



Economic and Environmental Aspects of Sustainable Tourism Development - A Conceptual Study

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Abstract

The term sustainable development is a commonly and widely used term in our contemporary world. The concept has gained popularity because it satisfies the urge of both its environmentalists and the developers. Sustainable tourism is considered as the meeting point of the developers and environmentalists even as both of them are quite skeptic about each other and criticize each other. Tourism which is an economic sector can eradicate poverty to a great extent. But the overuse of the natural resources for the tourism activities always leads to the negative impact on the environment. So there is an urgent need to maintain the balance between development and environment; otherwise the ever grasping power of tourism and development will demolish the basic structure of the world. The aim of this paper is to study the dialogues of sustainable tourism with reference to environment and economy. The present article is a conceptual discussion of evolution and the issues of sustainable tourism under economy and the environmental heads and concludes that both environment and development have equal importance in the betterment and survival of the human society.

Keywords: Sustainable tourism, Development, Environment

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Introduction

The term sustainable development is a commonly and widely used term in our contemporary world. The concept of sustainability was first used in World Council of Churches (1974). It was projected by the western environmentalists in reply to the developing world's objection to disturbing the environment while human beings from the other parts of the world were suffering from poverty and scarcity. Then the term sustainable development was put forward by the International Union for the Preservation of Nature and Natural Resources in 1980. Though theorists differ in their views about the emergence of the term sustainability, this term has come into prominence after Brundtland commission's Report 1987. The commission chaired by the Gro Harlem Brundtland announced the report "our common future". The central theme of this report was environmental protection through economic development. The definition has gained popularity because it satisfies the urge of both environmentalists and the developers. Environmentalists emphasize the sustainable part and the developers emphasize the development part. Gradually the use of this term has been widened over a period encompassing almost all the sectors at present. Though sustainable tourism is considered as the meeting point of the developers and environmentalists, both of them are quite skeptical about each other and criticize each other. Some of the theorists argue that sustainable development gives equal priority to economic, socio-cultural and environmental dimensions (Briguglio et al., 1996; Vellas and Becherel, 1999) while Swrbrooke (2000) perceives the over-emphasis of the environment detriment the developmental measures. Though one extreme interpretation is economic sustainability (Hunter, 1997; Page et al., 2001), also known as the development perspective (Garrod and Fyall, 1998), where economic development has been considered as a key function of tourism. On the contrary, the ecological perspective prioritizes the natural environment (Garrod and Fyall, 1998; Page et al., 2001) and advocates the approach of 'sustainable' as equivalent to 'responsible', 'alternative' or 'green' (Lumsdon, 1999). Study of the existing literature reveals that economy and the environment are major aspects of sustainable tourism development. Both environment and development play equally important roles in the

betterment and survival of the human society. We cannot ignore one aspect for the growth of another. The aim of this paper is to study the dialogues of sustainable tourism with reference to environment and economy. Given the fact that more than half of the world suffers from poverty, the preservation of environment doesn't figure in the priority list. Poverty can only be eradicated through the economic development. This debate of development and environmental issues is far reaching and makes the concept of 'sustainability' interesting and complex for study and research. Tourism as one of the economic activity is thus debated for its sustainability and economic contribution to address the issue of poverty.

Sustainable tourism development

The idea of sustainable development emerged with an aim to incorporate an environmental perspective through economic policy. The aim is to carefully maintain the balance between environment and economic development. The definition of sustainable development refers to the development which satisfies the wants of the contemporary generation without making any harm to the requirements of the upcoming generations (Brundtland Report, 1987). Manning and Dougherty (1995) further clarified this definition "as the utilisation of natural resources in such a way which will maintain the balance between economic development and environmental quality and keep on generating the economic goods and services" in society. The idea of sustainable tourism has originated from the concept of sustainable development. The term sustainability came into existence in the international, political scenario four decades ago. In the early 1970s, the idea of sustainability brought the concept of "limits to growth" (Meadows et al. 1972) Sustainability implies the harmony, stability or symmetry prevailing between needs of human beings and the physical environment on the basis of which the human society survives.

