

Sustainable Tourism

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Abstract

Tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world. It is an increasingly important source of income, employment and wealth in many countries. International tourism now accounts for a larger share of foreign exchange receipts and export earnings than any other industry in the world. But, while tourism provides considerable economic benefits for many countries, regions and communities, its rapid expansion has also had detrimental environmental and socio-cultural impacts. Natural resource depletion and environmental degradation associated with tourism. Sustainable tourism attempting to make a low impact on the environment and local culture, while helping to generate future employment for local people. The aim of sustainable tourism is to ensure that development brings a positive experience for local people, tourism companies and the tourists themselves. Sustainable tourism is a recent concept used to reflect the need for a comprehensive analysis and management of tourism both as business and experience. However, this should not be the only consideration. Tourism is actually one part of the effort to achieve overall sustainable development. One way for measuring sustainability patterns in tourism is through the use of indicators. Indicators for sustainable tourism are tools for assessing tourism development and estimate the economic, natural and sociocultural environmental implications.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Development, Indicators, Environment, Economics.

Introduction

Travel over long distances requires a large amount of time and/or energy. Generally this involves burning fossil fuels, a largely unsustainable practice and one that contributes to climate change, via CO₂ emissions. Mass transport is the most climate friendly method of travel, and generally the rule is "the bigger the better" compared to cars, buses are relatively more sustainable, and trains and ships are even more so. Human energy and renewable energy are the most efficient, and hence, sustainable. Travel by bicycle, solar powered car, or sailing boat produces no carbon emissions (although the embodied energy in these vehicles generally comes at the expense of carbon emission).

Tourism is a rapidly growing phenomenon and has become one of the largest industries in the world. The impact of tourism is extremely varied. On one hand, it plays an important and certainly positive role in the socio-economic and political development in destination countries by, for instance, offering new employment opportunities. Also, in certain instances, it may contribute to a broader cultural understanding by creating awareness, respecting the diversity of cultures and ways of life. On the other hand, as a tool to create jobs, it has not fulfilled its expectations. At the same time, complaints from tourist destinations concerning massive negative impacts upon environment, culture and residents' ways of life have given rise to a demand for a more sustainable development in tourism. Different parties will have to be involved in the process of developing sustainable tourism(UNCSD NGO,1999).

Tourism development can have both positive and negative impacts on destinations. Sustainable tourism development attempts to find a balance between these impacts to create an improved quality of life for the host community and the destination. The World Commission on Economic Development (WCED) describes sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". This session further describes some of the principles that have been proposed to ensure that the tourism industry of the future is characterized by rewarding and sustainable travel experiences(WCED, 1987).

Sustainable Tourism

The term ‘sustainable tourism’ first entered the language of tourism development policy some two decades ago. Reflecting the emergence and subsequent widespread adoption of sustainable development more generally, it was seen as an appropriate response to the challenges posed by the scale, scope and consequences of tourism development in particular. That is, since the mid-1960s, the rapid growth of tourism, particularly international mass tourism, and the inexorable global spread of the so-called ‘pleasure periphery’ (Turner & Ash, 1975) had been accompanied by increasing calls for restraint in its development. By the early 1990s, the attention paid to both the perceived negative impacts of tourism and to alternative approaches to its development had become re-focused through the specific lens of sustainable tourism and, since then, it has maintained a dominant position in both the academic study of tourism and in tourism policy and planning processes (Ashley, et al, 2001).

It is often claimed that sustainable tourism debate is disjointed, theoretically flawed and based upon weak or false assumptions (Liu 2003), whilst it has long been suggested that the principles of sustainable tourism represent little more than a micro solution to a macro problem (Wheeller, 1991). Secondly, there is little evidence to suggest that the principles of sustainability or sustainable development have been adopted amongst individual tourism businesses, sectors of the travel and tourism industry or, indeed, at the declinational level. Certainly, sustainable tourism remains a policy objective at the global level, enjoying.

The notion of sustainable development has expanded to cover all forms of development and economic activities including tourism. The interpretation of the concept of sustainable development in tourism remains vague and a number of different approaches have been proposed in an effort to define what constitutes sustainable development in tourism and what not. Coccossis (1996) recognizes four different interpretations of sustainable tourism. These four perspectives are the “*economic sustainability of tourism*”, the “*ecologically sustainable tourism*”, “*sustainable tourism development*” where although the need for environmental quality is apparent; the focus is on the long-term viability of the industry- and “*tourism as a part of a strategy for sustainable development*”.

