Title: Tourism planning in CEE countries. Assessing National Tourism Development Strategies.

Abstract: The Central East European countries need complex National Tourism Development Strategies managing and respecting their natural and cultural resources as a part of competitive advantage. The monitoring of this work is necessary to improve the quality of tourist national destinations in the long term. Therefore, with the new assessment methodology presented by Sustainable Tourism Working Group, NGOs have a possibility of providing assessment of their home country tourism planning documents according to the respective criteria.

I. Why CEE countries need special approach for National Tourism Strategies revision?

The Central East European countries constantly work on their planning documents for national tourism development since 2000 when the new version of many documents appeared for the first time. After 2004 several countries have begun to develop their strategies and planning documents for tourism in coordination with European Union legislation and pre-accession indications (EU Structural Funds). At the same time, there have been common approaches for tourism development in CEE countries not only because of history and economic overlap but also because of the similar variety of potential natural tourism assets which have to be integrated in sustainable development of the region.

There are several starting points for tourism development planning in the CEE countries:

- CEE countries are dynamically developing countries which aim to profit from the responsible management of cultural, social and natural resources in tourism development,
- in the long term, competitive advantage for CEE countries in tourism depends on quality of life,
- development of the regions within CEE countries needs fully integrated national tourism development strategy,
- there are numerous and valuable natural assets, natural land usage, healthy food production which determine type of tourism in CEE countries,
- there is little knowledge on the tourism influence in resolving problems of other sectors of economy, special management and natural environment,
- there are different policy areas and many other documents which regulate the tourism development in the countries,
- in many countries of the region tourism strategies are being reviewed and developed just now.
Therefore it is important to assess the possible planning documents in this region at the moment and step in where necessary. The assessment is complex and difficult because of variety of different planning documents for tourism in the CEE countries. Nevertheless, the analysis takes into account the common features which were mentioned above.

II. What information will the assessment methodology deliver for decision makers?

As far as territorial development of a country is concerned, social-economic development strategies are mainly elaborated. The basic document for all countries is National Development Plan which determines preconditions for financial negotiations with European Union. In Poland, this document includes tourism in the context of regional and horizontal policy.

The other type of a document which considers separate industry, describes areas which are not related to local administration division. This is the case of the proper National Tourism Development Strategy which facilitates the implementation of objectives, infrastructure projects, tourism promotion etc. in the country.

Baring in mind the influence of these documents on tourism planning, since 2005 the Sustainable Tourism Working Group of the CEEweb for Biodiversity has been working on guidance for decision makers on policy development of sustainable tourism. In 2012 the group finalized the Assessment Criteria for National Tourism Development Strategies. This research tool measures how well a national strategy fulfills the criteria for sustainable development of tourism.

Target audience for this analysis includes: policy makers, governments at national and local level and managers. Therefore the purpose of the assessment is:

1. to provide countries with constructive feedback on the national tourism strategy linkage between tourism and biodiversity protection, that could be used to further improvements of these strategies, and
2. to inform CEE NGOs and decision makers on the subject.

The criteria of the strategy assessment were elaborated in light of the EU biodiversity policies (EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020) and the Agenda 21 for a Sustainable and Competitive European Tourism. These include sustainable conservation and management of natural and cultural resources, minimising use of resources and pollution at tourist destinations including the production of waste, managing changes in the interests of the well being of the community, reducing the seasonality of demand, addressing the environmental impact of transport linked to tourism, making tourism experiences available to all without discrimination, and improving the quality of jobs in tourism. Therefore the analysis will provide the monitoring measures for these important issues.

The assessment has potential to provide help in projects such as Tourism Strategy Implementation (for example in Serbia, 2010-2012) and integration of tourism with other branches of economy.
The methodology may be also considered as guidance for other levels of tourism planning: regional and local especially in implementing monitoring indicators. Finally the results of analysis may inspire for final elaboration of the strategy where necessary (for example in Poland, in finalization of Directions for Tourism Development until 2015).

III. How NGOs can use the assessment methodology?

The results of assessments can have multiple effects and implementations. They can be used as:
- direct advise for decision makers in the country,
- a model of the “perfect document”,
- research argument for legal and organizational changes in tourism planning,
- project justification and situation description,
- creation of database for CEE countries experience exchange,
- an educational tool for schools,
- information for better understanding of tourism development in the neighbor country for international cooperation (Carpathian Region, Danube Region etc.).

The CEE NGOs may step in the consultancy process for the tourism strategy creation or promote the criteria for sustainable national tourism development strategies at regional and local level.

STWG is planning to assess five selected national tourism strategies according to methodology by end of the year 2012. The results of the analyses will be published and commented on the CEEweb website: www.ceeweb.org.