But, as Allen and Hoekstra (1992; 1994) argue, there is no transcendent notion of sustainability nor is sustainability a matter of degree (something is never partially sustainable). Rather, sustainability is always a human decision bound within some

temporal, spatial scale and directed towards selected features of the material system. Butler (1999) gave a valid basis for discussion on the related topic, pointing out the distinction between two terms: (a) sustainable development in the context of tourism and (b) sustainable tourism. According to this author, sustainable development in the tourism perspective is defined as tourism that is developed in a particular region that will allow its sustainability for an indistinct period, without making any harm to the environment, and with the purpose to allow the successful development of other activities. Tourism has great potential for the destination development and poverty reduction. But at the same time it creates enormous problems which cannot be ignored. Sustainable tourism has always been interpreted in many ways. At present it has been interpreted as strong sustainable tourism and weak sustainable tourism. The first one refers to 'an ill defined perception of a need to become more environmentally conscious than the traditional resource exploitation'. And the second one refers to 'extremely conservationist in approach'. Strong sustainability always desires to reduce economic activity, population level and reduce much technological innovation. So it has been considered as quite vague and irrational. Extreme sustainability is impossible to achieve because most of the third World countries have been lagging behind with poverty for example Pearce, Markendya and Barbier (1989) argue that people of Third World suffer from poverty and they are intimately attached to nature for their livelihood and the environmental degradation has more influence on the welfare of the Third World than in the areas of First World. After the Second World War the people of developed countries were attracted towards the Third World countries because of their unspoiled natural beauty, marvelous landscape, authentic culture and indigenous people. Due to the enormous tourism pressure the natural resources started to deplete. In recent years the idea of Third World in western mind has emerged in part from that of catastrophic crisis - of famine and hunger, scarcity and war - to symbolize the prospect for an exciting 'new style' holiday.

The attraction of natural beauty and environmental and cultural diversity in the Third World countries attracted millions, especially middle class tourists of the first world countries. Third World

governments became quite curious about the established interest and promoted tourism as a means to obtain better foreign exchange and to get rid of poverty and the ill of underdevelopment. Discussions of sustainable tourism usually emphasize three major domains viz. the natural environment; the social environment and the economic feasibility of the tourism industry. These domains are recognised as being both distinct and interrelated. Sustainable tourism implies interest in both ecological and economic dimensions. Sustainable tourism in its basic sense means the industry that influences the environment and local culture minimally, while creating job opportunities for the local people and protects the local ecosystems fairly.

In this regard it is imperative to discuss the major domains of natural, social and economic aspects of sustainable tourism. Responsible tourism is associated with natural and cultural heritage. Sustainable development approach suggests to carry the developmental achievements into future in such a way that upcoming generations are not left worse off (WCED 1987:Pearce et al...1990). One of the famous definitions of sustainable tourism given by the Globe 90 conference, held at Vancouver ,B.C., Canada (1991) says that sustainable tourism development is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that can fulfill economic, social and aesthetic needs while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological process, biological diversity and life support systems.

Environmental issues in sustainable tourism

Atfield defined environment as the 'surroundings' and its association with individuals for the duration of their life or the society for the duration of its existence (Environment and tourism Andrew Holden) As Brunn and Kalland (1995) observe in the environmental studies ...it is generally understood that there is a basic relationship between the society and the supervision of natural resources and its perception of nature. The term environment refers to the physical environment that comprises natural and manmade components, as well as socio-cultural components (Inskeep, 1991, p. 339;Mathieson & Wall, 1996, p. 3) There is a bond that prevails between humans and Nature.

Environment plays an important role in human beings' life. Tourism has an intimate relationship with Nature. After the introduction of the concept of sustainable development by the Brundtland Commission (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987) environmental protection became a key issue. The main aim of this report was to create awareness about environment among the people. Tourism which is an economic sector has enormous impact on the environment. Environment is often considered as a major pull factor for the tourist. As environment is an inevitable asset for the tourism industry, the protection of environment is quite essential for the existence of tourism industry along the human. Environmental quality implies the quality of the natural features of the destination that is prone to degradation by human activities. Natural features like beautiful scenery, marvelous landscape, natural hydrologic structures, clean water, fresh air and natural species suffer from the threat of pollution and losing their charm. Environmental quality is an essential part of natural attraction as far as tourists' demand is concerned.

The internationalization of environmental awareness through organizations such as Green Globe has led to the gradual restructuring of the tourism industry to adopt strategies and policies in support of environmental quality, based on the sustainable use of environmental resources (Christ Lim et.al, 2004). As the lion's share of the world's population became urbanized, the demand for environmental quality had rapidly increased. Introducing the dimensions of resource usage in tourism, Bull (1991, P.1) suggests that tourism is a human activity which comprise human actions, utilization of resources and relations with other people, economy and environment. This definition points out the reality that natural and cultural resources are given much priority in tourism and these are used in various ways such as employment, financial gain and economic development.

Tourism has negative impacts on the environment. Tourism was regarded as a smoke less industry initially because of its smaller size and scope (Initially, because of its relatively inadequate scope and size, tourism was facing less criticism). For the most part, it was regarded as an 'environmental friendly' activity and

'smokeless industry', barely creating any hassle. Such defenders even advocated tourism as a positive economic and environmental substitute to Florist-style resource extraction and construction. Perspectives concerning tourism's environmental consequences shifted with the industry's rapid emergence as a global economic force in the late 1960s and 70s. This period witnessed an unparalleled growth in international tourist arrivals, an unstable development of tourism activities and a lack of general guidelines for development. What was once supposed to be a small and chiefly non-invasive economic activity became a huge global event.

