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# SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND LOCAL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

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**Abstract:** The full involvement of local communities in the tourism sector, not only benefits them and the environment in general, but also improves the quality of the tourism experience. Projects imposed from outside and motivated by the pursuit of rapid economic growth often override local needs, conditions and resources, and result in unacceptable environmental, social and cultural costs. Local involvement is crucial to sustainable and appropriate development, which meets the needs of the local people and safeguards their natural and cultural environments. Thus a local development strategy is essential, especially in disadvantaged areas and countries.

**Key words:** community involvement, sustainable tourism development, local ownership, critical stakeholders.

**Sažetak:** UKLJUČIVANJE LOKALNE ZAJEDNICE U ODRŽIVI RAZVOJ TURIZMA. Potpunije uključivanje lokalnih zajednica u aktivnosti turističkog sektora ne samo da je korisno za same zajednice i za okoliš, već je i značajno za poboljšanje kvalitete turističkog iskustva. Projekti nametnuti izvana i potaknuti željom za brzim gospodarskim razvitkom često ne vode računa o lokalnim potrebama, uvjetima i resursima, stvarajući time neprihvatljive ekološke, društvene i kulturološke troškove. Uključivanje lokalnih zajednica ključno je za ostvarivanje održivog i odgovarajućeg razvoja, koji može zadovoljiti potrebama lokalnog stanovništva te zaštititi njihova prirodna i kulturološka okruženja. Strategija lokalnog razvoja je stoga neophodna, pogotovo u nedovoljno razvijenim područjima i zemljama.

**Ključne riječi:** uključivanje zajednice, održivi turistički razvoj, lokalno vlasništvo, ključni nosioci interesa.

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism, perhaps more than any other activity, depends on quality human and natural environments and resources (*Mathieson and Wall, 1982*). Up to date experience shows that it is characterized by rapid, short-term development, which in many cases damage those resources on which is based on. The tourism industry, like other industries, must recognise its responsibility to the environment, learn how to become sustainable, by avoiding further environmental degradation.

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The tourism industry becomes the world's biggest industry, with an enormous economic potential. The UN estimates that tourism produces more revenue than the steel, car or even oil industries by the end of the decade. In 1991, the World Tourism Organisation reported that world receipts from an estimated 450 million international tourist arrivals amounted to \$278 billion. (*WTO, 1991*).

Tourism in a broad sense employs around 118 million people compared to 60 million in 1960 all over the world. The industry itself is characterized by many benefits, particularly to destinations that need hard currency. It is more reluctant to admit that, like other major industries, unplanned and uncontrolled tourism has severe environmental, social and economic impacts on the destination communities. The damage caused by the over-development of tourism, from the coasts to resorts and mountains, has been well publicized.

Especially in Third World Countries these impacts vary according to many factors, including the type and scale of the tourism enterprise, visitor numbers, and the nature of the destinations. Also country's natural and built environments, facilities, infrastructure and overall stage of development, and of course its dependence on tourism for foreign currency. Such destinations, often find themselves disadvantaged in dealing with the international companies, which dominate the tourism industry.

The growth of tourism has coincided with increased leisure time and disposable income for many in the industrialized countries, who are realized as basic tourist origin countries. Europe generates 57 per cent of international tourist arrivals, with North America coming second with 16 per cent. Thus the nature and scale of tourism is largely determined by the industry in the more affluent, tourism-generating centers, which is primarily motivated to see a return on its capital and investments, and which operates more usually for short-term benefit. The costs, in economic, environmental, social and cultural terms are paid by the less affluent in the tourist destination countries.

Of course none can argue that tourism can be stopped. It is recognized that for many countries and regions, tourism presents a real alternative to other more damaging forms of development. However, if tourism is to be truly beneficial to all concerned, the owners of the industry, employees, tourists and 'hosts', think and act sustainable in the long-term. It must be ensured that resources are not over-consumed, natural and human environments are protected, and tourism is integrated with other activities that provides real benefits to the local communities assuming that local people are involved and included in tourism planning and implementation, and local cultures are respected.

