Understanding the Sustainable Development of Tourism

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Sustainable Tourism Planning

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Rationale

Tourism not properly planned and managed can leave permanent footprints on the physical, social, cultural and economic environments of destinations. Tourism development can be alienating to local residents, overcrowded, noisy, architecturally tasteless, and place pressures on infrastructure. Inappropriate types and scales of development may arise due to laissez-faire tourism policies and a lack of national, regional or local planning and regulation. Governments and stakeholders in the tourism sector have a responsibility to ensure that in the development of tourism long-term prosperity and the quality of life of future generations are not placed at risk.

Sustainable tourism development requires a process of planning and management that brings together the interests and concerns of a diverse group of stakeholders in a sustainable and strategic way. It is this complexity that demands a planning approach which is multidimensional and is purposely integrative. Tourism planning requires an understanding of the meaning of sustainable development and the guiding values for promoting sustainable tourism. It requires that communities be made to be sufficiently aware of the tourism industry and enabled to understand its impacts, as well as the various processes to integrate and engage in participatory planning, consensus building and conflict resolution among all stakeholders.

This chapter has a number of major emphases including the critical role that the community can play in the achievement of sustainable tourism development through the importance of leadership and skills enhancement, and the role of different stakeholders in strategy implementation. The chapter also highlights the importance of evaluating performance in achieving sustainable practice in tourism planning and addressing future challenges and issues associated with how tourism planning can contribute to the achievement of sustainable tourism development.

Learning objectives

The objectives of this chapter are to:

♦ Describe the nature of a sustainability approach to tourism planning and the essential role of the community in tourism planning

♦ Classify the positive and negative impacts of tourism development

♦ Identify the interrelations between the types of destination, different forms of development, types of tourists and tourism impacts

♦ Evaluate economic, social and environmental impact assessment techniques and their application to sustainable tourism planning

♦ Implement appropriate processes to integrate and engage stakeholders in participatory planning and consensus building in the planning process

♦ Explain the role of different stakeholders in strategy implementation including industry, government and community including the establishment of 'codes of practice'

♦ Promote a better understanding of the importance of evaluating progress and monitoring tourism development to achieve sustainable practice in tourism planning.

Sustainability approach to planning

The expected outcomes from tourism planning is tourism development which:

♦ Is sensitive to environmental, social and cultural attributes of the destination

♦ Provides quality tourism and leisure experiences valued by visitors and residents

♦ Is valued by business, government and the community.

Subsequently there are several guiding principles that underpin planning for sustainable tourism development. These include: responsibility, commitment and leadership, cooperation, education, social creativity and freedom.

Responsibility to protect natural and cultural/heritage environments

The tourism industry shares with local residents, governments and all people the obligation to protect and maintain the heritage resources of our planet, which are required both to sustain economies and to be passed on unimpaired to future generations. This recognises the importance of the continuity of natural resources and the continuity of culture and the balances within culture (Wall, 1993): to think globally, act locally.

Commitment and leadership

Destinations require strong, committed and effective leadership by business, government and community leaders at all levels. A proactive role by stakeholders, rather than a passive one, is necessary to ensure that heritage values are fully sustained. More good community projects fail due to leadership breakdown than for any other reason.

Cooperation

Since all industries share responsibility for heritage and natural resources protection, coordination and support between all stakeholders is crucial to the achievement of sustainable tourism. Stakeholders are the people and organisations who are or will be affected by tourism development either in the present or in subsequent years (Morra-Imas and Rist, 2009). We can distinguish four different stakeholders groups concerned with tourism within any destination:

♦ Don't have inflexible ideas about indigenous culture

♦ Avoid over consulting – identify the right contacts.

Visioning

According to Newsome et al. (2002: 147) the task of planning 'is to visualise the area, that is the product, as visitors and managers wish it to be in the future'. Visioning is an important step in formulating a tourism plan. In visioning, community members attempt to look into the future and imagine what they would like their community to be.

The community should develop a vision of where they would like to see their community in the future and how tourism fits into that vision. The process of defining a destination vision consists of three stages (Ritchie, 1993):

♦ Envisioning an image of a desired future organisational state

♦ When effectively communicated to followers

♦ Serves to empower those followers so they can enact the vision.

Visioning requires the community to identify what is really valued or desired and including those elements in the shared image of the community. The image can help a community become responsible stewards and to decide among alternatives how much of any type of development will fit within its vision and determine what levels of change are acceptable.

Goals

Specific goals of tourism planning will differ between communities and for different tourism projects. The community should have input into the goal setting process to help them work toward realisation of their vision. Without goals, the community will not be able to monitor whether its efforts are successful or not. Nor will it know when to stop further efforts. And without clear goals it is difficult to select between alternative development projects.

Once goals have been agreed upon, tourism planners can formulate an action agenda to achieve them, develop time lines and assign responsibilities to ensure the goals are met.

Goal setting will establish a target level for tourism development. Different plans may emphasise different goals but these specific goals should conform to the principles of sustainability and reflect the long run community vision.

Role of international organisations in formulating sustainable tourism plans

An important role of international organisations has been the development of codes of sustainable practice in tourism. These codes of conduct, relevant to all tourism stakeholders, articulate types of behaviour that support planning for sustainable tourism.

Codes of practice

Several industry codes of practice exist. Green Globe is a worldwide benchmarking and certification programme which facilitates sustainable travel and tourism for consumers, companies and communities. The WTO formulated the Global Code

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