The tourist industry is composed of three types of activities ship borne, land borne and airborne or over-flights (Hall and Johnston, 1995a). Hall (1992) and Hall and Johnston (1995a) have evaluated the nature of environmental impacts associated with infrastructure characteristics. Ship borne tourism generally does not need a permanent land based facility as passengers are adjusted on board for the duration of the journey. Environmental impacts are normally momentary (Hall and Johnston, 1995a) with pressure built due to repeated visits. Impacts can involve: water pollution from oils spills, Zodiac operations and sewage disposal, creating diseases of sea bird and plant life, littering, collection of souvenirs, introduction of exotic flora, incineration from the ships and disturbance as a result of shipwreck. Impacts related with land-borne activities are potentially the most severe. Infrastructure support can be extensive including airstrips, accommodation amenities, tracks and trails and waste disposal facilities (Hall and Johnston, 1995a). The nature of the impacts can include human competition with flora and fauna for ice free land, site specific degradation of high use areas, such as trampling, water pollution, disposal of sewage and waste, introduction of exotic flora and fauna, collection of souvenirs, cruising of small boats close to animals, disturbance to bird colonies and damage to heritage sites (Hall and Johnston, 1995a).

Natural resources promote visitor experiences that include close contact with wildlife and undeveloped natural environment. Impacts are also socially significant since they compromise the quality of visitor experiences and adversely affect local population (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996). An increasing number of developed

and developing countries have sought to address these concerns by mandating national tourism or ecotourism strategies (Edwards et al., 1998). Unfortunately, protected area managers, particularly in developing countries, often have limited funding and expertise to perform ecological planning or implement timely management and maintenance programmes. According to Butler (1980), Prosser (1994), Ceballos-Lascurain (1996) and Glassonet al. (1995), tourism carries the seeds of its own destruction; tourism can destroy tourism, spoiling the environmental attraction which visitors seek to experience. Most tourism development puts extra pressure on the environmental resources upon which it is based, compromising the future prospects of the local population and, indeed, the expectations of tourists themselves (Carter,1991). Apart from this the noise pollution from engine boats, small engine aircrafts, road vehicles and tourists is also a problem for local people. The garbage and sewage generated from the hotel are being discharged to the lakes and ocean and is always hazardous for the aquatic animals and coral reefs.

Development issues in sustainable tourism

The goal of development was first formally enunciated by President Truman in 1949. The focus of development 1970 highlights the requirements of resources to fulfill the essential needs of the poor people (Stewart,1985) and predominantly suggested a method that makes an attempt to enrich the living condition of the people (Bartelmus,1986). The significance of poverty in the general context of tourism relationship with natural environment is the main cause of environmental degradation as summarised in Brundtland Report (WCED 1987, P.28). It involves wider concerns with the value of life such as life expectancy, infant mortality, improvement of education, liberty, nutritional status and spiritual benefit (Pearce et al.,1990). An alternative development model came into existence in 1990s which was famous as the human development. The Indian economist Dr Amartya Sen, the pioneer of human development theory told that the human development can be judged through the society's standard of living not just according to the average level of income but according to the people's capabilities to lead the lives they value. The UNDP's

Human Development Index combines statistics of life expectancy, literacy and income and ranks the countries in the world.

Tourism is one of the world's largest industries and one of the fastest growing economic sectors, helping to create income and employment for local people. Economics of Sustainable Tourism aims to critically explore how tourism and economic development can move closer to a sustainable ideal from a firm economic analytical anchor. Grounded in economic theory and application, it analyses tourists' satisfaction and impact of tourism on the host community, investigates the productivity of the industry and identifies factors that could increase economic and sustainable development, such as trade relationships. Third world countries are suffering from a range of social and economic problems including severe unemployment, lack of foreign exchange, poor health and education facilities, population growth, where tourism acts as a boon for addressing these problems.

Ferrell (1992) interpreted sustainable development as the necessary tool to discover the balance between the growth of economy, environment and society. Environmental pressure has often been recognised as the result of growing demand on scanty resources. Pollution originated by enhancing living standard to comparatively an affluent level. Poverty also acts as catalyst that pollutes the environment in various ways. Those who are poverty stricken often spoil their surrounding environment in order to survive. Former Indian Prime Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi in her speech in the Stockholm conference said that poverty is the greatest polluter. Poor people have no option but to pressurize environment in order to attain immediate economic benefits at the cost of long-term sustainability of development.(Barbier,1987). For example some countries of the world without any choice embrace tourism for immediate economic development at the cost of socio-cultural and environmental impact.

