

The impact of extended discussions tourism essay



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One of the reasons why it is so difficult to achieve sustainable tourism development in first place is that there is no set definition for it. In the early 1990s, there were more than seventy existing definitions of sustainable development (Holmberg and Sandbrook, 1992). Regardless of the wide academic attention the term received, there is no consensus over a set definition, policies or measures (Berno and Bricker, 2001). As Muller (1994: 134) points out there are 'too many' experts' with too much advice on the one hand and too few agents with too few resources and too little time to act on the other'. The subject matter has been researched by many academics and it has reached a point where too many theories have been put forward, and not so much action (Pearce, 1989). The subject of tourism development may be viewed as in two means: as a process or as a state. In both cases the focus is on the relationships between development and tourism, and what their impact on destinations is (Pearce, 1989). Butler (1993: 29) argues that there is no set definition of what tourism development is and how it should be implemented, however the author points out the importance 'to take into consideration the relationship between tourism, other activities and processes, and the human and physical environments in which tourism is taking place'. Sustainable development received a lot of attention over the last decades by private and public sectors, governments, non-governmental organisations and it 'has evolved over three decades from an environmental issue to a socio-political movement for beneficial social and economic change' (Farrell and Twining-Ward, 2003: 275). The fact that it was adopted by such a wide variety of organisations proves the ambiguity of the term. Its vagueness is demonstrated by the most widely used definition of sustainable tourism development, proposed by the World Commission on Environment <https://assignbuster.com/the-impact-of-extended-discussions-tourism-essay/>

and Development ' sustainable development is not a fixed state of harmony, but rather a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of the investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are made consistent with future as well as present needs' (WCED, 1987: 9). The complex correlation between environmental, social and economic development poses a global challenge on sustainability nowadays (Potter et al., 2004).

' Development' and ' growth' are often used as synonyms; however there is a significant difference in their meanings (Holden, 2008). Development is defined as " the continuous and positive change in the economic, social, political and cultural dimensions of the human condition, guided by the principle of freedom of choice and the limited capacity of the environment to sustain such change." (Sharpley and Telfer, 2002: 27). Since the end of the Second World War, many development theories emerged, all of them encompassing different approaches to tourism development such as: modernisation theory (1950s-1960s); dependency theory (late 1960s); neo-classical counter revolution theory (1980s); and sustainable development theory (late 1980s). Development is often associated with ' developing countries'; however it is a term that affected global development at all levels (Potter et al., 2004). At that time ' developing countries' were expected to catch up with the West and enter modern age, so that development was linked to modernisation, which was then related to westernisation. During this period of time one of the main paradigms of development emerged – the theory of modernisation (Sharpley and Telfer, 2002). It is an optimistic thesis, which assumes that underdevelopment could be overcome through

modernisation from the West to 'less developed countries' and from urban areas to rural (Elliott, 2006). However, modernisation has both positive and negative impacts, and this was the case of tourism in Crete. Tourism development was concentrated on the demand side, attracting as many tourists as possible at that time, and resulted in environmental and cultural degradation (Andriotis, 2003). Adams (2001) argues that sustainable tourism development at present is still underpinned mainly within the industrialised North and West part of the world. It is also portrayed as a 'EuroAmerican paradigm' and a 'Western construct' (Cater, 2006: 24).

Due to the economic and industrial growth in the 1950s, many natural resources have been used in unsustainable ways, without any environmental concern (Elliott, 2006). These negative aspects have resulted in a call for sustainable development. Consequently, different theories were developed in order to try to establish set guidelines of how sustainable tourism should be developed (Sharpley and Telfer, 2002). In 1994, Muller has introduced "the magic pentagon" as a conceptual framework of sustainable tourism development. The pentagon consists of the following five angles: economic health; subjective well-being; unspoilt nature/protection of resources; healthy culture; optimum satisfaction of guest requirements. The idea of the framework is that in order to maintain sustainable tourism development these five angles must be balanced, enhancing the positive relationships between them. However, in reality numerous factors may perhaps make it quite difficult to balance all angles of the pentagon and achieve sustainable development (Muller, 1994). Mowforth and Munt (1998) also proposed a list of tools for achieving sustainable tourism and it includes the following

factors: area protections, industry regulation, visitor management techniques, environmental impact assessment, carrying capacity calculations, consultation/participation techniques, codes of conduct, sustainability indicators. Many other frameworks were suggested over the years and despite the great progress of academic research in the subject field, there is still a debate on what practices should be embedded to encourage sustainable change (Elliott, 2006).