For tourism development to be sustainable requires due reference to the broader economic, political and social environment. It cannot be isolated from other forms of economic activity. Thus, tourism must take its place as part of programmes for integrated rural development of local economies, and should not dominate over other forms of economic activity. Sustainable tourism emphasizes the need to understand and respect the tourism resource base, to ensure a synergy of effort between relevant parties, involving cooperation, partnership, monitoring and research. In the absence of legislation the tourism industry must comply with the highest international standards set by international organizations like U.N. etc.

Above all, sustainable tourism involves an integrated approach to development and must not be simply a marketing ploy. There is undoubtedly a growth in 'alternative' or 'green' tourism, targeting to special interests in nature or culture. But the principles of sustainability must be implemented by the whole industry, including the mass market, not simply limited to a relatively expensive and specialized, small-scale, elite market.



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## DEFINING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

What is sustainable development?

The concept of sustainable development, which is central to tourism, can be traced back at least to 1972 when the Club of Rome published the influential report *Limits to Growth* (Meadows *et al*, 1972). This report predicted that, if current trends were to continue, the limits to growth on the earth would be reached in one hundred years. The debate that followed publication of this report led to a series of international conferences, the best known of which was that at Stockholm in 1972. The term sustainable development was already in use during the early 1970s (Pezzoli, 1997), although it did not come into popular use until the publication of *Our Common Future* by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987. The WCED was established by the UN General Assembly and was chaired by the Prime Minister of Norway, Gro Harlem Brundtland. The Brundtland definition of sustainable development remains the most popular in use today: sustainable development is "*...development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*".

Also notes that:

*"...in the end, sustainable development is not a fixed state of harmony, but rather a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are made consistent with future as well as present needs"*.

The main components of sustainability as interpreted by Brundtland were:

- Revive growth
- Change quality of growth
- Meet basic needs
- Stabilize population
- Conserve and enhance resources
- Reorient technology and manage risk
- Put environment Into economics

Clearly the Brundtland statement has a strong people-centered ethical stance, concentrating on the satisfaction of human needs, rather than, for example, on protection of the environment in general. Then the United Nations General Assembly asked for a report on progress in sustainability. This report was produced in a summit known as the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) which was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992.

The intention was to build on Brundtland's hopes and achievements to respond to pressing global environmental problems, and to achieve agreement on principles and actions for sustainable development.

Among the outcomes were *Agenda 21* and the *Rio Declaration on Environmental Development*. Four groups of topics are considered in Agenda 21:

1. Social and economic development, including: international cooperation, poverty, sustainable consumption, population, health, settlements, and integration of environment with development.
2. Resource management, including: atmosphere, land resource planning, deforestation, fragile ecosystems, mountains, rural development, biodiversity, biotechnologies, oceans, freshwater, toxic waste, hazardous waste, solid wastes and sewage and radio active wastes.
3. Strengthening the **participation** of major groups. This includes virtually everyone: women, children, indigenous people and NGOs are among groups specified.
4. Means of implementation includes finance, institutions, technology, transfer, sciences, education, capacity building, international institutions, law and information for decision making.

Furthermore, a very important statement made by Butler (1993, p. 29) who very clearly adapted the concept of sustainable development into the context of tourism and introduced an intrinsic distinction between "sustainable development in tourism destinations" and "sustainable tourism":

*"...Sustainable development in the context of tourism could be taken as: tourism which is developed and maintained in an area (community, environment) in such a manner and at such a scale that it remains viable over an indefinite period and does not degrade or alter the environment (human and physical) in which it exists to such a degree that it prohibits the successful development and well-being of other activities and processes. That is not the same as sustainable tourism, which may be thought of as tourism which is in a form which can maintain its viability in an area for an indefinite period of time".*

As Christou *et al* (2003) claim, the sustainable development framework also uses different measures of human development, departing from the traditional economic growth measurements, Gross National Product (GDP) or GDP per capita. As an alternative, since 1990, use the following measures:

- The human development index (HDI) is based on life expectancy, educational attainment, and adjusted income.
- The human poverty index (HPI) measures the distribution of progress and current deprivation.
- The gender-related development index (GDI),
- and the gender empowerment measure (GEM). The GEM specifically measures women's ability to participate in economic and political life (*United Nations Development Programme, 1999*).

