

Three Dimensions of Sustainable Tourism Development-- an Overview

(For Literature and Tourism)

GENERAL OVERVIEW

- IN 1992 AT THE Rio Earth Summit, 178 governments approved Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration. Agenda 21 offered a blue-print for sustainable development, while Rio Declaration articulated the main principles for sustainable development in the 21st century.
- Both documents challenged organizations, governments and industries to work towards maximum levels of sustainability defined by the Brundtland Commission in 1987 as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- Since the summit, the social, political and economic world has developed at a rapid pace. The encroaching globalization of the world, the increasing necessity and use of technology and its inherent liberalization, have altered the way business is conducted and in so doing have affected the relationships between people and the environment.
- The inevitable global shift towards ‘globalization is transforming the workplace, the job market, lifestyles, communities, industries and markets. The challenge for stakeholders involved in all industries is to find a balance between sustenance, prosperity and people’s desire to improve their financial/material, well-being, with the underlying need for identity, community, religion, home and family.
- Travel and tourism can play a vital role in balancing these forces. It not only provides the livelihoods for both rural and urban communities, but has the capacity, when planned, developed and managed properly to enhance community relations and build bridges of understanding and peace between nations.
- Travel and tourism also plays a crucial role in encouraging governments to reduce their barriers to growth. Thomas Friedman in his book. The Lexus and the Olive Tree suggests that governments need to don a ‘golden straight jacket’ in order to allow pure free market capitalism and enable both developed and developing countries to achieve full economic growth within a sustainable development framework.
- The first step to achieving this balance between sustainable development and economic growth for travel and tourism was in 1996. The world travel and tourism council (WTTC), the world tourism

organization (WTO/OMT) and the earth council, together launched Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry:

- Towards Environmentally Sustainable Development—a sectoral action plan for sustainable development based on the outcome of the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. At the time it was the only industry specific adaptation of Agenda 21.

TOURISM TODAY

- The following definition of tourism was officially adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission in 1993: Tourism comprises the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes.
- Both the inter-governmental WTO/OMT and the private sector WTTC consider the travel and tourism sector to be one of the largest—if not THE largest—in the world, particularly in terms of its contribution to the world economy. According to WTTC estimates, travel and tourism achieved the following economic impact directly and indirectly in 2001: USD3,3 trillion contribution to global GDP, almost 11% of total GDP; 207 million jobs worldwide, over 8% of all jobs; USD630 billion in capital investment, almost 9% of all capital investment.
- This economic activity of the travel and tourism sector was generated by 698 million international tourist arrivals in 2000, representing an estimated 7.3% increase over 1999 according to preliminary estimates. This was the highest growth rate in nearly a decade and almost double the increase of 1999 with nearly 50 million more arrivals recorded, which is approximately what destinations such as Spain or the United States receive in the entire year.
- In less than a decade international tourist arrivals are projected to reach one billion. In March 2001, WTO/OMT submitted a concise report on sustainable development of tourism to the United Nations (UN), in which it noted that ‘the development of tourism has been characterized by continuing geographical spread and diversification of tourist destinations.
- While in 1950 the top 15 tourist destinations, all in western Europe and North America, attracted 97% of the world’s total arrivals, by 1999 this figure has fallen to 62%, with market shares increasing for developing countries and economies in transition, particularly in south-east Asia, central and eastern Europe, and Latin America’.

- Some of the main qualitative trends seen in the industry in the form of increased market segmentation the development of new terms of tourism—especially those related to nature and wildlife, rural areas and culture—and how such programmes are influencing traditional package tours. Clearly tourists are increasingly selective about destinations and are demanding higher quality products and services.
- One of the driving forces behind this trend is the emergence of an ‘experience-based economy’, a term used by B. Joseph Pine and James H. Gilmore in the Harvard Business Review (July-August 1998), to describe what happens when a company intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates memorable events.
- The travel and tourism industry simultaneously thrives upon this trend and is threatened by it. Tourism products and services that demonstrate ‘greater sensitivity to the environment, traditional culture and local people at the destinations’ can create such an experience, whereas tourism in a context of uncontrolled growth which puts increasing pressure on the natural, cultural and socio-economic environment, risks diminishing the visitor’s experience.
- In short, increased market demand for experiences can contribute to social, economic and environmental sustainability only if the resulting pressures from growth are properly planned and managed. The travel and tourism industry is both receptive and conscious of the resulting pressures from economic growth and the need to protect our natural and social environment.
- The preservation of the tourism product—the environmental, social or cultural heritage specific to each country—is the only way to ensure a future for everyone. In response to this increase in recognition of the need to safeguard natural resources, a growing number of travel and tourism companies are seeking to create more responsible consumer behavior by using their products and services to educate and inform their customers.
- Many multinational companies such as Lusotur, British Airways, Japan Travel Bureau (JTB), Taj Hotels and Preussag have all adopted ‘corporate citizenship’ programmes that have created dialogue between the community and the private sector, as well as promoting sustainable development.

DEFINITION OF TOURISM

- Tourism is the United States' third largest retail industry, behind only automotive dealers and food stores. Although tourism was once thought of as a "smokeless" industry with few, if any, environmental impacts, recognition of its potential for adverse impacts is growing.
- Tourism consists of the activities undertaken during travel from home or work for the pleasure and enjoyment of certain destinations, and the facilities that cater to the needs of the tourist (Mathieson and Wall, 1982).
- It is often difficult to distinguish between tourism and recreation, as they are interrelated. Tourism implies travelling a distance from home, while recreation is defined as the activities undertaken during leisure time (McIntosh & Goeldner, 1990). The overlap is partly dependent upon the length of time of the recreational activity.
- For example, recreational boating is both a recreational activity and a tourist activity, depending on the duration and location of the trip. A boater who uses his or her boat for a day can be considered to be participating in a recreational activity, while a boater who takes a longer trip can also be considered a tourist (if visiting other destinations).
- Therefore while tourism is the primary focus of discussion, selected recreational activities and their impacts are considered as well. This discussion paper presents environmental impacts of tourism in three categories: direct impacts, including impacts from the travel to a destination, the tourist activities in land of themselves at that destination, such as hiking or boating, and from the creation, operation and maintenance of facilities that cater to the tourist; "upstream" impacts, resulting from service providers' ability to influence suppliers "upstream" impacts, resulting from service providers' ability to influence suppliers; and "downstream" impacts, where service providers can influence the behavior or consumption patterns of customers.