The definitions of sustainable tourism emphasize the following important features (Tao, 2005):

- Quality – sustainable tourism provides a quality experience for visitors while improving the quality of life of the host community and protecting the quality of the environment.
- Continuity- sustainable tourism ensures the continuity of the natural resources upon which it is based and the continuity of the culture of the host community with satisfying experiences for visitors.
- Balance- sustainable tourism balances the needs of the tourism industry, supporters of the environment, and the local community. Sustainable tourism also emphasizes mutual goals and cooperation among visitors, the host community, and the destinations.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF TOURISM

The concept of sustainability arose from the recognition that the earth’s limited resources could not indefinitely support the rapid population and industrial growth as economic development moves to reduce poverty and increase standards of living among all countries. Most tourists wish to visit areas that are attractive, functional, clean and not polluted. Tourism can provide the incentive and means to maintain and, where needed, improve the environmental quality of areas. A high level of environmental quality is also very important for the local residents to enjoy. Tourism can help make residents more aware of the quality of their environment and support its maintenance and, where necessary, improvement.

While tourism provides considerable economic benefits for many countries, regions and communities, its rapid expansion can also be responsible for adverse environmental (and sociocultural) impacts. Natural resource depletion and environmental degradation associated with tourism activities are sometimes serious problems in tourism-rich regions. The management of natural resources to reverse this trend is thus one of the most difficult challenges for governments at different levels. The main environmental impacts of tourism are (Neto, 2002):

Pressure on natural resources: In addition to pressure on the availability and prices of resources consumed by local residents such as energy, food and basic raw materials the main natural resources at risk from tourism development are land, freshwater and marine resources.

Pollution and waste generation: Besides the consumption of large amounts of natural and other local resources, the tourism industry also generates considerable waste and pollution. Improper disposal of liquid and solid waste generated by the tourism industry has become a particular problem for many developing countries and regions that lack the capacity to treat these waste materials properly.

Damage to ecosystems: Intensive tourism activity in natural areas can interfere with fragile vegetation and wildlife and cause irreversible damage to ecosystems, particularly if the infrastructure in those areas is not adequately prepared to absorb mass tourism.

Environmental threats to tourism: In many mountain regions, small islands, coastal areas and other ecologically fragile places visited by tourists, there is an increasing concern that the negative impacts of tourism on the natural environment can ultimately hurt the tourism industry itself. There is now plenty of evidence of the lifecycle of a tourist destination, and the subsequent deterioration of key attractions or facilities.

The natural environment is an important resource for tourism. With increasing urbanization, destinations in both industrialized and developing countries with significant natural features, scenery, cultural heritage or biodiversity are becoming increasingly popular sites for tourist destinations. Efforts to preserve and enhance the natural environment should therefore be a high priority for the industry and for governments. But the reality is not quite as clear cut. The biophysical characteristics of these habitats often render them particularly susceptible to damage from human activities. As the scale of tourism grows, the resource use threatens to become unsustainable.

International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) pointed out (ICLEI 1999):

“Tourism in natural areas, euphemistically called “eco-tourism,” can be a major source of degradation of local ecological, economic and social systems. The intrusion of large numbers of foreigners with high-consumption and high-waste habits into natural areas, or into towns with inadequate waste management infrastructure, can produce changes to those natural areas at a rate that is far greater than imposed by local residents. These tourism-related changes are particularly deleterious when local residents rely on those natural areas for their sustenance. Resulting economic losses can encourage socially deleterious economic activities such as prostitution, crime, and migrant and child labour”.

Some of the different kinds of impacts that tourism development and operational activities can have include (UNEP, 2002):

- Threats to ecosystems and biodiversity – e.g loss of wildlife and rare species, habitat loss and degradation.
- Disruption of coasts – e.g shoreline erosion and pollution, impact to coral reefs and fish spawning grounds.
- Deforestation – loss of forests for fuel wood and timber by the tourist industry also impact on soil and water quality, bio-diversity integrity, reducing the collection of forest products by local communities.
- Water overuse – as a result of tourism / recreational activities e.g. golf courses, swimming pools, and tourist consumption in hotels.
- Urban problems - Congestion and overcrowding, increased vehicle traffic and resultant environmental impacts, including air and noise pollution, and health impacts.
- Exacerbate climate change from fossil fuel energy consumption for travel, hotel and recreational requirements.
- Unsustainable and inequitable resource use Energy and water over consumption, excessive production of wastes, litter and garbage are all common impacts.