Mathieson and Wall (1982) were amongst the first academics to trying to consider the relationship between tourism and sustainable development that emphasised the diverse environmental, economic and social structures. In other words, according to Curtin and Busby (1999) and Page and Dowling (2002) the concept is about local communities' so far as natural resources. In addition, sustainable tourism management is not a value-free concept, a point seldom mentioned in the literature (*Bramwell, 1996*).



## INTEGRATING TOURISM INTO PLANNING

Tourism development which is integrated into a national and local strategic planning / framework and which undertakes environmental impact assessments, increases the long-term viability of tourism.

Conflicts of interest, the over-use of resources and over-dependency can be avoided or minimized by the integration of any one sector with other sectors. Such integrated development rests on two principles: strategic long-term planning and environmental impact assessment (EIA).

A *strategic planning framework* provides a context for evaluating the short, medium and long-term impacts of development on local and regional environmental, economic and social conditions. *Environmental impact assessment, (EIA)* undertaken in the planning and implementation stages of a project, is essential in order to minimize disruption to natural, social and economic environments.

EIAs are still being developed and tested. However, within the European Community, the directive of 1985 stipulates that EIAs should include a project's direct and indirect impact on human beings, flora and fauna, soil, water, air, climate and landscape the interaction between these factors and material assets and cultural heritage. A public or private developer must submit relevant information to a competent authority regarding a project.

When tourism development is an integral part of a national plan, which considers development and environmental management as a whole, it results in maximum long-term rather than short-term benefits for national and local economies and for the industry. Such properly planned tourism enhances values placed on environmental assets, provides incentives for conserving threatened species and ecosystems, and brings improvements to local communities. This in turn leads to a better quality tourism product.

However, in practice, tourism development is rarely balanced with other sectors, such as local industry and agriculture, which can provide invaluable resources in the form of equipment, transportation, foodstuffs etc. These sectors can in turn benefit from the tourism market. Where tourism is not integrated with other sectors and balanced through strategic planning, it can result in uncontrolled and rapid expansion, which often has disastrous consequences, including environmental effects such as surface erosion, of walking areas, the visual blight of concrete jungles, pollution of bathing water and damage to flora and fauna.

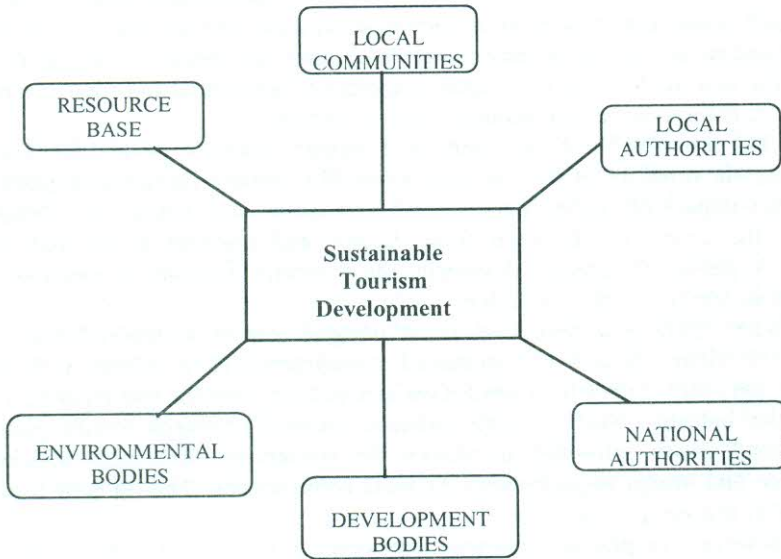
Particular problems arise when the local economy is relatively fragile and the prospect of even low-level, short-term employment is seductive - or when development is promoted without regard to the infrastructural costs to the community, the effect on local agriculture, land prices and housing markets. Even where the importance of integrated planning is understood, the time taken to produce an overall plan may mean that individual initiatives are taking place unchecked. The industry may then be subject to governmental measures, such as the introduction of temporary freezing - the 'white zone' scheme in Cyprus - while policy is being worked out (Barett, 1990).