Owen, Witt and Gammon (1993, P.463) have given the following view. The concept of sustainable development need not conflict with the concept of economic development. Defenders of sustainable development acknowledge that economic progress is crucial for alleviating poverty, improve the value of life and steer growth towards the environmental safety. So a well balanced

strategy should be maintained to ensure that growth does not place extreme pressure on the natural resources. Further, the exponents of sustainable development do not claim that this is the instruction of doing nothing or for standing in the way of change. It is further argued that Sustainable development is more emphasised by the developed countries whose unsustainable utilization of resources have improved their high quality of life. Poor countries want economic development and have to depend on natural and environmental resources which are already under great pressure (de Kant,1992).

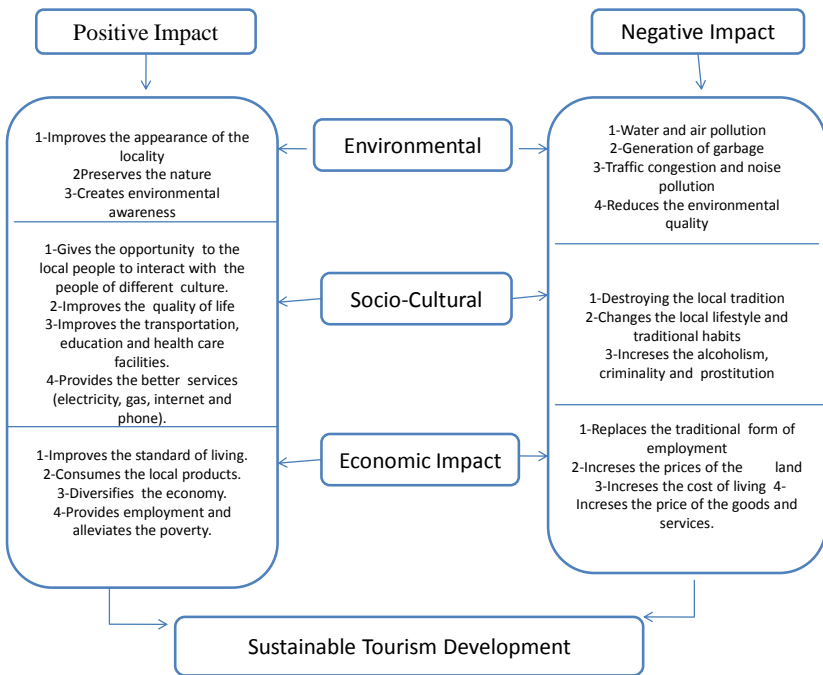


Fig 1: Issues in Sustainable Tourism Development

Tourism is an economic sector not only yields positive results but also has some serious negative impacts. It influences the tourist region environmentally, economically and socio-culturally both positively and negatively. But sustainable tourism is such a measure which can maintain the balance between economic development and environmental conservation along with preserving the socio-cultural sensitivity. Sustainable tourism in its purest perception is an industry which seeks to put the minimal impact on the environment and local culture, while helping to provoke income, employment and the conservation of local ecosystems. It is responsible tourism, which is both ecologically and culturally fragile in nature. The model in the previous page gives a clear description about tourism impacts.

Conclusion

Sustainable development is the most debated concept. Recently priority has been given to sustainable development because of depleting natural resources over the years that has been a cause of concern of academicians, scientists, economists and politicians etc worldwide. The word sustainable development implies the stability between environment and development. Environment and development are the two major aspects of sustainable development. As a labour intensive industry, tourism gives employment better compared to other sectors. Tourism helps in alleviating poverty, enrich the standard of living of the local people, improving health and education and transportation system. Thus the contribution of tourism is enormous though it is debated that it has serious drawbacks. Even though tourism generates considerable income for many countries, regions and communities, the swift expansion of tourism is quite hazardous for the environment and society. It generates considerable amount of waste, polluting the environment, destroying the ecosystem, creates the social ills like vandalism, prostitution, alcoholism, drug addiction, crimes etc.(Angelika M.Almeyda, 2010). Tourism and environment are correlated with each other. Environmental protection is essential for the survival of the world, development on the contrary is very necessary for the growth of the human society. Development should not mean only economic

development but should also include social, economic, environmental and moral considerations such as its measurement may integrate indicators of poverty, unemployment, inequity and independence. There is a growing relationship between tourism development, the environment and socio-economic development. It means that if tourism adopt sustainable development, it must be economically feasible, ecologically fragile and culturally suitable. We cannot imagine the existence of human being without a healthy environment and a strong economic development. So there should be a balance between these two, otherwise the extreme difference between environment and development may lead the world towards destruction. Environment and development can go hand in hand only when the reciprocity can be maintained between environmental conservation and economic development.

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