

TOURISM MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

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SUMMARY

Sustainability is a term that is used often in relation to tourism planning and management. Concepts of sustainable tourism have been derived from concerns with sustainable development. A number of statements on sustainable development appeared in the 1980s. The first major statement on sustainable tourism appeared in 1990. Since then the concept has developed and changed. Early ideas on sustainable tourism usually focused on environmental sustainability. More recent statements have been concerned with socio-cultural and economic factors. The role of host communities has also featured significantly in recent comments on sustainable tourism. It is possible to subdivide comments on sustainable tourism into groupings such as 'technocentric' or 'ecocentric'. It is very likely that concepts of sustainable tourism will continue to evolve over the next decade, and that tourism planning and management will reflect these changing notions.

TOURISM MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability is a concept used with increasing frequency in tourism development, planning and management circles. It is often linked to terms such as 'green' tourism and „ecotourism“. The term, however, is not well defined. To a certain extent, sustainability is now an overused term and is open to abuse, particularly from those operators who wish to indicate that their product is worthier than another's, and even by academics who see that their careers could be advanced through work in this area of tourism.

The modern usage of the term 'sustainability' would appear to date from the Brundtland Report of 1987 (**Holden, 2000**). In this report, the term sustainable development was used. The Brundtland Report focused on the Earth's environment and was concerned about unsustainable resource use associated with what was seen as too rapid development. This report also made the link between environment and development very clear.

At what was known as the Earth Summit, held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, the concerns that were expressed in the Brundtland Report were once again present. This conference set forward a programme for promoting sustainable development throughout the world. This came to be known as Agenda 21. Agenda 21 is an: „action plan laying out the basic principles required to progress towards sustainability“ (**Holden, 2000, p. 164**). The particular approach of Agenda 21 is to involve local communities in a „bottom-up“ approach to their own development.

However, the concept of sustainable development was not fully defined in either the Brundtland Report or at the Rio Summit. This means that for example, private organizations, governments, NGOs and academics may have very different views on its meaning. Nevertheless, the Brundtland Report stressed that sustainable development does not mean preservation of the environment, but sustainable development of it (Holden, 2000) and the focus is thus on conservation and not preservation.

Holden (2000) suggested that although there is a diverse range of views on sustainable development, they can be classified, generally into two camps; there are „technocentric“ views and „ecocentric“ views. The technocentric view insists that problems can be quantified and solved largely through the application of technology. The ecocentric view places great emphasis on „quality of life“ rather than „standard of living“ and the measurement of economic growth in quantitative terms has little value. The opposite ends of the spectrum of the technocentric and ecocentric are shown in Figure 1.

Here the ecocentric view is represented under the 'deep ecology' heading which follows from the ideas of Doyle and McEachern (1998). The technocratic view is recognized by most commentators as being the dominant one globally (see Bartelmus, 1994). However, it should be remembered that this is a *spectrum* and there are many views lying between the extremes.

Differences in views of development between the 'dominant world-view' and 'deep ecology' (Adapted from Bartelmus, 1994.)

Figure 1

Dominant world-view	Deep ecology
Strong belief in technology for progress and solutions	Strong belief in technology _ Favours low-scale technology that is self-reliant
Natural world is valued as a resource rather than possessing intrinsic value	Sense of wonder, reverence and moral obligation to the natural world
Believes in ample resource reserves	Recognizes the 'rights' of nature are independent of humans
Favours the objective and quantitative	Recognizes the subjective such as feelings and ethics
Centralization of power	Favours local communities and localized decision-making
Encourages consumerism	Encourages the use of appropriate technology
	Recognizes that the earth's resources are limited

Mirroring the range of views on sustainable development there is also a number of different views on sustainable tourism. One perspective on the meaning of sustainable tourism is that of a sustainable industry of tourism (Coccossis and Papairis, 1996). In this view of sustainable tourism, the development of tourism is one alternative and seen as more acceptable than other more environmentally damaging activities such as logging or mining (Holden, 2000). However, little allowance is made in this view for the cumulative impacts of tourism on the environment (Hunter, 1996). Hunter (1996) suggested a number of other perspectives in which the environment is more, or less, central in concepts of sustainable tourism.

Much of the preceding discussion has not made explicit that statements on sustainable tourism need to be related to value judgements. Hence, the interpretation of the term sustainable tourism is very closely related to the political context in which the term is being applied. Butler and Hall (1998) argued strongly that it is actually impossible to separate concepts of sustainable tourism from the value system and political context in which these are being used.

