4 Sustainable Tourism Policy Frameworks

Introduction

Having looked at the external and internal challenges facing the move towards more sustainable tourism, and the impacts of tourism, you should now be wondering how sustainability in tourism can be turned into more than an ideal.

Perhaps one of the most obvious way to achieve this is simply to regulate the sector. After all regulation worked for the ozone layer: scientists raised the alarm in the 1970s that a hole was appearing in the atmosphere's ozone layer, caused by Ozone Depleting Substances or ODS (most notably CFCs) and resulting in adverse effects on human health and the environment. By 1987 the Montreal Protocol was established to phase out the use of ODS, and by June 2015, all countries in the United Nations, the Cook Islands, Holy See, Niue and the supranational European Union had ratified the original Protocol. The result was a 98% drop in ODS since ratification, and the hole is expected to have fully repaired itself by 2050. A significant achievement in terms of international cooperation, based on scientific advice.

Can such an approach be replicated in tourism? Well, the situation is perhaps more complex, as you've hopefully come to realise in Chapters 1-3. Sustainable tourism means different things to different people; there are significant external drivers (outside the direct control of tourism stakeholders) that hinder the move towards greater sustainability; there is relatively little coordination between the different decision makers, who often have competing agendas; there is a lack of data and understanding about the impacts of tourism at various scales; and moreover tourism can have both positive and negative impacts in equal parts – often providing development opportunities where no others exist, or where other alternatives are more harmful than tourism itself.

Key words and concepts

- Wicked problem.
- Sustainable development goals
- Human rights act
- Paris Agreement

- Rights of Nature
- Supply chain management
- Organic, incremental and induced path to sustainable tourism

4.1   Tourism as a wicked problem

These characteristics have led some to label the move towards greater sustainability in tourism a 'wicked problem' – not a moral judgement, or simply slang, or even hyperbole, but a specific term used to describe highly complex issues possessing several characteristics in common. Rittel and Webber (1973) describe these characteristics as follows.

☐ There is no definitive formulation of a wicked problem, unlike an ordinary problem.

☐ Wicked problems have no stopping rule – the search for solutions is ongoing, as the problem is never fully resolved.

☐ Solutions to wicked problems are not true or false, but are largely a matter of judgment.

☐ There is no immediate and no ultimate test of a solution to a wicked problem, and there are likely to be unexpected consequences over time, making it difficult to measure solutions' effectiveness.

☐ Every solution to a wicked problem is a 'one-shot' operation. There is no trial and error, as every implemented solution has consequences that cannot be undone.

☐ Wicked problems do not have an exhaustively describable set of potential solutions.

☐ Every wicked problem is essentially unique – experience does not help you address it.

☐ Every wicked problem can be considered to be a symptom of another problem, and is entwined with other problems, meaning there is no one root cause.

☐ A wicked problem can be explained in numerous ways, and each stakeholder will have different ideas about what the problem really is and what its causes are.

☐ The planner has no right to be wrong. Problem solvers dealing with a wicked issue are held liable for the consequences of any actions they take, because those actions will have such a large impact and are hard to justify.
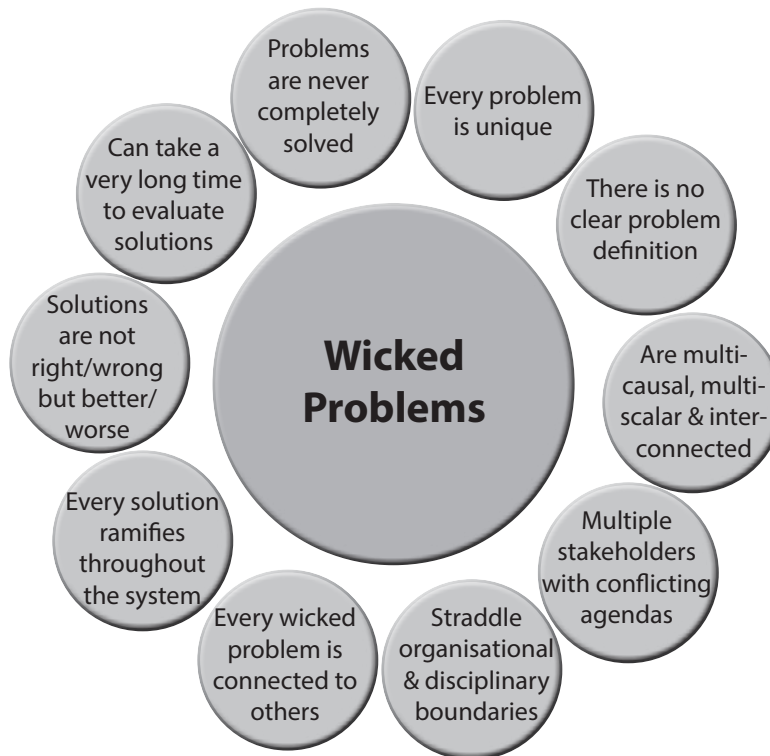
Figure 4.1: The characteristics of a wicked problem.

The upshot is that there is no one way to regulate for greater sustainability in tourism.

4.2 Overview of policy and planning in tourism

Because there is no one way of regulating tourism, we rely instead on a number of international declarations on issues ranging from Human Rights, Rights of the Child, and International Labour to the Protection of the World's Cultural and Natural Heritage, Convention on Biodiversity, on the Environment and Development, and Climate Change. The more relevant ones will be briefly outlined in Section 4.3., with more detail on the significance of Agenda 21 (Environment and Development) and the Paris Agreement (Climate Action). The emerging area of Rights of Nature will also be explored here as will the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are an important discussion of any form of sustainable development.

There are also a number of more specific tourism-related international frameworks, such as the Warsaw Convention on Air Transport (1929), the Manila Declaration on World Tourism (1980) and on the Social Impact of Tourism (1997), as well as the various Resolutions of the World Tourism Organisation's General Assembly. The rights of movement, including visas