The growing demand for international tourism over the last decades has raised a great concern of how tourism activities change the cultural and environmental assets of destinations. Many tourist areas began to receive negative destination image by unsatisfied tourists. This was the case with the Spanish coastal area of Costa del Sol, as ' environmental decay and poor image have combined with overcrowding and low safety and hygiene standards, together with the popularity of cheaper forms of accommodation and catering, to reduce the perceived attractiveness of the region' (Barke and France, 1996: 302). In the end of the 1990's some tour operators, airlines and hotels for the first time took actions against their negative impact on the environment. This was as a result of eco-tourists boycotts against the unsustainable practices of tourism providers. For example businesses have been put at risk by tourists' riot in the ski resort of Vail in Colorado, in 1999 (Holden, 2008). However, Sharpley (2009) argues that there is a lack of proof that sustainable principles are adopted in the business practices of tourism organisations, at present. He also emphasizes on the disparity between the concepts of tourism and sustainable development, arguing that the perception of sustainable tourism is anything

other than a myth. A case study of the impact of international tourism on the economy in Turkey showed that despite the significant development of facilities along the coastline, development had many negative impacts on the rural regions of the country. Because of the large investments in the resorts, rural areas were left behind and disparities amongst regions and classes were encouraged (Tosun et al., 2003). Robinson (2004) is another author who doubts sustainable development because of its vagueness, 'green-washing' and possible delusions from the real problems related to tourism activities. Mass tourism activities have been viewed as highly unsustainable and after great criticisms other forms of more sustainable tourism have emerged, such as ecotourism or responsible tourism. Nevertheless, the demand for responsible tourism seems to be lacking, with 'green' holidays being low down on the list for tourists throughout the holiday purchasing process (Sharpley, 2009).

Sustainable tourism is often regarded as ecotourism and their objectives are viewed as parallel, both embracing host community sense and conservation of natural, built and heritage beauty and resources. However, ecotourism in fact is a type of nature-based niche tourism, which is simply a mode of sustainable tourism (Wearing and Neil, 2009). 'Eco-labels' of products and services are growing in numbers and 'greenwashing' amongst tourism sectors is gaining popularity, however their environmental credentials are hard to measure (Dahl, 2010). This trend is adopted by many tourism suppliers, who seem to be 'implementing' sustainable practices, whereas none of them have changed in reality. A case study of the ecotourism (dragon tourism) in Indonesia showed that this type of tourism was viewed

as a sustainable alternative to the mass tourism, favouring local communities. In fact, after a small-scale survey was conducted in the area, results showed that local communities are lacking employment, and distributional inequalities exist, favouring external suppliers (Walpole and Goodwin, 2000). Robinson (2004) labels the 'greenwashing' used as a method to cover up for unsustainable tourism practices as hypocrisy. It is also seen as a method to place guilt on tourists and to sell eco holidays, which in fact may not be that 'green' (Robbins, 2008). In that sense, the 'triple bottom line' (TBL) has been introduced to measure organisations performance in social, economic and environmental terms and it is key to sustainable development (Elkington, 1998). The most comprehensive framework to measure these sustainable indicators was set by the UNWTO (2004). However, it is very hard to measure TBL as again there is no consensus on a measurement framework and different measures need to be applied depending whether it is used on organisations or at destination level. Marshall and Toffel (2005) identified that sustainability can be placed on a continuum, where at one end is the micro sustainability and on the other is the macro sustainability. During the past decades sustainable tourism practices tend to be small-scale projects on local level, whereas in order to achieve sustainable development through tourism, they should be happening at large scale, globally (Stoddard et al., 2012).

Muller's (1994) statement that sustainable tourism is difficult to achieve is relevant today. It is true that conceptually sustainable tourism development is ideal; however it is hard to implement. Therefore, the main task for tourism organisations and governments is to identify and agree upon

common rules and codes of conducted. Sustainable tourism development is not simply an economic process, as suggested by the modernisation theory; it is however multidimensional process and should lead to 'good change' (Chambers, 1997). In order for organisations to adopt the 'good change' the following ethical values should be applied towards sustainable tourism development: self-sufficiency; self-determination; empowerment; and improvement of living standards. Sustainable practices should be adopted by all tourism organisations because earth resources are finite, therefore resources should not be consumed at faster pace that they renew, maintaining biological diversity of the planet. Equity between communities should be sustained, involving local people in development processes, following their customs and cultures. All these should be done through the adoption of long-term strategic planning. Main points are that in order to develop sustainable tourism, key economic and environmental costs should be considered. Economic growth should be achieved in more environmentally and socially sound manners, instead of earlier practices. Issues regarding environment should be considered at government levels, however involving individual consumer. And finally, the needs of present generations should be met in a way that does not compromise on the ability of future generations to do so.