If in early definitions of sustainable tourism the environment was central, then during the late 1980s and early 1990s socio-cultural factors were linked closely to the concept. By the last decade of the twentieth century, sustainability was usually assumed to refer to the specifically environmental and cultural aspects of the visitor destination area. However, it is possible to suggest that it is rather artificial to consider only these aspects from the total of all elements that make up the tourism experience. Hence, tourism sustainability has an economic and organizational dimension as well as socio-cultural and environmental aspects.

Innskeep (1991) suggested that, in relation to practical applications of concepts of sustainable tourism, there are a number of assumptions that underpin these concepts.

Discussion on sustainable tourism, so far has concentrated, largely, on the impacts of tourism itself and how tourism can become more sustainable in terms of, for example, the environment or local communities. However, this ignores the fact that tourism like many other human activities is affected by events beyond the control of those directly involved in it, (such as tourists, host communities and even members of the tourism industry). In other words, tourism is subject to important external forces, both natural and man-made.

However, much thinking in tourism planning and management has ignored external factors. If these are ignored, then it is relatively easy to believe that tourism activities are the result of known factors and are generally predictable. The assumption that causal relationships can be discerned easily and hence that events are predictable is based on a view of the world that is often described as reductionist (Capra, 1982). In this view, which is largely influenced by the ideas of scientists such as Galileo and Newton, objects and events can be understood in terms of their constituent

parts and these parts fit together like cogs in a machine and hence every event is determined by initial conditions that are, in principle, predictable (Faulkner and Russell, 1997). This view has held sway in the natural sciences until the early part of the twentieth century and has also been greatly influential in the social sciences, including tourism studies until very recently.

However, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century, the ideas of Einstein on relativity and Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, meant a revolution in scientific thinking in which it was accepted that the universe is more complex and chaotic than originally conceived. Faulkner and Russell (1997) have applied the idea of chaos to the social sciences and specifically to tourism studies. They suggested that in science, the language used involving linear concepts and machine analogies is now being replaced by a world of non-linearity, spontaneity and surprise and these concepts are being set alongside attributes normally associated with living organisms, such as adaptation, coherence and organization (Faulkner and Russell, 1997).

In terms of tourism, Faulkner and Russell put forward a number of key ideas based on the application of the notions of chaos and complexity.

However, it is not indicated that natural events can greatly influence tourism. For example the eruption of a dormant volcano on the Caribbean island of Montserrat in 1997, severely disrupted the tourism economy, not only because of the perception created, that the island was a dangerous place to visit, but because it actually permanently covered some of the island's tourism resources in lava and ash. Storms, floods and tsunamis are other natural events that can cause major disruptions to tourism activities. Although it is generally known when these might occur and even where, the specifics of force of individual events, precisely when and exactly where they will occur is still not possible to accurately predict. Hence, such events do not fit neatly into the scientific linear conceptualization of tourism activities.

It has been argued that if we accept that we live in an increasingly complex world then, the type of natural or man-made disasters referred to above will become more common (Faulkner, 2001). However, the impacts of disasters on tourism activities (and hence by implication their relevance for tourism planning and management) have been little researched. Faulkner, in attempting to create an agenda for this type of research, tried to distinguish between disasters and crises. He indicated that it is commonly accepted that crises tend to be associated with on-going change that an organisation has failed to respond to and not adapted, while a disaster is the result of a sudden event (or events) that an organization has failed to respond to at all.

Nevertheless, both crises and disasters may have very similar features and, in particular, generate similar impacts (Faulkner, 2001). Fink (1986) attempted to distil the main

ingredients of disasters and crises and came up with the following aspects:

- There is usually a triggering event, which is so major that it challenges existing structures, routines and even survival of an organization.
- They are characterized by fluid dynamic situations.
- There is an element of surprise with a high threat and short decision time.
- For at least part of the event, a feeling of an inability to cope.

A turning point, when a decisive change will happen which may have both negative and positive dimensions, to the extent that even if the event is well managed, the organization will experience great change that may be irreversible.

In the early part of the twenty-first century, despite the general belief that life on earth is becoming more complex, there is as yet insufficient evidence to indicate whether crises and disasters are becoming more common, than in earlier epochs. Neither is it clear, yet, the effect that such events may have on tourism and the various attempts to make the activity more sustainable. Nevertheless, chaos theory provides important perspectives on tourism planning and management. A number of important events that have occurred in the early part of the twenty-first century, and in particular, global terrorism we discuss in relation to global complexity and chaos.

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