

Sustainable Tourism: Theory and Practice

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Foreword

This book has a rich, up-to-date and innovative didactical and pedagogical value, thus becoming an essential tool for tourism university students at the beginning of the century. It clearly responds to the unavoidable need to include the principles of sustainability in all study areas, but especially in tourism, which has become one of the main social and economic phenomena of our times.

If tourism is to continue growing and diversifying in the next decades according to the same patterns that were observed in the second half of the twentieth century, it is not conceivable to let it follow such an expansion without mastering its wide range of impacts, both positive and negative, upon the social, economic and environmental fabrics of societies. In this context, educating future tourism industry professionals is crucial, both for developing more awareness about sustainability issues, and for providing them with the necessary tools for addressing those issues in their concrete, day-to-day tourism operations and in the policy-making decisions in tourism.

This publication is also a practical handbook for current tourism destination, site or enterprise managers. It can help them in raising the level of sustainability in their activities. It allows them to learn about the different sustainability challenges facing the tourism industry today, how to redress current unsustainable operations, and how to take informed decisions regarding the expansion or refurbishment of existing facilities to make them more sustainable, or to plan and develop new tourism infrastructures that guarantee long term, sustainable operations.

For students and operators, the book clarifies the concept of sustainable tourism, which is not to be understood as a particular variety of tourism as it is sometimes wrongly thought, but rather as an overriding approach to tourism development and management applicable to all the segments of the tourism industry. In this respect, Chapter 4, dedicated to mass tourism, is an *a fortiori* example, showing that sustainable principles must be applied to all human activities, and tourism, in all its forms, must be included in the general sustainable development of territories and nations.

According to the Conceptual Definition established by the World Tourism Organization, sustainable tourism must:

- Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development;
- Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to intercultural understanding and tolerance;
- Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, and contributing to poverty alleviation; and
- Maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices.

In order to implement the equally important three dimensions of sustainability reflected in this definition (environmental, socio-cultural and economic), and to

ensure the quality of the tourist experience, all stakeholders in the tourism sector are relevant and play complementary roles. Indeed, it is known that actors in the tourism industry are very numerous, and they all share a common responsibility towards sustainability. However, this responsibility is differentiated and each stakeholder should assume it and establish, whenever necessary, the appropriate partnership with other actors. The book reflects well this multi-stakeholder nature of tourism, as well as its trans-sectoral implications.

Quality, the notion of which is often linked to sustainability, is also dealt with in this book. Indeed, in today's world, no product or service can be considered of high quality if it does not comply with sustainability criteria. These criteria should be the basis on which tourism organizations, companies and destinations should establish quality labels, associating such labels with suitable indicators of sustainability. Indicators are crucial tools and help tourism managers at all stages, from planning decisions to monitoring process, but also in zoning and for determining carrying capacities. The book dedicates part of Chapter 3 to indicators, with corresponding references to the substantive work carried out in this field by the World Tourism Organization in recent years.

After explaining various managing tools and techniques, such as visitor management, and presenting some of the tourism destinations, like small islands or cities, this publication ends by dealing with one particular tourism segment: ecotourism. Ecotourism is no longer a vague, confusing concept or a marginal tourism segment. The International Year of Ecotourism in 2002 – which gave the opportunity to open a wide, participatory debate among all types of stakeholders that reached its peak at the World Ecotourism Summit in Québec (Canada) – recognized the leading role that ecotourism is playing in terms of the overall sustainability of tourism activities. The Québec Declaration on Ecotourism clearly defines the concept of ecotourism and has become a reference point in all ecotourism studies, publications and conferences. In many ways, ecotourism is a microcosm of all the issues of sustainable tourism, but focusing in a more concentrated way on specific ecosystems and traditional cultures. As a leading segment in sustainability issues, ecotourism should serve to open new windows in future research on tourism and its relation with major human challenges worldwide, contributing as far as possible to the UN Millennium Development Goals.

The book also deals with the main categories of infrastructure and services that make up a tourism product, avoiding a classical and somehow outdated description of each of these components, but rather grouping them into two major groups, irrespective of whether they are physical, infrastructural elements, or services. Yet, in both the so-called 'facilitating sectors' and in the 'attractions', the author stresses the need to adopt the sustainability approach, addressing first the ways in which each of these components affects the environment and generates impacts upon the social and cultural fabrics of societies. The facilitating sectors and the attractions come together in Chapter 8 of the book to constitute a 'destination', and it is here the role of the host community is examined, and especially the various ways in which communities can influence the level of sustainability of destinations.

In conclusion, there is an adequate and appropriate coverage in the book of the various denominations that are commonly, but not always rightly used by tourism professionals and academics, clarifying the concepts of :

- sustainable tourism – namely a condition that all types of tourism must fulfil;
- alternative tourism – referring to the variety of modern, special interest tourism niches that have appeared over the last couple of decades and that have tended

to remain outside the mass markets, although not necessarily being more sustainable;

- conventional mass tourism – referring to the traditional forms of tourism, such as beach, city, congress and winter sports tourism, and the need for these forms of tourism to become more sustainable; and
- ecotourism, understood as the segment of the tourism industry operating in relatively wild natural areas.

Clarifying these concepts has become an unavoidable necessity, especially when talking about sustainability in tourism, in order to erase, once and for all, the misunderstanding that it is only some segments of the industry that need to be more sustainable. Perhaps the marketing and promotion of these segments need to be differentiated; perhaps also their operational management too, but the sustainability conditions must apply to all of them.

