

# SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND ECOTOURISM: AN INQUIRY INTO THEORETIC TIES WITH SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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## **Abstract**

*Sustainable development is a prerequisite for long-term economic, ecological and social development at the global level. This places the topic of this paper in the centre of an international debate on development. The role and importance of tourism can be observed primarily through economic and environmental sustainability, while respecting the social and cultural aspects of sustainability as well. Due to the above-mentioned, it is not possible to discuss sustainable tourism or ecotourism without taking into consideration the principles of sustainable development. In the first part of the paper, authors discuss the characteristics of sustainable development as the basis of sustainable tourism. Further on, the relationship between sustainable tourism and ecotourism is investigated, accompanied with a detailed analysis of the characteristics and importance of ecotourism in terms of sustainable development. The authors used descriptive and comparative analysis of the domestic and international literature and various documents, scientific papers and reports.*

*Key Words: sustainable development, sustainable tourism, ecotourism, environment*

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## **Introduction**

Rapid development of technology, economy, industry, etc., has led to further development of tourism and emergence of its new forms. Tourism has experienced a boom globally, as a result of higher living standard,

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excess of free time and development of different forms of transport (Gržinić & Vitasović, 2007). Such a sudden and unplanned tourism development has left negative consequences such as degradation of environment, mainly generated by the uncontrolled use of non renewable resources. “Environmental degradation is among the most serious problems confronting modern societies, and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, mainly containing carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), represent the principal cause of climate change” (Mitić et al., 2017). Thus, the intensive development of the tourism industry is not in accordance with the concept of sustainable development, which, in its essence, is a prerequisite of modern, global and balanced economic development.

Tourism, as all other activities, will not be able to survive if economic development is not sustainable. All components of sustainability must necessarily be integrated into all forms of development, especially in the technological and economic development because in these areas the pace of development is the fastest (Munitlak Ivanović, 2007). Sustainable development has three pillars: economic, environmental and institutional. Due to the development of mass tourism that has begun to influence the environment, the need for sustainable tourism development arose. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has declared 2017 as The International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. Principles governing the UNWTO are in line with the ambitious 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Sustainable tourism is, therefore, especially directed towards the realization of the 8<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> goal (World Tourism Organization, 2017).

Ecotourism and sustainable tourism are not the same notions, although both belong to the new forms of tourism that are characterized by responsible behavior of tourists with no adverse impact on the environment. Sustainable tourism development is the basis of all the alternative and new forms of tourism: ecotourism, green tourism, urban tourism, coastal tourism and tourism based on nature (Stojanović, 2011).

### **Sustainable development characteristics as the basis for sustainable tourism**

The concept of sustainability in all areas originated as an idea – a vision that such an approach could evolve into a concept or strategy. This applies to the concepts of sustainable development, sustainable tourism

and ecotourism as well. As a concept, sustainable development is defined by a development strategy for the protection of living resources. International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources in 1980 set the goal as "achieving sustainable development through the protection of living resources" (Lele, 1994, p. 607). The most cited and widely accepted definition of sustainable development was adopted at the 42<sup>nd</sup> session of the UN General Assembly, from the report entitled "Our Common Future"-Brundtland report. This report provides the essence of sustainable development and defines it as: "development which meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future, 1987, p. 16-17). A similar understanding of sustainable development in 1972 was provided by The Club of Rome. However, this report, known as The Limits to Growth, has not been accepted by economists and did not leave a mark in the international economic and environmental policy. The main objection to The Limits to Growth was related to the assumption that this document should serve as a proposal for strengthening and highlighting the role of redistribution. On the other hand, Our Common Future was seen as politically and economically acceptable continuation of economic growth (Munitlak Ivanović, 2015).

This definition of the concept of sustainable development has rapidly been adopted by many countries. In this context, a detailed and comprehensive action plan for the implementation of sustainable development in the XXI century was created and approved. Agenda 21 was defined by the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Before Our Common Future report defined the concept of sustainability, Reppeto gave a very similar definition that was based on intergenerational equality of opportunity. This is one of the first definitions of sustainable development that emphasizes the importance of current decisions in light of negative impacts on the standard of living for future generations (Reppeto, 1985).

