

What is sustainable development in tourism?

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The focus must shift from climate change to poverty reduction in order to make tourism in developing countries more sustainable. Critically evaluate this statement.

Abstract

The creation of a sustainable tourism industry in a developing country will necessarily have an important impact on the economic and social development of that country because of the ability of the sector to attract capital to the country. In economies where there is little diversification, this is an important consequence. Poverty reduction strategies as the focus of creating a sustainable tourism sector will have important consequences for the industry as a whole. Included in these consequences are the realization of certain objectives related to climate control which has been the focus of sustainable tourism efforts in the recent past.

It stands to reason therefore that a shift in emphasis towards poverty reduction strategies enforced by important policy developments will have a broader social and economic impact, which includes the achievement of environmental objectives and climate change concerns. The shift in focus therefore towards poverty reduction is more desirable as a strategy for sustainable tourism in developing countries as it recognizes the spectrum of issues plaguing these countries, rather than focusing on one aspect thereof.

Introduction

Sustainability as a goal of tourism is a complicated question and as to goal of tourism in developing countries, one needs to understand the broader social,

economic and political circumstances relevant to country itself in terms of broader tourism considerations. Mvula (2001; p. 394) suggests that sustainable tourism “ requires that the local host population achieves rising standards of living and that the tourist guests are satisfied with the product and either return to the area or recommend it to others.” Included in this definition of sustainability, Mvula (2001) adds that this requires conservation of wildlife and the local environment.

One can observe therefore that sustainability in tourism requires more than simply focusing on either climate change or poverty reduction. It is therefore the assertion of this paper that the focus of tourism in developing countries is one which does not necessarily focus on climate change or poverty reduction to the exclusion of the other, and that these two strategies are mutually reinforcing, rather than exclusive and in order to ensure sustainability in developing countries, both strategies will need to be employed as they in effect rely on one another.

It stands to reason however that a shift in poverty reduction as the focus of sustainability in tourism will have the effect of ensuring that climate change objectives are met. The essential element of a shift towards poverty reduction will be the inclusion of policy objectives which implement these strategies. As will be argued, the achievement of climate change objectives may be achieved as a byproduct of implementation of poverty reduction strategies and therefore a shift in focus may have the result of achieving this objective where previous attempts have failed.

Climate Change and Sustainability

Ashley et al. (2000) note that the increased awareness in eco-tourism and community tourism arose in the 1980's from an awareness that tourism should not erode the cultural and environmental base on which it relies. This arguably is another way of recognizing that tourism efforts should make sustainable, rather than exhaustible use of a country's resources. Becken and Hay (2007) describe the climate for the purposes of tourism as both a resource and an essential ingredient in the product offering of a destination. Indeed, the tourism industry of a destination may be inextricably linked to the climate conditions of that area, such as skiing destinations.

Climate change therefore may threaten the sustainability of the region by causing extreme and unpredictable variations in the expected weather patterns, causing potentially harmful consequences, such as hurricanes and floods. Not only does this threaten the sustainability of the local tourism industry, but also damages tourism infrastructure (Becken & Hay, 2007). One can observe therefore the link between climate change and sustainability, as climate change will threaten the sustainability of the tourism industry.

Understanding the link between climate change and sustainability allows a tourism sector in a developing country to adapt to the challenges presented by the issue. The problem however lies in the fact that the industry is plagued with an 'immobility problem' where the tourists will simply move to another destination, as a result of relative inability of a local tourism industry to adapt to these climate changes (Aall & Hoyer, 2005). Becken and Hay (2007) note this dilemma by stating that the problems associated with climate control are external to the tourism industry of a place as there is little that a country can do to mitigate changes in the climate. Indeed, the <https://assignbuster.com/what-is-sustainable-development-in-tourism/>

focus of climate change with regards to sustainability is on the socio-economic consequences thereof and the relative inability of developing countries to understand the variables associated with climate change allowing them to adapt tourism operations accordingly (Weaver, 2011).

Despite these difficulties, the focus of sustainable tourism on climate change is arguably essential for what can be described as a broader sustainability dilemma. Simply stated, this recognizes that climate change is a matter of significant international concern which is not going to disappear at any point (Scott, 2011). The inclusion of climate change objectives in sustainable tourism therefore should be recognized as an inclusion for a broader societal purpose which is equally relevant to developing countries. Climate change therefore in tourism reflects the need for conservation efforts protecting the local environment and biodiversity, as well as using sustainable techniques which will reduce climate change factors, such as green house gases (McKercher et al., 2010; Becken & Hay, 2007)

Poverty Reduction and Sustainability

With climate change being the focus of sustainable tourism in the 1980s (Ashley et al., 2000), one could argue that poverty reduction or Pro Poor Tourism ('PPT') has become the focus of sustainable tourism in the 2000s (Hall, 2007). PPT is that which generates a net benefit for the poor regardless of sector or product. The benefits of PPT may be economic, social, cultural or environmental, and rather than relating to a specific benefit to a class of persons, it refers to an overall benefit that is the result of the priority given to poverty issues (Ashley & Roe, 2002).