TOURISM AND ECONOMICS

Economic gains have been a major driving force for the growth of tourism in developing countries. The initial period of growth happened in the late 1960's and 1970's, when tourism was perceived as a key activity for generating foreign exchange and employment by both development institutions, such as the World Bank, as well as by governments (Goodwin, 2000).

Despite the negative economic impacts of tourism (such as inflation; dominance by outsiders in land and property markets; inward-migration eroding economic opportunities for domestic industry including the poor) the demand for travel and tourism continues to grow. There is significant scope for enhancing the possible gains through addressing a number of issues that can help improve opportunities for entrepreneurs and the communities in the destinations, for the poorer sections within these communities, as well as at the macro level for the national economy.

Tourism has become the main source of income for the economies of an increasing number of Small Island developing States (SIDS) as well as less developed regions of large countries with a natural environment appealing to tourists. Foreign exchange earnings can, however, vary significantly among these tourism-driven economies because of 'leakages' arising from imports of equipment for construction and consumer goods required by tourists, repatriation of profits earned by foreign investors and amortization of foreign debt incurred in tourist development (UN, 1998).

Besides export earnings, international tourism also generates an increasingly significant share of government (national and local) tax revenues throughout the world. In addition, the development of tourism as a whole is usually accompanied by considerable investments in infrastructure, such as airports, roads, water and sewerage facilities, telecommunications and other public utilities. Such infrastructural improvements not only generate benefits to tourists but can also contribute to improving the living conditions of local populations. This increase in social overhead capital can also help attract other industries to a disadvantaged area and thus be crucial to regional economic development.

The tourism sector is an increasingly important source of employment including in tourism-related sectors, such as construction and agriculture primarily for unskilled labour, migrants from poor rural areas, people who prefer to work part-time, and notably women. Because the sector is relatively labor-intensive, investments in tourism tend to generate a larger and more rapid increase in employment than equal investment in other economic activities. Informal employment relations in small and medium-sized enterprises, which employ about half of the labour force in the hotel and catering sub-sectors worldwide, also contribute to a relatively high proportion of child labour and non-remunerated employment in these sub-sectors in many countries (Neto, 2002)

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND THE SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPACTS

The sustainable development approach is particularly important when applying socio-cultural impacts because this sector depends mostly on tourist attractions and activities that are related to both the natural environment and historic and cultural heritage of an area. If these resources are degraded or destroyed, the tourism cannot thrive. Conservation of tourism resources can help make residents of an area more aware of their heritage and support its protection (TAO, 2005).

Community Involvement: Community involvement is an essential factor in the success and/or failure of the development process. The community should be encouraged to become involved in the development process, through which the socio-economic benefits can be maximized.

Community Conflict: Not all social exchanges between tourists and visitors are negative. Younger residents of tourist destinations sometimes express the belief that tourism is a positive force in creating a less rigid society. This loosening of traditional restrictions is often associated with a phenomenon called the "demonstration effect". Tourism can further contribute to community conflict indirectly through the creation of new job and economic opportunities.

Cultural Change: Because culture can play an important role in attracting tourists to a destination, tourism offers both economic incentives and social support for the maintenance and revitalization of various cultural activities. The production of traditional arts for tourists, however, has often resulted in changes in cultural products.

Cultural Interpretation: Cultural or community interpretation is one means of mitigating the negative impacts of tourism upon a host region's culture. One of the main objectives of cultural interpretation is to assist visitors in developing a keener awareness, appreciation, and understanding of the area and culture of the people they are visiting.

INDICATORS FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Indicators for sustainable tourism are a relatively new field of research and work interest. WTO since 1992 has been undertaking work on this field (WTO 1993, 1996). However, the indicators proposed, as well as the overall framework appear to be too tourism centric targeting on safeguarding tourism businesses. Sustainable tourism indicators like the sustainability indicators are about integrating tourism to its environmental and socio-cultural context. Furthermore, sustainability indicators for already developed tourist destinations should be formulated in a way that the weak points where action must be taken and must examine the sector's relationship to the rest of the activities and the environment in an effort to achieve overall sustainability for the area.