A similar opinion is shared by Robert Solow in dealing with this concept in the 90s. Solow emphasized the importance of the moral duty of the current generation, stressing that such a position should be viewed in a more general sense, rather than an individual one. He notes that the natural resources and the environment cannot be left unchanged for future generations. However, to achieve intergenerational equity, sustainability

should aim at preserving the ability of future generations to have at least the same quality of life (Solow, 1992).

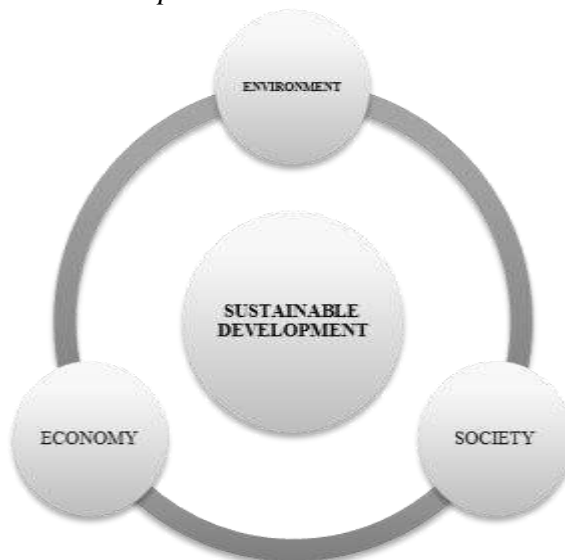
Different perceptions of the essence of sustainable development are more complex when a model of the economy that is sustainable in all segments is needed. One of these segments is certainly tourism.

These definitions of sustainable development are general and a need for more specific and measurable goals and precise tools for implementation are evident. Otherwise, the concept of sustainability is a phrase with no real stronghold in everyday life. Many countries have created and adopted strategies related to sustainable development. However, adequate implementation of the precise principle of sustainable development in most countries is lacking (Munitlak Ivanović, 2016).

As mentioned, sustainable development is set on three pillars (Figure 1), and it could be stated that sustainable tourism is part of all three pillars:

7. Economics (as a service),
8. Ecology (sustainable tourism requires a clean environment) and
9. Institutional (requires the application of adequate international and national regulations that will ensure there is a sustainable, green or ecotourism).

Figure 1: *Sustainable development*



Source: *Authors*.

Sustainable tourism is based on the sustainable development guidelines, and therefore, is also based on three principles:

1. Economic sustainability provides a continuous process of tourism industry development, based on the economic efficiency and at the same time guided by the principles of management and conservation of natural and other resources;
2. Environmental sustainability provides parallel development of tourism, maintenance of biological resources and environmental processes while preserving biodiversity;
3. Socio-cultural sustainability ensures the continuity of tourism development while maintaining cultural and local values (McIntyre, G., et al., 1993).

As a complex economic, environmental and socio-cultural phenomenon, sustainable tourism directly depends on the implementation of the principle of sustainable development because uncontrolled economic development pollutes and devastates tourism resources (original setting of a certain location, clean, pure and healthy natural environment, etc.). According to Krippendorf (1986), this behavior is the result of non-compliance with nature because tourism "swallows land, nature and cultural heritage, as a new colonizer and destroyer of the environment" (p.114).

The concept of sustainable tourism has several definitions, but the authors have selected two interpretations. World Tourism Organization defines sustainable tourism similarly to the definition from the Brundtland Commission. According to UNWTO, sustainable tourism industry satisfies demand needs of tourists and tourist destinations and the development of the tourism market, with respect to intergenerational equity (UNWTO, 2017).