Poverty reduction through sustainable tourism recognizes the use of tourism as a means for economic development. PPT refers to the relationship between poverty reduction strategies and tourism development in developing countries (Hall, 2007). There are a number of important economic consequences of the implementation of PPT strategies for poverty reduction, chief of which being the capacity of economic development and the ability of the industry to diversify the economy (Goodwin & Roe, 2001). This relates in part to the development of employment opportunities and opportunities for small enterprise development in order to support the local tourism industry. In developing countries, singularities in the economy are often seen and therefore the opportunity to create employment outside of this is an important consequence.

Ashley and Roe (2002) recognize three categories of PPT strategies, which includes increasing access of economic benefits to the poor through expanding business opportunities, in terms of employment, training and income; addressing the negative social and environmental impacts of tourism; and using policy objectives as a measure of ensuring sustainability of these objectives. One can observe therefore that the shift in focus towards poverty reduction for the purposes of sustainability does not necessarily exclude priority given to climate change objectives. Indeed, environmental objectives which have been set as a priority in terms of international environmental protocols are often observed as a byproduct of PPT objectives (Sheyvens, 2011)

These considerations are particularly relevant in the context of developing countries as often there are political and economic difficulties which prevent <https://assignbuster.com/what-is-sustainable-development-in-tourism/>

the effective implementation of poverty reduction strategies that have typically been used in other regions (Sheyvens, 2007). Often the political and economic factors of developing countries include the monopoly over certain economic activities (such as mineral extraction and agriculture) and with the introduction of these strategies through the tourism industry, arguably policy objectives are realizing a realistic possibility for the achievement of poverty reduction. It does so by offering opportunities for sustainable growth (Manyara & Jones, 2007), although it is generally acknowledged that this depends on effective marketplace value, quality of the product developed and establishing meaningful partnerships between the public and private sector, and the community (WTO, 2002). The adoption of these strategies however is also largely dependent on the implementation of effective policy measures which will ensure that this remains a priority in the tourism sector and the broader economy generally (Ashley et al., 2000). This is built from the realization that community based tourism products and sector tourism, such as eco-tourism and nature tourism are ineffective as an overall strategy towards attaining poverty reduction objectives (Sheyvens, 2007).

Sustainability in Developing Countries: The Intersection

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) has identified both poverty reduction along with climate change as challenges to the global tourism industry, whereby a commitment is needed to ensure balanced and equitable policies in order to address the identified issues (Ashley & Roe, 2002; WTO, 2002). The intersection between the focus on climate change and poverty reduction in creating a sustainable tourism industry in developing countries is arguably two sides of the same coin.

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Participation in PPT has a number of important consequences for developing countries, such as human and financial capital, social capital and organizational strength, gender participation, a positive effect on livelihood strategies and aspirations, impact on the location itself, land ownership and tenure, planning gain, regulation and access to the tourism market (Ashley et al., 2000). One can argue that the extensive impacts of PPT will have the effect of improving the tourism sector in the developing country as a whole. In theory, this has the potential to create a self-enforcing cycle of development, whereby the improved facilities and characteristics of the location, with the improved support services and products will have the effect of diversifying the tourism industry. This in turn has the potential to attract further tourism capital and investment. This positive association with poverty reduction strategies includes the outcomes of sustainability that are intentioned with regards to climate change objectives.

The creation of a sustainable tourism sector in a developing country therefore through the implementation of poverty reduction strategies has been noted for the overall improvement which it provides for the country, creating not only sustainability in the tourism industry of the country itself, but also in the overall sustainable development of the country's economy (Cabezes, 2008). In the context of the Dominican Republic, it was noted that the use of these strategies had a positive effect on the political and financial stability of the country, as well as the inclusion of poor members of society in the markets (ibid). Higgins-Desbiolles (2006) similarly notes the transformative capacity that tourism focused on poverty reduction has on the social and economic standing of a developing country.

Conclusion

It is clear therefore that the creation of a sustainable tourism industry in a developing country is one which requires consideration of a number of complex social, economic and political factors. It requires an understanding of the relationship between the various stakeholders in the tourism industry in the country itself. It stands to reason that focus on climate change objectives are not precluded by a shift in focus towards poverty reduction, as the literature indicates that a byproduct of this focus is necessarily that the nature and eco-tourism of the country will be positively affected as this invariably forms a part of the tourism resources of that country.

Becken and Hay (2007) note the role that the natural environment of a country plays as an essential part of the product offering of the country and as such, the implementation of policies aimed at inclusion of poor members of society may have the impact of improving this resource. Arguably however, this is not necessarily a natural consequence of PPT and the implementation of poverty reduction strategies will necessitate the inclusion of climate change objectives to ensure that the exploitation of these natural resources is managed in a sustainable manner. The end result of the implementation of these strategies is an overall betterment of the poor members of society and to the extent that climate change objectives are not inclusive of an essential partnership in the creation of sustainability, these objectives will fail.

The clear advantage that PPT has in creating a sustainable tourism sector lies in the fact that it includes all relevant stakeholders in the tourism

industry, as well as speculating for meaningful methods of enforcing these objectives. In so doing, it allows for the creation of sustainability through transforming local economies, creating employment opportunities, bettering the overall standing of members of the local community, exploiting natural resources in a sustainable manner (therefore achieving climate change objectives) and offering measures of accountability to ensure that these objectives are in the forefront of policy consideration.

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