Eugenio Yunis
Head, Sustainable Development of Tourism
World Tourism Organization

Preface

Introduction

The juggernaut of global tourism continues to roll inexorably in the early years of the new millennium, with major geopolitical events such as 9/11 and the Iraq war causing little more than minor and temporary interruptions in the pattern of increased tourist arrivals and revenues that has persisted since the end of World War II. Mass tourism destinations are now evolving into mega tourism destinations, ever more remote places are being incorporated into the global tourism system and the exploding domestic and outbound tourist markets of China and India are poised to propel global tourism into yet another period of accelerated expansion. Intensifying tourism activity is affecting more and more places – mostly on earth, but now also in outer space – and there can no longer be any doubt as to the potential of this sector to effect fundamental economic, environmental and sociocultural change on destination as well as origin and transit regions. This change, depending on how this sector is managed, can be either positive or negative and it is the understandable desire to maximize the former and minimize the latter that has given rise to the now ubiquitous engagement of stakeholders with the concept of sustainable tourism.

Premises

This book facilitates the engagement process by describing and critically analysing the extent to which sustainability-related considerations are being pursued within the global tourism sector. In effect, it engages the contemporary engagement with sustainable tourism. At least four basic premises inform the content, which is directed primarily toward senior university undergraduates taking a tourism management major or minor. First, all scales of tourism are inherently legitimate and it is a question of how appropriate alternative or mass tourism, or some combination of the two, is in any given place and time. Having said this, it makes sense to pay particular attention to the sustainability of ‘mass tourism’ since this accounts for most tourism activity and is the mode that has been implicated in most negative impacts. Second, both alternative and mass tourism always entail costs as well as benefits and neither is a panacea. It is for this reason that managers can only hope to minimize rather than eliminate the negative impacts. Third, any strategy aspiring to attain environmental, sociocultural and economic sustainability, to be viable, must additionally take into account the imperative of financial sustainability. The other dimensions of sustainability are moot if an operation goes out of business, while the ability to pursue those dimensions is enhanced if the operation is profitable. The ability of the public sector to pursue effective strategies is similarly dictated by the direct and indirect financial resources at hand. Sustainability deliberations are too often utopian, yielding superb paper plans for destinations that are unlikely to attract the

necessary funding. Fourth and finally, comprehensive engagement with sustainability requires public/private partnerships based on mutual respect and cooperation, since neither sector can achieve sustainable tourism by itself.

Outline

The first two chapters are introductory, with Chapter 1 examining the historical origins of sustainable tourism and the extent to which the concept of sustainability has been adopted and institutionalized by organizations both internal and external to tourism. Chapter 2 discusses basic issues that complicate the practice of sustainability and introduces indicators as a critical component in sustainability-related strategies and management. Chapter 3 considers alternative tourism, which was conceived in the 1980s as a more appropriate or 'sustainable' form of tourism than mass tourism. But recognizing that alternative tourism is only a partial solution to the world's tourism-related problems, the next four chapters focus on the private sector mass tourism industry. Specifically, Chapter 4 examines the factors that have given rise to the industry's growing engagement with sustainability, including the emergence of the 'green' consumer and the advantages associated with size. Chapter 5 looks at the initiatives and issues of sustainability in facilitating sectors such as travel agencies, tour operators, transportation and accommodations, while Chapter 6 examines selected mass tourism attractions such as casinos, theme parks, ski resorts and golf courses. Chapter 7 addresses quality control mechanisms such as codes of conduct, ecolabels and awards that attempt to ensure adherence to the precepts of environmental and sociocultural sustainability. The next three chapters shift the focus to destinations (Chapter 8) and to the spatial strategies (Chapter 9) and visitor management strategies (Chapter 10) that can be employed by public sector managers to realize sustainable tourism outcomes. Finally, Chapter 11 illustrates and synthesizes issues raised in previous chapters to one particular sector, ecotourism, which is described here as the conscience of sustainable tourism because of its explicit focus on sustainability precepts.

Format

The 11-chapter format reflects the division of most senior university-level courses into a 12 to 14 week semester, so that allowing time for midterm exams as well as introductory and concluding housekeeping, one chapter can be covered each week. Each chapter begins with a list of expectations that the student should meet after reading and assimilating the text. The text that follows is organized into main sections (e.g. Section 1.0), primary subsections (e.g. Section 1.2.1) and secondary as well as tertiary subsections, neither of which are numbered. Important terms are italicized while asterisks identify organizations, initiatives, etc. for which a relevant web link is provided near the end of the chapter in the *On the net* feature. Other supportive features that follow the main text of each chapter include a Summary, a list of print resources, a *Beyond the Book* feature that provides relevant questions and exercises that go beyond mere reiteration of content and a case study that illustrates concepts and issues raised by the chapter.

Limitations

The topic of sustainable tourism encompasses an enormous body of information and knowledge that expands by the day. It is therefore inevitable that much important material will be excluded from this book. In some cases no coverage was available in English and in other instances my search for relevant information through personal contact, the web or other sources was unsuccessful. The author would appreciate being made aware of such material so that it can be considered for inclusion in the next edition. One result of this limited access to information is uneven geographic coverage. Most of the material pertains to developed regions such as North America and Western Europe where the involvement with sustainability is most pronounced, while regions such as Africa, the Middle East and Asia receive only sporadic attention. A major limitation beyond the author's control is the paucity of rigorous academic studies that assess the results of certification programmes, measure awareness of and support for such initiatives among consumers and operators and otherwise provide objective evidence by which progress in the realm of sustainable tourism can be assessed.

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