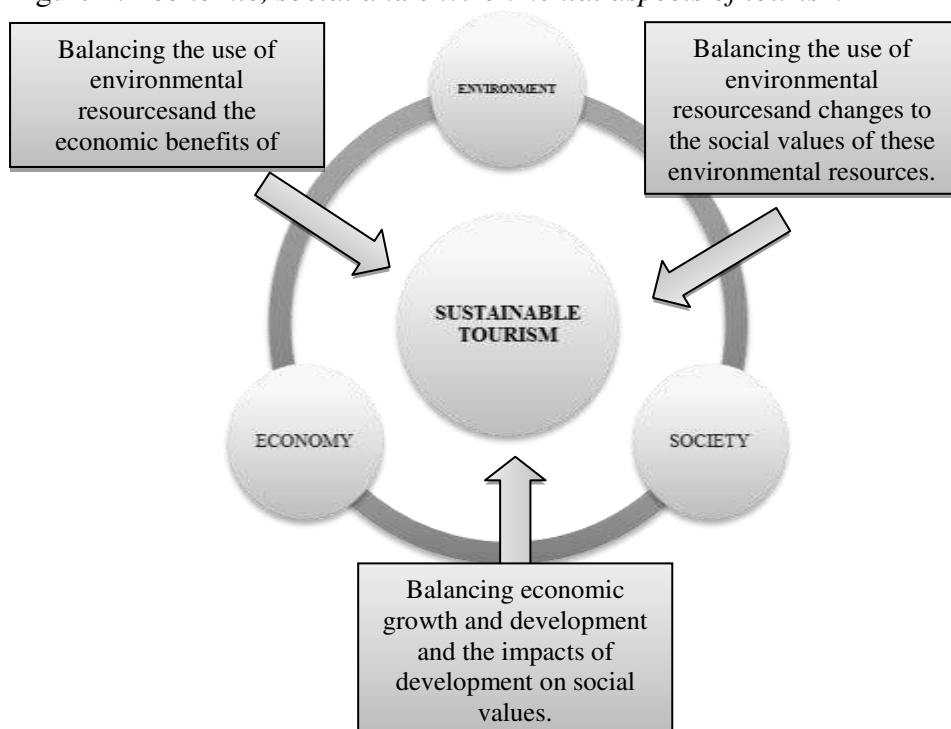
Somewhat more specific definition of sustainable tourism was given by Jovičić (2002): "Sustainable tourism entails an integrated and complex development of tourism which insures simultaneous realization of heterogeneous goals - none of which can become dominant over the other, and they are:

1. Achievement of economic profit,
2. Preserving social integrity and local communities,
3. The affirmation of cultural identity of the receptive field,
4. Environmental protection,
5. The optimal satisfaction of tourism needs" (p.10).

It is interesting that Jovičić (2002) points out that this and other definitions are not precise enough because sustainable tourism is subject to continuous changes. The European Commission concluded the same in the "Green paper of Tourism". This document indicates the necessity of interaction between economic activities and sustainable development with emphasis on the interaction between economy and ecology (Hrabovski Tomić, 2008). Figure 2 shows the relationship between sustainable tourism in relation to the economic, social and environmental aspects. The figure vividly presents the relationship between sustainable development and tourism activities. In other words, sustainable tourism should be accepted as an important way of realization of sustainable development goals. The main forms of sustainability that are important for sustainable development through sustainable tourism are:

1. Economic sustainability
2. Social and cultural sustainability
3. Environmental sustainability (Popescu, et al., 2001)

Figure 2: *Economic, social and environmental aspects of tourism*



Source: Dredge, D. and Jenkins, J. (2008) 'Tourism Planning and Policy', Wiley & Sons, Australia, Milton.

