Prepare the detailed tour package itinerary*
Step 1. Tour Itinerary Development

Example:

DAY 1. Arrival

Option (a) Transfer to hotel ___________________________________________
    Transfer service _________________________________________________
    Personnel ______________________________________________________

Option (b) Transfer directly to connecting domestic flight ______________________
    Meet, Greet and Assist __________________________________________

Phase 2. Tour Package Costing Form

(Typical 7 day Package for 10 people)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Services</th>
<th>Day 1</th>
<th>Day 2</th>
<th>Day 3</th>
<th>Day 4</th>
<th>Day 5</th>
<th>Day 6</th>
<th>Day 7</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transfers</td>
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<td>Hotel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meals:</td>
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<td>Breakfast</td>
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<td>Lunch</td>
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<td>Dinner</td>
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<td>Means of</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transportation:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Land transport</td>
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<tr>
<td>Air transport</td>
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<td>Water transport</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guide Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experts</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Park Fee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
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<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contingencies</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
PHASE VII: MARKETING STRATEGY

The marketing strategy involves the process of developing a market plan that specifically sells the organization’s ecotourism products.

a. It responds to the definition of Eco-Tourism
   • Small groups
   • Involves non-consumptive activities
   • Utilizes environmentally sound facilities
   • Takes a very small volume of visitors into an area in any one year
   • Uses local people and business as much as possible
   • Networks with community and grassroot organizations

b. It responds to the development strategy including:
   • Key objectives, including your mission statement
   • Creating a marketing plan, including your strategies and tactics necessary to achieve your objectives
   • Preparing a budget in accordance with the action plan
   • Monitoring feedback for control and evaluation of the marketing strategy

c. It meets Important Ecotourism criteria

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1 The cost of using the land as a resource and the provision of its sustainability.
• Is the organization using tour operators that meet standards of responsible, conscious tourism?
• Does the organization incorporate local and indigenous people into its programs making sure they benefit directly?
• Does the organization educate its clients before they visit or have contact with a culture-bound community or destination?
• Does the organization have a Code of Ethics that represents the philosophy and goals by which it operates?
• Educational value both in-house and on-site?
• Is the organization making appropriate decisions not to visit an area because it is too sensitive or negatively impacted?

**ANNUAL MARKETING BUDGET WORKSHEET**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ADVERTISING</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Brochures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newsletter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tour Shell</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SALES</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade shows</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Conferences/Seminars</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Email/Post Mail</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Website development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Familiarization Tours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Displays/Exhibits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Video presentations</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MARKETING RESEARCH</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PHASE VIII: IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

ACTION PLAN

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

There are variety of agencies, associations, organizations and companies responsible for the implementation of a Development Strategy. A matrix that outlines the specific responsibility assures response to the opportunity as well as action.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles / Responsibilities</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Association</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

FINANCING AND FUNDING SOURCES:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program/Project</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Partner Agency</th>
<th>Budget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure /</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marketing/Promotions</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Human Resource Development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHERS</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The composition of ecotourism products should vary in order to satisfy different market segments and local conditions:
• Address quality, authenticity and security. Throughout the three conferences\(^2\), the importance of these three attributes was underlined. Quality does not necessarily mean luxury, but attention to detail and understanding customer needs. Authenticity is about meeting a visitor aspiration of ‘seeing the real thing’ while respecting the sensitivities of local communities and environments. Security is about visitor safety, perceived and real, but can also be applied to wider issues of reliability.

• Give top priority to the interpretation of nature and culture. The most essential component of an ecotourism product is the inherent quality of the landscape and wildlife. The WTO market studies confirmed this as the main visitor motivation, but closely followed by the opportunity to meet local people and experience cultural traditions and lifestyles. Ecotourism is distinguished by providing an experience that is both educative and enjoyable. Quality of interpretation is of paramount importance; within this, the value of good local guides, who know their subject and how to put it over, has been strongly emphasized.

• Design and manage service facilities to maximize sustainability. Although not the driving force in an ecotourism offer, accommodation, catering, and opportunities to make purchases are essential components of the product. There is a whole host of planning, design and management issues here that affect viability, environmental impact, enterprise and employment opportunities for local people, value retained in the local economy and the quality of the visitor experience. Case studies presented during the three conferences have demonstrated a wealth of good practice in this area and a growing body of knowledge internationally, on topics such as: eco-lodge design and management; village based accommodation and homestay programmes; use of local produce and traditional dishes; and handicraft production and sales.

