

BIGMUN 2020
ECOSOC 1 – Commission of sustainable development

Research Report

Topic 3: The question of sustainable tourism



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Introduction:

Sustainable tourism is an industry committed to making a low impact on the environment and local culture while helping to generate future employment for local people. The positive of sustainable tourism is to ensure that development is a positive experience for local people; tourism companies; and tourists themselves.

Tourism has grown exponentially since the beginning of the 20th century, as a consequence of globalization. From 25 million globally in 1950, to 278 million in 1980, 527 million in 1995, and 1.32 billion in 2017. They are expected to reach 1.8 billion by 2030 and as a result, legislation needs to be enacted in order to ensure that tourism is done in a sustainable manner that does not jeopardize the environment. However, since tourism is such a large factor of countries' economies, accounting for around ten percent of global GDP (US 7\$ trillion) it is difficult to convince states whose economies depend largely on tourism, to try and change the status-quo.

Solutions need to be found which not only benefit the environment's well-being but also the macro-economies in question.

Definition of Key Terms:

Tourism

Travel for pleasure or business; also the theory and practice of touring, the business of attracting, accommodating, and entertaining tourists, and the business of operating tours.

Sustainable tourism

According to the World Tourism Organization, sustainable tourism is "Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities"

Overtourism

Overtourism refers to the risk associated with a destination being specifically popular for trips. Consumers may wear certain historical monuments down, or turn the areas architecture into hotels and generic restaurants, decreasing the value and authenticity of the area. Overtourism also indicates a level at which the particular local area can't handle both financially and environmentally.

Background Information:

Tourism is an industry since the 1950s, the number of tourists has risen exponentially and this is largely due to globalization and the improvement of standards of living. Most of these tourists come from European and North American countries, however recently there has been an influx of Chinese and East-Asian tourist too due to rapid economic growth in those countries.

Tourism has large environmental and socio-cultural effects. The quality of the environment, both natural and man-made, is essential to tourism however, It involves many activities that can have adverse environmental effects. Many of these impacts are linked with the

construction of general infrastructure such as roads and airports, and of tourism facilities, including resorts, hotels, restaurants, shops, golf courses and marinas. The negative impacts of tourism development can gradually destroy the environmental resources on which it depends. This can be seen for example in places where there are large building projects which could harm the environment in the vicinity.

On the other hand, tourism is also a way to raise awareness of environmental values and it can serve as a tool to finance protection of natural areas and increase their economic importance.

In general, tourism development can put enormous pressure on an area and lead to impacts such as soil erosion, increased pollution, discharges into the sea, natural habitat loss, increased pressure on endangered species and heightened vulnerability to forest fires. It often puts a strain on water resources, and it can force local populations to compete for the use of critical resources.

Although certain countries benefit massively from this influx of tourists and therefore they may not want to invest in sustainable infrastructure for example having to do with recycling and avoiding the use of single use plastics. This is why the UN needs to step in and enact legislation to try and regulate tourism and make it conform to the Sustainable Development Goals set by the IGO.

Major Countries and Organisations Involved:

The UN

The UN has tried to set guidelines for sustainable development and tourism development with the SDG's (Sustainable Development Goals) in 2000 however has not set any binding resolutions for countries to follow. These do however allow countries to be more aware of the environmental impact that they have on their country and open them up to the possible impacts that could danger their culture and architecture. The UN has also made multiple UN resolutions and documents in further attempts to solidify and specify the mass negative impact that tourism is causing as well as what the member nations can do to aid in helping. Since all UN member states have tourism in their countries, they are all taking part in the environmental and soci-cultural effects of unsustainable tourism and therefore all countries need to come to a consensus on regulations which will benefit the countries' economies and also decrease the effects of unsustainable tourism.

UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organization)

The United Nations World Tourism Organization focuses on many areas having to do with tourism, which include making sure the industry stays in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) and maintaining a code of ethics for tourists to follow. Seeing as tourism is a major factor in certain countries' economic growth, the UNWTO attempts to raise awareness on the effects of unsustainable tourism. However, since it is a UN agency it does not have any "real" power seeing as their guidelines are not binding to UN member states.

Relevant UN Resolutions:

The UN General assembly on the 27th of January 2017¹

<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/778204?ln=en#record-files-collapse-header>

The UN General Assembly on the 1st August 2014²

<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/858314?ln=en>

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue:

Despite the need for governments and countries to take control of the issue, the majority of attempts to apply more sustainable tourism in highly visited areas, have been done by larger businesses. For example, Disney has set a list of cooperate goals in order to become a business in the forefront of sustainable tourism. Amongst other things, they plan on reducing electricity usage by 10% from 2006 to 2012 and decrease the waste that is sent to landfills by 50% from 2006 to 2013³. Despite these goals being created over a decade ago, they are still extremely relevant for other large tourism-based businesses to follow. They help in creating the necessary global attention required for others to take initiative and solve these issues. Disney also managed to succeed in completing these goals, and have since then attempted to remain on the course of using more sustainable methods in their tourism attractions. Amongst encouraging other businesses to follow in Disney's path, these changes can also pose a positive impact on Disney. Not only does their brand now differ from competitors, which can attract more consumers, but Disney also predicts that using these new methods, may cause them to save money on energy and waste, guaranteeing them a larger net profit by the time the goals are set to be met. Overall, these goals have helped Disney strengthen in every aspect of their business, and thereby set a positive example for others.