## LOCAL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The full involvement of local communities in the tourism sector, not only benefits them and the environment in general, but also improves the quality of the

tourism experience. Projects imposed from outside and motivated by the pursuit of rapid economic growth often override local needs, conditions and resources, and result in unacceptable environmental, social and cultural costs. Local community involvement is a key-player or critical stakeholder, among others, in the sustainable tourism development process (Fig.1).

**Fig.1:** Critical Stakeholders Model for the sustainable tourism development: community involvement



Local involvement and shared decision making is crucial to sustainable development. A local development strategy is essential, especially in disadvantaged and remote areas. Programs such as the European Union funded Local Employment Development Action (LEDA), aim to provide employment in disadvantaged areas through partnerships between business, local government, labour organizations, voluntary and community groups, and to foster greater understanding of local conditions, ways of problem-solving and mobilizing and administering resources.

Similar projects in other countries like the U.K. propose coordination between business, government and non-governmental organizations in order to foster sustainable development that benefits the local as well as the business community. Local involvement makes a community more supportive, confident and productive, with a sense of pride and commitment to the future. Educational programs that prepare people for participation in the process of defining and implementing development strategies that are socially and environmentally sensitive are vital. This is the focus of WWF's CADISPA project (Conservation and Development in Sparsely Populated Areas). In the entire current project areas (Scotland, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece) tourism is a major consideration.

Local involvement is essential to tourism: local peoples, their culture, environment, way of life and traditions are important factors which attract tourists to a



location. The needs and aspirations of local peoples must therefore be fully supported. Carefully developed tourism can provide real economic, environmental and cultural benefits to the community. In turn, genuine community involvement can enrich the tourism experience and product.

When a community is involved in the direction of tourism development it is more likely to become an active partner and to provide checks and balances since it has a particular stake in the region and commitment to environmental quality. The long-term viability of tourism depends on the support and involvement of the local community. Local involvement in tourism projects has been successful in the community-led projects in the Scottish Highlands, in France, in Spain (paradores) and farm as well as in rural Greece (agrotourism).

It has been argued that tourism contributes to local development by providing destination countries with foreign exchange and employment. However, it is increasingly realized that such benefits do not automatically disseminate to all levels of society. There is little evidence that increased tourism to India, Indonesia, Thailand or other developing countries affected in such a way to lower poverty. Genuine local involvement would go some way to doing so, at the same time improving the long-term prospects of the tourism product.

Local involvement means more than employment in the usual low-paid, seasonal service jobs, such as waiters, barmen or gardeners. Higher status and better-paid management jobs, often filled by expatriate staff, should be made available to local people whose special local knowledge and expertise would add invaluable quality to the tourism experience.

Local involvement, through encouraging the local ownership guiding services, transportation and accommodation, craft-shops and restaurants, would prevent the leakage of foreign currency and benefit both host community and tourists alike. However, ownership by local elite will not ensure the equitable distribution of benefits or environmental accountability.

The promotion of home-based bed-and-breakfast accommodation or agro tourism holidays is a further encouragement to local involvement and provides tourists with an enriching alternative to the mass market.

