

13th International Educational Technology Conference

Design and development of a Sustainable Tourism Indicator based on human activities analysis in Inle Lake, Myanmar

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Abstract

Inle Lake encompasses immense cultural and biological features, it is the second biggest Lake in Myanmar and it is home to different ethnic groups such as Intha, Pa-O and Shan people that have been making the lake their source of revenue for several decades. Conversely, some of the activities being performed by these communities have caused diverse environmental challenges for the lake. The risk of losing part of the lake ecosystem, including local endemic fish, snails and migratory birds has been increasing in recent times. Though, there is a lack of leadership and control over these actions. Tourism is one of these key activities that can either be a difficulty or an answer to the lake ecosystem conservation. To analyze the range of actions within the lake, this document develops a methodology that analyzes and places the main hazardous activities in one scheme, it evaluates its social, economic-social and ecological cumulative impacts, and refer the main stakeholders involved in it. The outcome information from the study aims to facilitate information analysis to formulate strategies to switch from harmful activities on the lake towards Sustainable Tourism actions. The research paper indicates the methodology of incorporating data into the indicator table and its value as Sustainable Tourism analysis tool for different stakeholders, the analysis tool aims to be a sample for other case studies analyses.

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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of The Association of Science, Education and Technology-TASET, Sakarya Universitesi, Turkey.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism; Human Activities, Inle Lake Myanmar; Sustainable Tourism Indicator.

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1. Introduction: Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism

The significance of questioning the controversial definition of Sustainable Tourism (ST) (Honey, 2008) and distinguishing it from the term Ecotourism that have been implemented in media as blooming solution to achieve Sustainable Development (SD) (Allen, 1993; Isaacs, 2000; Maclaren, 2002) is fundamental when exploring human activities in tourism and its effects on the Natural Ecosystem. The widely accepted term of Ecotourism (Valentine, 1992; Carter, 1994) defined as: “*Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people*” by International Ecotourism Society (TIES) (1990) has been declared incomplete by authors as Ziffer (1989) or Isaacs (2000) due to its insufficiency, thus, this shortened designation tolerates unrelenting abuse of natural resources by mass tourism. Furthermore, Allen (1993), Blamey (2001) Maclaren (2002) and other contemporary authors shaped broader definitions to illustrate the misapprehension between their visions on ecotourism and Nature Tourism. Nonetheless, most of these explanations as well cannot embrace a comprehensive approach for most of the elements related to Tourism and Sustainable Development (Honey, 2008). World Tourism Organization (WTO) and United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) (2005) had defined ST as: “*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*” This definition addresses the three main elements of Sustainability: Economic, Environmental and Social (UN, 1987). Concerning the social component of ST description, WTO-UNEP rationalization is divided into two main factions: (1) the visitors and (2) the host communities. The interrelation between these two target groups with natural environment is critical for the development of SD in Tourism (Koeman, 2002; Pierre, Walter and Reimer, 2011), primarily to address matters as environmental impact reduction, cultural preservation, promotion of community livelihood and visitor satisfaction (Honey, 2008; Fredline, 2006).

This paper investigates the interrelationships between these two social elements, connecting human activities with ecological environment. Inle Lake is selected as a case study in this investigation because of its particular circumstances: it encompass a fragile and rich eco-habitat, there are provisions of vast tourism affluence and the local community is getting disrupted from their usual habits (UNESCO, 2008; BEWG, 2011) This study aims to create an understandable framework to analyze human activities impacts related to ST by defining the critical social indicators involved on it, computing the cumulative impact for the main activity groups and creating strategies and alternatives to implement ST efficiently.

2. Inle lake: Customs that pollute the environment

2.1. Inle Lake in Myanmar: Ecological Significance

The physical heritage, cultural expressions and biological environment of Myanmar are attracting more tourists every year (UNESCO, 2008). This fact has been generating vast international and national tourism investment and speculation that is threatening the ST Myanmar industry (ADB, 2012). A large part of Myanmar, including Inle Lake, is situated within the Indo-Burma Biodiversity Hotspot and is one of the 34 richest and most threatened flora and fauna reservoir on the planet (IID, 2012). There are about 1,027 species of birds, 300 mammals, 425 reptiles and amphibians and about 7000 plants recorded (BEWG, 2011). Thus, it is significant for the country to create a comprehensive framework to develop SD and preserve its natural ecosystem.

Inle Lake, also known as Inlay Lake, is positioned within southern Shan Plateau in central Shan State and is one of the main sightseeing attractions within Myanmar (IID, 2012). The Lake and its environs was converted into a officially protected bird sanctuary in 1985. The Steering Committee of Inle Lake Conservation was formed

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