• Address destination as well as individual product issues. Successful and sustainable product development in ecotourism also needs to take account of infrastructure, environmental management and visitor services in the destination as a whole. For example, the need for more sustainable transport options to and within the destination was stressed at the European Ecotourism and Biodiversity Conference 2010.

• Relate ecotourism to sustainable activity tourism, where appropriate. Although ecotourism is clearly distinguished from activity tourism, it is apparent that some ecotourists are looking for activities such as hiking or trail riding to complement the product offer. This appears to be

particularly true in mountain areas, in regions like Europe and Central Asia. In maritime locations, such as small island states, making activities like diving and yachting more environmentally sustainable was seen as an issue for ecotourism. The three conferences also raised the controversial question of the relationship between hunting and ecotourism, recognising that this activity, when carefully controlled, can provide resources for wildlife management and raise the perceived value of certain species within local communities.

Ecotourism products can have an immediate and lasting effect on the nation's diverse economics and will go a long way toward carrying the precious environmental and cultural resources successfully into the next century.

According to David Fennell, the sustainability of ecotourism products depends on the following factors:

- Development within each locality of a special sense of place, reflected in architectural character and development style, sensitive to its unique heritage and environment.
- Preservation, protection and enhancement of the quality of resources, which are the basis of tourism.
- Fostering development of additional visitor attractions with roots in their own locale and developed in ways which complement local attributes.
- Development of visitor services which enhance the local heritage and environment.
- Endorsement of growth when and where it improves things, not where it is destructive, or exceeds the carrying capacity of the natural environment or the limits of the social environment, beyond which the quality of community life is adversely affected (Fennell, 2003).

Five basic principles of sustainability are the idea of planning and strategy making, the importance of preserving essential ecological processes, the need to protect both human heritage and biodiversity, the need to develop in a manner that fosters long-term productivity sustainable for future generations, and the goal of achieving a better balance of equity among nations.

Generally, the idea of sustainable growth is that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Fennell, 2003). The two sustainability principles that are linked to the classifications of ecotourism are the need for giving back to local communities and returns for the environment through support for conservation. Economic sustainability is usually provided in the form of both direct and indirect benefits of employment, monetary exchanges and even infrastructure development. Environmental sustainability is enhanced through better resource conservation, as well as cash. It is beyond doubt that the long-term feasibility of the ecotourism industry
essentially relies on maintaining the natural environment on which the industry depends, and provide fair economic return to local communities (Black, 2007).

Determining the future of ecotourism is as filled with uncertainty as any other exercise in forecasting or fortune-telling. It seems that ecotourism is here to stay, but that it is currently still at a very early and delicate stages in its growth. Individual ecotourism enterprises and in general concepts and principles of ecotourism are continually plagued by larger participants who pursue ecotourism for other purposes, mainly financial gain. This is not simply a question of business competition, where successful ecotourism ventures may be undercut or bought out. Whereas the best examples of ecotourism are making real and important contributions to conservation of the natural environment and the development of disadvantaged communities, these instances are still extremely rare and most of them are very small in number. Under the appropriate conditions ecotourism can indeed be one such tool, with assured success. If for this reason alone, it seems advisable to encourage successful ecotourism ventures and endeavors to replicate them worldwide (Buckley, 2003). Ralf Buckley states, “for tourism to make useful contributions to conservation, its enormous revenue-generating power must be channeled and focused through a conservation framework. As the ecotourism sector continues to grow, the continuing vigilance of organizations such as the United Nations Environment Program and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Sustainable Tourism Division of the World Tourism Organization and international conservation organizations, such as Conservation International and the World Wide Fund for Nature, will become increasingly important. And finally, as the debates of the International Year of Ecotourism and the World Summit on Sustainable Development have moved onto a new dimension of their implementation phase, perhaps it is time to reconceptualize ecotourism in the jargon: ecotourism is geotourism with a positive triple bottom line.”(Buckley, 2011, p.264).
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• Hawkes S., and Williams P (eds)., 1993: The Greening of Tourism From Principles to Practice: A Casebook of Best Environmental Practice in Tourism, Centre for Tourism Policy and Research, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC.


