

Developing sustainable tourism in a changing environment: issues for the tourism enterprises (travel agencies and hospitality enterprises)

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Abstract

The awareness of the problem of mass tourism led researchers on tourism and the environment to attack past methods and policies of tourism development and to recommend their replacement with alternative forms of tourism. Due to conflicts between mass tourism and the environment, managers researchers, academicians, planners, tour operators and international bodies, such as the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) and the World Tourism Organization (WTO), are all working towards the development of new forms of tourism that will diminish impacts on the environment as well as maintain the national and local benefits of the tourism. The problem is that some favor small scale approaches and others see that there is no solution due to inherent problems of pollution related enterprises. This paper presents how sustainable tourism theory can be ‘operationalized’ putting on the tourism firm especially the micro tourism enterprises (travel agents and tour operators, hotels and other hospitality establishments etc) certain issues regarding opportunities and treats with this form of tourism.

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Key words: sustainable tourism development, mass and alternative tourism, tourism stakeholders

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Introduction

Alternative types of tourism, environmentally friendly, that integrate environmental protection and development policies can be introduced at local and regional level by supporting environmentally friendly traditional activities.

The development of leisure and recreation activities should be based on the capacity of local and regional resources to sustain such activities. An identification of local environmental assets must take place in order to be preserved and protected.

Local administrative structures must be trained and educated to monitor environmental resources as well as to improve skills and knowledge of environmental issues.

1. Mass versus alternative tourism

It is evident that not only has tourism grown rapidly worldwide, but that many of those concerned about its negative impacts at the destination assume that mass forms of tourism are largely responsible for these problems (Cooper and Ozdil,1992) [1]. Although the notion that mass tourism is 'a bad thing' is perhaps rather simplistic (Cooper and Ozdil,1992) [1] it has been suggested that controlling the volume of tourism might control the situation (Wheeler,1992) [2]. Especially since tourism is typically found in locations with fragile environments, such as mountains and coasts, many of which are peripheral to the world economy. Increased interest in alternative forms of tourism is perceived as a response to the emphasis placed on exploitation associated with mass tourism, especially in developing countries. The search for a different holiday experience is not a new phenomenon. It has been codified by writers such as Cohen (1972) [3] and Plog (1972) [4]. But there has been a renewed concern with environmental ethics, which has focused on the negative effects of mass tourism on important and fragile natural environments.

This led to the emergence of a more sensitive form of tourism, in which the aim is to minimize the environmental (and also the social, cultural and economic) costs and maximize the benefits. It has been given a number of different labels - appropriate, responsible, soft, green - but perhaps the most useful is 'alternative' tourism, since it is pursued as an alternative to mass tourism and its associated negative impacts. Small numbers of individual travelers are preferred to big numbers of tourists, who are often in groups. Locally provided accommodation and decision making encourage slow, controlled growth that lies well within the capacity of the host area to absorb, without damage to its culture or the natural environment. These factors contrast with the rapid pace of the large-scale development often favored by multinational companies, which dominate on any destination and frequently leads to soaring costs. Inevitably this polarization masks a continuum in reality, along which a range of variants and sub-types can be identified. The nomenclature is confusing and clear definitions can be difficult to find. In addition there is overlap among the categories.

This is compounded by an assumption sometimes made that sustainable tourism is simply another type of tourism, synonymous with alternative and the antithesis of mass tourism. Ecotourism, in some cases appears as a variant of adventure tourism Cater (1987) [5] rather than as a sub-type of equal status. Has attracted so much attention in the literature and in the popular press that deserve separate consideration. The complexities of definition are compounded by perception on the part of the consumer, and by temporal changes that can result in the movement of a host area within the boundaries of a category or from one type or sub-type of tourism, to another, often with quick rapidity.

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