Sustainable development is essential for tourism, as pace of growth in tourism has positive economic effects and contributes to the implementation and achieving sustainable development goals. This indicates a strong relationship between sustainable tourism and sustainable development in the following:

- Interaction: there is a strong interaction between demand for tourism, local communities and the environment.
- Awareness: tourism strongly influences awareness of tourists about differences between customs, cultures, nations, state of the environment; all this is reflected in the forming awareness about living in accordance with sustainable development.
- Dependence: tourism industry depends on the attractive natural areas, authentic and historical cities whose natural environment is not compromised (Ivanovic et al., 2016)

Some authors have presented a more detailed classification of sustainable tourism (Zamfir & Corbos, 2015), in which case the division of sustainable tourism looks as follows:

1. Socio-cultural dimension
  - a. Respecting local communities
  - b. Improving the quality of life of local communities
  - c. Promoting inter- and intra-generational equity
  - d. Ensuring stakeholders participation in decision making
  - e. Ensuring a satisfying and rewarding experience for the client
  - f. Improving understanding among tourist and locals
  - g. Promoting scientific research
2. Economic dimension
  - a. Finding new sources of income (diversification of the economy)
  - b. Boosting economic activity and growth in rural areas
  - c. Insuring outside investment in infrastructure
  - d. Supporting local economies
  - e. Increasing employment opportunities
  - f. Increasing market for the local producers
3. Environmental dimension
  - a. Respecting ecological limits
  - b. Promoting scientific research
  - c. Managing natural areas
  - d. Maintaining and enhancing natural and cultural heritage
  - e. Reducing over-consumption and waste

In depth analysis of tourism's contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals was presented in the Tourism and Sustainable Development Goals paper by UNWTO, which the authors summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. *Tourism's contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals*

<b>Sustainable Development Goals</b>	<b>Tourism's contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals</b>
<b>1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere</b>	Tourism can foster economic growth and development by providing income through job creation. It promotes entrepreneurship and SMEs, while empowering less favoured groups (particularly women and youth).
<b>2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture</b>	Tourism can promote the production, use and sale of local produce in tourist destinations. This can contribute to the local produce integration in the tourism value chain. Additionally agro-tourism can complement traditional agricultural activities.
<b>3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages</b>	Tourism's contribution to economic growth and development can have a domino effect on well-being and health (e.g. Tax income from tourism can be reinvested in health care and services).
<b>4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all</b>	Tourism can provide incentives to invest in education and vocational training. This can be accomplished through cross-border certifications and standards. This can especially ameliorate the position of less favoured groups from Goal 1.
<b>5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls</b>	Tourism can empower women through providing jobs and income-generating opportunities. It can be used as a modus for women to unlock their full potential.
<b>6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all</b>	Tourism can play a pivotal role in achieving adequate levels of hygiene and sanitation for all by providing water access and security.
<b>7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all</b>	Tourism can support reduction of GHG emissions, climate change mitigation and can contribute to new energy solutions in urban and remote areas by promoting high quality long-term investments in sustainable energy sources.



<b>8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all</b>	By giving access to decent work opportunities tourism can benefit from professional development as stated in Target 8.9: “By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products”.
<b>9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation</b>	Tourism can motivate governments to upgrade their infrastructure and modernize their industries, making them more resource-efficient and clean. This could attract more tourists and other foreign investments.
<b>10. Reduce inequality within and among countries</b>	Tourism can contribute to community development through urban and rural renewal and development. This can reduce regional imbalances and give communities the opportunity to prosper in their place of origin. Tourism assists and enables developing countries to take part in the global economy.
<b>11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable</b>	Tourism has the potential to advance urban infrastructure and accessibility, promote regeneration of areas in decay and preserve cultural and natural heritage.
<b>12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns</b>	If the tourism sector accepts sustainable consumption and production (SCP) practices, it can play a pivotal role in a global effort towards accepting sustainability.
<b>13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts</b>	By lowering energy consumption and transitioning to renewable energy sources (in the transport and accommodation sector especially), tourism can help combat climate change and its impacts.
<b>14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development</b>	Coastal and maritime tourism rely on healthy marine ecosystems. Conserving and preserving delicate marine ecosystems support tourism development and promote the blue economy.
<b>15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss</b>	“Majestic landscapes, pristine forests, rich biodiversity, and natural heritage sites are often main reasons why tourists visit a destination. Sustainable tourism can play a major role, not only in conserving and preserving biodiversity, but also in respecting terrestrial ecosystems, owing to its efforts towards the reduction of waste and

	consumption, the conservation of native flora and fauna, and its awareness rising activities”.
<b>16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels</b>	Tourism can lay the foundation for more peaceful societies and preventing violence and conflicts. Tourism sector can foster multicultural and multi-faith tolerance as it relays on vast number of encounters between people of diverse backgrounds.
<b>27. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development</b>	Tourism has the ability to “strengthen private/public partnerships and engage multiple stakeholders – international, national, regional and local – to work together to achieve the SDGs and other common goals”.