Small-scale, community-led projects can contribute significantly to raising living standards. However, commercial success and the need to meet demands makes it hard to prevent them evolving into large-scale enterprises. On the other hand, the infrastructure of mass tourism can in turn lead to successful small projects involving local people.

A gradual pace of tourism development gives local people time to adjust to new environmental, social and economic conditions and helps prevent the adverse results of rapid uncontrolled development. The involvement of local people in determining their own development would prevent conflicts that inevitably affect the sustainability of tourism. There is a variety of good and bad practice all over the world.

- a. Local peoples homelands in Puerto Galera, on Mindoro Island and Boracay in the Philippines, were targeted by the Marcos government, as luxury resorts for tourists. The residents united against these plans and managed, to a great extent, to maintain local control over tourism development.
- b. While the creation of national parks, marine and nature reserves, or tourist enclaves on beaches, pasture or agricultural land, may protect endangered

species and habitats, they can marginalize local communities and deprive them of traditional livelihoods. Tourists on safari in Tanzania may be aware of the need to conserve wild species, but few realize the impact of conservation on local people.

The Ngorongoro Conservation Area is home to 23,000 Maasai but regulations have restricted their possibilities for livestock-keeping and agriculture as well as access to grazing areas and essential water sources. These same areas have been developed for tourism, with campsites, problems of rubbish, track erosion, disturbance to wildlife and the destruction of vegetation and archaeological sites.

Summarizing the tourism industry should:

- Respect the needs and aspirations of local people.
- Support the concept that local people should determine their own development.
- Actively encourage local community involvement in tourism projects.
- Promote the active partnership of local people and communities in tourism development.
- Involve the widest range of local associations.
- Actively support local enterprises and cooperatives, which provide services, goods and crafts.
- Support locally owned shops, restaurants and guide services.
- Involve local people through employment at all levels.
- Encourage the development of home-based tourism accommodation and facilities.
- Prevent disruption to and the displacement of local people.

## **SUPPORTING LOCAL ECONOMIES**

Tourism that supports a wide range of local economic activities and which takes environmental costs and values into account both protects those economies and avoids environmental damage.

Economic growth, as conventionally measured by Gross National Product (GNP) and calculated from the market price of goods and services, excludes non-marketed goods and informal activities and has treated environmental services and resources as 'free goods'. Such failure to incorporate environmental values into cost has usually meant trade-offs in favor of unlimited growth to the detriment of the environment.

Sustainable development, on the other hand, aims at "improving people's overall satisfaction and welfare while maintaining and improving the environment. This means taking its vital economic functions into account and incorporating environmental quality into investment decisions – 'ecological accounting'. It also means integrating environmental values into traditional Cost-Benefit Analyses (CBAs). Such CBAs have been used to show the monetary value of forest conservation in Cameroon and Nigeria.

Central to sustainable economic development is the avoidance of dependency on a narrow economic base and the promotion of economic diversity. It also entails restructuring market systems to account not only for environmental services but also



the wider social costs of production. The business community is increasingly taking the environment into consideration in response to public opinion. Surveys within the European Union regularly show concern for the environment ranking second to unemployment.

## COLLABORATION AND TOURISM

According to Hall (2000) the unique nature of the tourism industry creates a recognized need for coordination and collaboration in planning and many different stakeholders have interests in the tourism planning process (Ladkin and Bertramini, 2002). Cooperation and collaboration are issues of great importance in the planning process. They have been integrated to the idea of sustainable tourism development in the context of community-based tourism (Hall, 2000). Essential to the implementation of the collaborative planning approach is the identification and legitimization of all potential stakeholders, including those who are involved in the planning process.

The identification of stakeholders is a complicated task particularly in destinations experiencing emerging tourism development where interests are not collectively organized. The fundamental objective is to engage all those affected by the proposed tourism development within the planning process. Without a doubt, the first stage in establishing an effective collaborative process is to bring various interests together.

