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Sustainable Tourism: Towards Sustainable Development

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Learning outcomes

By completing this chapter, the reader will be able to:

- Discuss the concept of sustainable tourism
- Understand the goals of sustainable tourism
- Explain the contribution of tourism to sustainable development
- Discuss the effective governance, policies and tools required for sustainable tourism
- Reflect on real-life case studies of sustainable tourism projects, in pursuit of sustainable development

Introduction

Following the previous two chapters on sectorial applications of sustainable project management, the tourism sector has been identified as one of the most influential contributors to the economic growth of many developing countries. The growing influence of the tourism sector as an economic powerhouse and its potential as a tool for development are irrefutable. The available data indicates that the sector contributes to more than 10% of global gross domestic product (GDP) and provides for one in ten jobs in the world. Not only does the tourism sector spearhead growth, it also improves the quality of people's lives, supports environmental protection, champions diverse cultural heritage and strengthens peace in the world

The necessary shift from the traditional tourism practice to sustainable tourism is a change which can very appropriately utilize the concepts, frameworks and methodologies of sustainable project management, presented and discussed in depth in the earlier chapters of this textbook. This starts from the higher level of

applying eco-innovation concepts discussed in Chapter 4, in defining the business model, in the era of digital transformation, that would translate the set strategy of sustainable tourism into SMART objectives to be broken down into well-defined deliverables. Agile methodologies using Scrum tools and the 12 traits of sustainable change management, as discussed in Chapter 5, can be useful in managing this process amid the VUCA economic reality. The use of the technology will be imperative to manage such change with the urgent need for tools such as Smart Contracts on Blockchain as discussed in Chapter 7. In order to do so, the project manager seeking to contribute to this vital sector of the economy needs essential background about the basic concepts of the sector, with emphasis on the definition, attributes, goals, policies and tools of sustainable tourism.

This chapter aims to provide the reader with these basic concepts. It starts with a general background about the tourism sector leading to the concept of sustainable tourism in light of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals set by the UNDP, (2015). The benefits of sustainable tourism are discussed in the context of sustainable development. The chapter then presents a detailed discussion of the attributes, governance, policies and tools for implementing sustainable tourism. It wraps up with eight real-life case studies from different parts of the world, about how sustainable tourism has a significant impact on sustainable development. Each case study is in fact a project, so it should make an interesting learning tool for project managers working in the tourism sector.

Background

Tourism can be defined as: travel for pleasure or business; the theory and practice of touring; the business of attracting, accommodating, and entertaining tourists; and the business of operating tours. Tourism may be international, or within the traveller's country. The World Tourism Organization defines tourism more generally, in terms which go *"beyond the common perception of tourism as being limited to holiday activity only"*, as people *"traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes"*. Tourism can be domestic or international, and international tourism has both incoming and outgoing implications on a country's balance of payments.

Today, tourism is a major source of income for many countries, and affects the economy of both the source and host countries. Tourism is an important, even vital, source of income for many regions and countries. The growing interest for the development of the tourism sector is explained primarily by the fact that the tourism industry produces numerous positive economic effects: (i) on the social product and national income and their territorial redistribution, (ii) on the activity of the tourist industry, (iii) on the employment, (iv) on balance payment. Tourism is seen as a factor of economic development.

In the second half of 20th century, in many tourist countries the concept of the tourism development that was focused exclusively on achieving economic goals

and making as much profit as possible was applied. However, even though economic interests are still priority, many countries have started to pay more attention to the ecological interests of destinations. That is the result of adopting and implementing the new concept of tourism development, which is the *sustainable development of tourism*. The goal of the following sections of his chapter is to present an overview of the scope of current and potential contribution tourism, and particularly sustainable tourism, has towards sustainable development.

Sustainable tourism from the perspective of the United Nations Development Programme

In 2015, leaders from 193 countries created a plan called the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This set of 17 goals imagines a future in just 15 years with no poverty and hunger, and safe from the worst effects of climate change. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is one of the leading organizations working to fulfil the SDGs by the year 2030 and is present in nearly 170 countries and territories. To harness tourism's impressive potential to advance sustainable development, it is imperative to stress it can contribute to all 17 SDGs. Tourism is specially included as target in Goals 8, 12 and 14 on inclusive and sustainable economic growth, sustainable consumption and production and the sustainable use of oceans and marine resources, respectively, making the pursuit of these targets actionable rather than solely aspirational.

Critical attention must be paid to the way tourism is managed. While countries strive to maximize the sector's positive impact as a generator of economic activity, a provider of jobs and source of foreign exchange, this must be juxtaposed against the need to mitigate some of the current and potential risks including, inter alia, tourism overcrowding and climate change. The evidence from the 2017 tropical hurricane season, which has been one of the most intense and destructive in recent memory, not only forces us to confront the overwhelming scientific evidence that these events are largely due to the changes to our climate and are likely to increase in frequency and ferocity, but to also consider the importance of mainstreaming the issue of resilience in all tourism planning, so that we are in a better position to mitigate these impacts.

There is an increasing evidence of the emergence of a more responsible tourist; one that demands tourism products and services better geared towards environmental protection and beneficial to local communities. Managing sustainable tourism for development also highlights the need to focus on developing and strengthening existing partnerships between government and the private sector, as well as those involving local communities, local stakeholders and tourism authorities, and partnerships among the international tourism community.

Despite its importance there is still a need for a better understanding of how the sector can surmount current challenges and capitalize on opportunities, and how to measure tourism's role in sustainable development, including its economic,