Source: *UNWTO, Tourism and Sustainable Development Goals*, available online: <http://www.e-unwto.org/doi/pdf/10.18111/9789284417254>

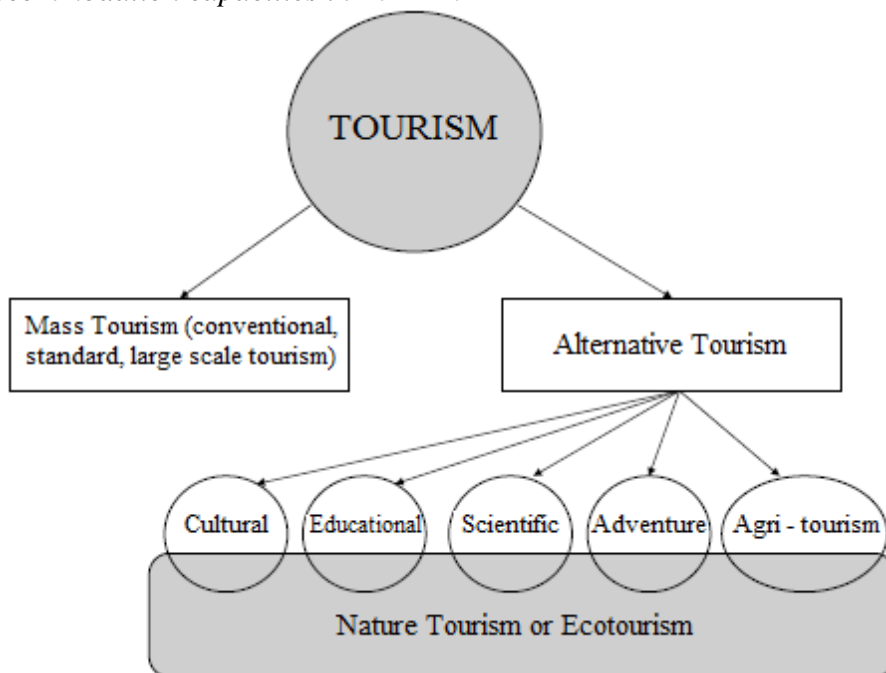
### **The relationship between sustainable and ecological tourism**

It is essential to make a distinction between the concept of sustainable and ecological tourism. The concept of sustainable tourism is broader because it includes various forms of tourism activities, ways of doing business and can be applied to various forms of tourism whereas ecotourism refers only to one segment of tourism. Notwithstanding the above-mentioned, both are characterized by responsibility, which is not detrimental to the environment and that is still an alternative (Stojanović, 2011).

The tasks of ecological tourism can be outlined as: respecting the needs of the local community through the respect for its culture and customs, meeting the needs of tourists without endangering the environment and all this in a way to follow modern trends in tourism.

On the other hand, sustainable tourism could be put in relation to any form of tourism development, as these forms should jeopardize neither nature nor resources. Figure 2 shows that ecotourism includes in itself the elements of cultural, educational, scientific, adventure, agricultural and other types of alternative tourism.

Figure 2: *The percentage of rooms in the structure of hotel accommodation capacities in 2011-2012*



Source: *Mieczkowski, Z. (1995). Environmental issues of tourism and recreation, University Press of America.*

As sustainable development, ecotourism was initially an idea rather than a concept. Principles and guidelines for ecotourism on international and national levels have begun to gradually develop in the last decade of the XX century within the The International Ecotourism Society (TIES).