A further complication is the extent to which the stakeholders involved can represent the local community. Part of this problem lies in the definition of the term 'community', which is elusive and vague. A community can be defined most usefully for tourism in terms of a geographical area, or a group of people with shared origins or interests. If the geographical definition is used, then the community can be defined as citizens within a given locality. If the common interest approach is taken, the business sector is often used to represent the local community, with bias towards economic factors. In spite of these difficulties, the advantages of reaching a consensus within the tourism development process are many. Such a practice tends to stay away from the cost of resolving conflicts in the long term and mutual participation can provide cost effective solutions by pooling resources.

A further advantage is that stakeholder collaboration adheres to the concept of democracy. Politically the collaboration process is more equitable than the conventional approach, as the views of stakeholders are as legitimate as those of an expert (Hall, 2000). Additionally, it makes use of local knowledge to make sure that decisions are well informed and appropriate. This adds value by building on the store of knowledge, insights, and capabilities of and gives a voice to those who are most affected by tourism.

According to Gray (1989), a stakeholder has been defined as a person who has the right and capacity to participate in the process; thus, anyone who is impacted upon by the action of others has a right to be involved. As a result, according to Swarbrooke (1999) a stakeholder in the tourism industry is deemed to be anyone who is impacted on by development positively or negatively, and as a result it reduces potential conflict between the tourists and host community by involving the latter in shaping the way in which tourism develops. An additional argument for collaboration is that it engages all interested parties in the decision-making process by allowing them to take

responsibility, enhance their self-reliance, and their own awareness of the issues all of which enables them to enjoy a greater degree of consensus and shared ownership.

Set against the positive factors, there are a number of negative aspects and challenges to the development of collaboration. These include the added cost to planning and development (Swarbrooke, 1999), the identification of legitimate stakeholders (Tosun, 2000), and the capacity of the stakeholders to participate. Expectations may be raised beyond what can realistically be delivered (Gray, 1989), and the power often sits with an established local elite and/or those most 'vocal'; the silent majority and any local minorities may often be superseded (Hall, 1999).

In addition, not all interested parties may have the required capability to be involved which is a particularly significant problem in less developed countries where expertise might not be available. Furthermore, a major criticism of stakeholder involvement is that, collaboration theory rests upon the assumption that, simply by involving all of the interested parties that power imbalances can be overcome. This ignores the fundamental constraint of the distribution of power and resource flows.

Furthermore, it is important to understand how collaboration works in different cultural and political contexts. Tosun (2000) found that, in the context of developing countries, there are operational, structural, and cultural limits to community participation. Although not all of these barriers may be present in a destination at any one time, they can be significant difficulties in the implementation of a collaborative approach. In summary, the constraints of community involvement in the tourism planning appear as following:

- Lack in information;
- Bureaucracy;
- Unclear and incompatible objectives;
- Lack of human and economic resources;
- Cultural and prejudices constrains;
- Inability to communicate the objective;
- Conflict of interest;
- Apathy of the citizens; and
- Dominance by 'vocals' and by local 'elite'.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The issue of community involvement is of great importance on the tourism planning process. Community involvement is a significant planning tool for maximizing the positive impacts of the tourism process while it can be used as a 'prolepsis' for the negative impacts of tourism planning activity. The full involvement of local communities in the tourism sector, not only benefits them and the environment in general, but also improves the quality of the tourism experience.

Projects imposed from outside and motivated by the pursuit of rapid economic growth often override local needs, conditions and resources, and result in unacceptable environmental, social and cultural costs. Local involvement is crucial to sustainable and appropriate development, which meets the needs of local people and safeguards their natural and cultural environments. Thus a local development strategy is essential, especially in disadvantaged areas and countries.



Practically we must accept that the implementation of community involvement in the tourism planning in 'real world' is not an easy task. We must realize the above as a rather slow process that assumes, among others, also changes in the mentality, attitudes and behavior.

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