Another business in the forefront of catering to sustainable tourism, is Airbnb. Even though their approach is very different from Disney's, they have received just as much praise. Airbnb was built to make traveling more affordable for consumers while allowing others to lend their house to those traveling. But, an accidental advantage of this, has been the decrease in the bad environmental impact which traveling has had. By decreasing the global demand for cheap, convenient, and well-located hotels and hostel, Airbnb is unintentionally aiding the global waste produced within sustainable tourism. Considering that Airbnb accommodates around 7% of the consumers in the world's most popular destinations, allows for a decrease in the risk of overtourism and allows the areas visited so remain unaffected architecturally by the mass popularity of the destination.⁴ It also promotes the consumers using Airbnb to be more environmentally conscious when travelling in the future. However, local areas may be negatively affected by these changes, as their overall housing prices may increase and local

¹ <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/778204?ln=en#record-files-collapse-header>, United Nations General Assembly, January 27th 2017

² <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/858314?ln=en>, United Nations General Assembly, August 1st 2014

³ <https://www.huffpost.com/entry/>, HuffPost, April 27th 2012

⁴ <https://news.airbnb.com/airbnb-helps-fight-mass-tourism-promotes-sustainable-travel/>, Airbnb Newsroom, May 29th 2018

housing will be used on tourists rather than the population there. Despite this, the positive impact associated with Airbnb, can severely aid in the global understanding and acceptance that sustainable tourism is better and more environmentally helpful than standard tourism.

In terms of consumers, the population of India is very far ahead of the majority of the rest of the world. They have conducted a survey for the Indian showcasing the length to which they are willing to go for sustainable tourism. One of the questioned showed, that 32% of Indians were willing to pay up to 15% more for their travels and accommodation if it was considered sustainable tourism. Knowing this, it's much easier for both governments to raise their process in order to spend the extra profits on more expensive sustainable solutions to tourism. The survey also showed, that 73% of current travellers in India would naturally opt for a sustainable travel option as well as transportation in their everyday life, making it ideal for companies to brand themselves as sustainable and put the effort into making themselves appealing and in the forefront of the sustainable tourism market. Most extremely, it found, that 97% of Indian travellers want to travel sustainably, but simply find both limited options and the price of sustainable tourism the barriers for this possibility⁵. This survey clearly shows, that in the case for Indian consumers, the problem with the sustainable tourism market, is that many businesses and governments focus on the financial benefits of tourism, and attempt to make travels as cheap and convenient for consumers. However, many need to realize the current shift in the demand of the market, and the demand for sustainable tourism.

Possible Solutions:

In terms of sustainable tourism, there aren't specific solutions, especially since sustainable tourism is seen as a solution to mass tourism and overtourism. This being said, there are many aspects of sustainable tourism. Considering that tourism covers around 10% of the global GDP (gross domestic product)⁶, thereby being one of the largest global industries, it is also an industry which involves many aspects. These could be areas such as accommodation, attractions, travel, hotels and hostels, or restaurants. All these not only rely on tourism as a large fraction of their profit, but also brand and cater to suit the consumer demand. As mentioned earlier, the consumer demand is changing, and the industry must therefore be creative in making new solutions to becoming more sustainable tourism.

In general, sustainable tourism can't be categorised in one action to adapt, but rather an array of smaller adaptations, which can result in the constant improvement of tourism globally. The end goal is to make the most of the least possible environmental resources as well as respecting and aiding the host cultures that are being visited. Although the specific tools catered to aid this industry in the right direction haven't been created, there are many tools, such as the use of sustainable energy sources, which other industries have been using that can be applied to sustainable tourism. The difficulty also lies in the diversity of businesses in the

⁵ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/97-indians-travellers-eye-sustainable-tourism-in-2018-survey/articleshow/63867379.cms>, Times of India, April 22nd 2018

⁶ <https://news.airbnb.com/airbnb-helps-fight-mass-tourism-promotes-sustainable-travel/>, Airbnb Newsroom, May 29th 2018

tourism industry. There is no one way of monitoring or making progress within the whole industry.⁷

One of the specific solution that has been found, is the Easter islands. There was previously set a 90-day limit to how long tourists were allowed to stay there; however, in the summer of 2018 there was a large overcrowding of tourists, and the limit was set down to 30 days. Even though this was established the 1st of August in 2018, the Chile has yet to establish how many tourists are allowed to stay on the island. They do however plan to follow in Barcelona's and Venice's footsteps, by setting a limit. These limits do include all international and Chile travels, but not the indigenous people of Rapa Nui. These establishments were mainly for limiting the waste and environmental impact that tourist had on the islands, but also in an attempt to preserve the areas. Recently, it has also been discussed to make similar changes to Mt Everest, due to the immense waste found at the peak⁸.

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⁷ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/09/global-tourism-sustainable/>, World Economic Forum, September 12th 2019

⁸ <https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/easter-island-chile-limiting-tourism/index.html>, CNN Travel, August 13th 2018