### **Characteristics and significance of ecological tourism in terms of sustainable development**

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) is a nonprofit organization whose activities are aimed at promoting ecotourism. It was founded in 1990 and currently has 120 member countries that are represented by experts in various fields. TIES nourishes multidisciplinary approach to ecotourism and defines it as a socially responsible travel through nature, which improves the welfare of local residents and does not destroy the environment (TIES Overview, 2017).

A defined set of terms on which ecotourism is based:

1. Ecological environment - a tourist destination must be a protected ecosystem, national park or unregulated "wild" natural environment.
2. Ecotourists - tourists that expect experience in the nature and a close relationship with local customs, culture, and/or complete cessation of contact with everyday accelerated pace life. As for the size of the group, they usually range from 2 to 15 people.
3. Protection of the environment - such ecological environment characteristic for the development of ecotourism necessarily needs to be actively protected and monitored. This area should be characterized by protected natural, architectural or cultural monuments.
4. Ecological activity - this type of activities implies casual relaxation, study of geology, flora and fauna, but also socializing with local people and buying local products.
5. Ecological transport - ecotourists should use the adequate means of transport that do not endanger the ecosystem. Depending on the offer, ecotourists may use bicycles, boats, cars driven on battery, local trains, domestic animals (horses and donkeys) or walk.
6. Environmental contacts - in order to achieve as close social contact, ecotourists need to establish different forms of communication in order to inform themselves about the local culture and customs. In the case of a language barrier, the help of a guide is necessary.
7. Ecological information - in order to fully enjoy the area, ecotourists should be prepared for the site they are visiting. On the other hand, local residents should prepare a better picture of the environment and about themselves for the tourists (Meier, 2004).

Evolution, certification and guidelines of ecological tourism, based on the tenet of sustainable development, put it in a special place in the tourism industry. Discussions and adopted documents from numerous conferences over the years led to a general consensus which components make ecotourism:

1. Contribution to the preservation of biodiversity
2. Maintaining the well-being of the local population whose living space is an ecological tourist destination
3. Acquiring new and continuous experiences on the basis of spread of ecological tourism
4. Responsibility of eco tourists, ecotourism and the tourism industry as a whole
5. Orientation towards small tourist groups
6. Minimal consumption of non-renewable resources

7. Encourage the development of entrepreneurial ventures and establishment of family businesses to provide services to ecotourism, especially in rural areas (Epler Wood, 2016).

## **Conclusion**

The rapid development of technology has caused harmonious growth of the global economy and all activities. In order to prevent further devastation of the environment and natural resources the concept of sustainable development has been created. Regardless of the declarative acceptance by international institutions, this concept, which essentially has social and intergenerational justice, has not brought the expected results. Aided by Agenda 21, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Paris Agreement and many other international documents, this concept should provide better results than the existing ones. This paper analyzes the relationship of sustainable development and the development of sustainable, ecological and green tourism.

There are many definitions of sustainable tourism and ecotourism. All definitions of sustainable tourism emphasize that this form of tourism does not endanger natural resources, respects the principle of intergenerational justice and necessity of positive connections in the development of tourism industry, tourists, the environment and local communities.

Ecotourism and sustainable forms of tourism are similar but not the same. Ecotourism has somewhat different tasks: to satisfy the interests of ecotourists without the devastation of the environment, and with respect for the local community and its culture and customs, provided that it is organized in a modern way.

Sustainable tourism is a broader concept. It summarizes the different types of projects and business enterprises, various tourist activities and should be applicable to all new so-called alternative forms of tourism. On the other hand, ecotourism refers only to one segment of tourism.

It could be said that ecotourism is a subsystem of sustainable tourism, which includes a more modern format, so called "Green tourism". Both are based on nature. Despite potential lack of awareness of tourists, they have individual and selective approaches to free time they want to spend

in a healthy environment, without compromising the welfare of the local population and at the same time learning about local way of life, culture, customs, etc. This is the essence of ecological tourism - features are in absolute compliance with the principles of sustainable economic, environmental and social development. Ecological tourism is in complete accordance with the concept of sustainable development.

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