Indicators are defined for the local scale of application. The scale of application is significant since more detailed information could be considered as it gets lower while aggregations are mostly used in a broader scale of application. Moreover, different indicators are meaningful at different scales although some of them could be used in local as well as regional and/or national level. The local scale was chosen here in order to facilitate local communities and stakeholders to adopt sustainable practices. It is also believed that research in the local scale could help in clarifying theoretical as well as practical issues about sustainable development and facilitate in this way in its implementation.

The number of indicators varies from principle to principle according to the different dimensions this might have as well as the apparent lack of data or not. Data availability is a significant issue, especially in Mediterranean countries. For this reason, in some instances, more than one indicator may have been proposed which more or less refer to same parameter (Farsari, 2000).

1. Using resources sustainably.
2. Reducing over-consumption and waste.
3. Maintaining diversity.
4. Integrating tourism into planning and marketing tourism responsibly.
5. Supporting local economies.
6. Involving local communities and Consulting stakeholders and the public.
7. Training staff.

Solutions for Sustainable Tourism

Through national and international research of best practices commissioned by Travel Oregon, Rural Development Initiatives has developed a set of principles of sustainable tourism to help shape regional tourism plans. These principles capture characteristics of tourism that can be used as a screen for prioritizing and refining potential strategies. The principles are as follows (RDI, 2005):

- **Serves a target market that is profitable, with promising long term viability:** Typically, this market is characterized by low volume, higher priced, high value-added goods and services.
- **Is integrated with and respectful of the culture, homeland, heritage, and people of a place:** Sustainable tourism does not overrun the community or detract from its "soul"; it enhances it by increasing local awareness and pride in what makes each place and its people special.
- **Generates localized economic development benefits:** There are diverse opportunities for local jobs, local entrepreneurs, and many locally owned businesses that grow and reinvest in the community.
- **Generates development that has a balanced and beneficial impact on the environment and community:** In support of this principle, the community chooses techniques for constructing and operating buildings, service provision and infrastructure in a way that has a net-zero or positive impact on the environment.
- **Generates revenue that is re-invested in conserving and enhancing the unique features of the community:** Sustainable tourism creatively generates revenue to support efforts such as open space preservation, conservation efforts, schools, and trails.
- **Encourages diverse parties to work together to create new opportunities and to address challenges that emerge:** Communities that are successful with sustainable tourism have created organized ways to leverage and coordinate the efforts of many diverse people and entities.

CONCLUSION

Tourism is expected to resume its rapid growth in the future because of improved living standards, rising incomes and amounts of free time, the falling real cost of travel, and improved transportation around the world. This growth can be harnessed not only for the enjoyment of tourists themselves but, more importantly, for maximizing economic benefits and thus increasing the living standards of host communities and countries. At the same time, it is bound to have negative environmental and socio-cultural impact on those communities, whose involvement in tourism planning, development and management can be crucial to minimizing the impact. The major challenge for the international community is, therefore, not only to minimize the negative impact of tourism but also to ensure that the economic benefits of tourism can contribute to environmental protection and the sustainable use of natural resources.

Ecotourism can be a valuable means for promoting the socio-economic development of host communities while generating resources for the preservation of natural and cultural assets. In this way, ecologically fragile areas can be protected with the financial returns of ecotourism activities made by both the public and private sectors. In many developing countries, ecotourism has been particularly successful in attracting private investments for the establishment of privately owned natural parks and nature reserves. Tourism industry can help to protect and even rehabilitate natural assets, and thus contribute to the preservation of biological diversity and ecological balance.

Unsustainable ecotourism activities may threaten the very natural environment upon which they depend. There is, in fact, a crucial distinction between ecotourism and sustainable tourism. If tourism development is to be sustainable it must move away from its traditional growth-oriented model to one concerned with a sustainable set of goals and principles. All forms of tourism can either be considered sustainable or not. Sustainable tourism must be seen as a goal in tourism development. Achieving such a goal is a difficult task to accomplish; however, developing tourism in a sustainable manner must be an important objective in the developing process.

There are many stakeholders in the field of sustainable tourism. The major areas include; the host community, governmental bodies, tourism industry, tourists, pressure groups, voluntary sector, experts, and the media. It is essential that all stakeholders work together towards the common goal of developing tourism in a sustainable manner.

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