Employment Quality

Community Wellbeing

Biological Diversity

Economic Viability

MAKING TOURISM MORE SUSTAINABLE

Local Control

A Guide for Policy Makers

Physical Integrity

Environmental Purity

Local Prosperity

Visitor Fulfillment

Cultural Richness

Resource Efficiency

Social Equity

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Introduction

Tourism is an activity that has grown by around 25 per cent in the past 10 years. It now accounts for around 10 per cent of the world's economic activity and is one of the main generators of employment. However, it also has major impacts on the natural and built environments and on the wellbeing and culture of host populations. In roughly that same period, the concept of sustainable development has become widely accepted as the way to a better future, even though its roots go back to the 1980s.

It is against this background that *Making Tourism More Sustainable: A Guide for Policy Makers* views the effects of tourism, both positive and negative. In this context, the Guide examines ways in which principally governments but also other stakeholders can develop strategies, policies and tools to maximize the industry's positive effects while minimizing the negative impacts.

Tourism can play a significant role in sustainable development and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Tourism Organization (WTO) wish to encourage all countries to make sure that their policies and actions for its development and management fully embrace the principles of sustainability. Likewise, policies to promote sustainable development should take full account of the opportunities offered by tourism.

Various international conventions and declarations have put forward principles and guidelines for sustainable tourism and the importance of tourism and its sustainability was underlined at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. Many countries declare that they are pursuing, or wish to pursue, policies for 'sustainable tourism'. Despite this interest, there remains a degree of uncertainty over the scope and priorities for making tourism more sustainable and only partial appreciation of how to put this into practice.

All tourism should be more sustainable

Sustainable tourism is not a discrete or special form of tourism. Rather, all forms of tourism should strive to be more sustainable.

Making tourism more sustainable is not just about controlling and managing the negative impacts of the industry. Tourism is in a very special position to benefit local communities, economically and socially, and to raise awareness and support for conservation of the environment. Within the tourism sector, economic development and environmental protection should not be seen as opposing forces—they should be pursued hand in hand as aspirations that can and should be mutually reinforcing. Policies and actions must aim to strengthen the benefits and reduce the costs of tourism.

Big issues are at stake here. Further massive growth is predicted for tourism between now and 2020, providing excellent opportunities for spreading prosperity but presenting considerable challenges and potential threats to the environment and local communities if not well managed. Climate change is recognized as a major global issue, with significant implications for tourism. There is also an increasing appreciation of the potential role of tourism in addressing world poverty, by bringing sources of income to the heart of some of the poorest communities.

Stakeholders in sustainable tourism

Many different interests can benefit from tourism being made more sustainable:

- Tourism enterprises, while seeking long term profitability, should be concerned about their corporate image, the relationship with their staff, and their impact on the global environment and that immediately around them.
- Local communities are seeking increased prosperity but without exploitation or damage to their quality of life.
- Environmentalists are concerned about the harmful impacts of tourism but also see it as a valuable source of income for conservation.
- Tourists are seeking a high quality experience in safe and attractive environments; they are becoming more aware of the impacts of their travelling.

In seeking more sustainable tourism, governments must recognize the different positions and motivations of these stakeholders and work with them to achieve common goals.

Governments play a leading role

Sustainability is the responsibility of all those involved in tourism. Most of the impacts of tourism are the result of actions taken by private sector enterprises and by tourists themselves. However, there is a clear need for governments to take a leading role if truly significant progress is to be achieved in making tourism more sustainable. This is because:

- The tourism industry is very fragmented. It is difficult for the individual actions of many micro and small businesses to make a positive difference and coordination is required.
- Sustainability relates to areas of public concern—air, water, natural and cultural heritage and the quality of life. Moreover, many of the relevant resources are managed by governments.
- Governments have many of the tools that can be used to make a difference—such as the power to make regulations and offer economic incentives, and the resources and institutions to promote and disseminate good practice.

Governments should provide an environment that enables and encourages the private sector, tourists and other stakeholders to respond to sustainability issues. This can best be achieved by establishing and implementing a set of policies for tourism development and management, drawn up in concert with others, that place sustainability at its centre.

The principles of sustainable development put emphasis on local determination and implementation of policies and actions. This should be placed within a supportive national policy framework.

Who this Guide is for

The Guide is primarily aimed at governments, at both national and local levels. It is also relevant to international development agencies, NGOs and the private sector, to the extent that they are affected by, and can affect, tourism policy and its implementation.

The sustainability of tourism is an issue of equal importance in both developed and developing countries. This document is aimed at both. However, the balance of priorities may vary between them.

Purpose and scope of the Guide

The purpose of this document is to provide governments with guidance and a framework for the development of policies for more sustainable tourism as well as a toolbox of instruments that they can use to implement those policies.

The Guide contains five chapters:

1) Tourism and sustainability. This looks closely at what sustainability means for tourism and why governments need to address it. It introduces some key principles and an agenda for more sustainable tourism, framed around a set of 12 Aims.

2) Policy implications of a sustainable tourism agenda. The 12 Aims for more sustainable tourism are discussed in turn and policy areas relevant to each of them are identified.

3) Structures and strategies for more sustainable tourism. This chapter is about establishing the right structures through which governments can work with others towards more sustainable tourism, and about the strategies that are required to develop and drive policies and actions. Particular attention is paid to the relationship between national and local structures and strategies for sustainable tourism.

4) Shaping sustainable tourism. This chapter looks at the process of developing a tourism strategy that embraces sustainability and identifies some of the strategic choices that need to be made. It looks at product and market selection, and introduces the tools that may be used to influence tourism development, the operation of tourism enterprises and the behaviour of visitors.

5) Instruments for more sustainable tourism. A detailed description is given of a set of tools, and of how they can be applied by governments. They include the use of sustainability indicators, planning, infrastructure provision, legislation and regulations, and a set of voluntary and facilitating instruments.

Both tourism and sustainable development are subjects that relate to a broad spectrum of topics and a Guide such as this one inevitably makes passing reference to many of them. To assist readers wishing to expand their background knowledge, the final section of the Guide provides a comprehensive list of relevant sources of further information from UNEP and WTO.

Gathering information for the Guide

This document has been informed by looking at a wide variety of different practices by governments around the world, in the development of policies and the application of instruments.

Initially, a postal survey was carried out by the WTO asking governments to submit information about their existing policies and initiatives relating to the sustainability of tourism. This was supplemented by a survey of experts and practitioners known by UNEP and the WTO to be working in this field. They were asked to recommend examples of good practice against a checklist of instruments. A call for examples was also issued through the regional offices of UNEP, at a number of relevant international conferences, and through publications such as the newsletter of The International Ecotourism Society.

Box I.1: Initial motivations and triggers

It is instructive at the outset to consider the kinds of motivational factors that might lead a country or local destination to pay more attention to sustainability issues in its policy making for tourism.

- A fundamental, overarching national policy position, putting sustainability at the top of the public agenda.
  In South Africa, all recent policies seek to support a process of reconstruction and development, with social empowerment and transformation being driving forces.

- A perceived need to change direction from high impact tourism in order to reduce impacts on the local environment and improve quality of the product offer in line with new market trends.
  Calvià (Spain), Mexico and Egypt provide examples of destinations with established or developing coastal resorts and heritage towns where it was realized that better planning and reduced environmental impact were essential for long term economic as well as environmental sustainability.

- A need to back up a tourism product and market position that is based on the appeal of the area's natural environment with policy to underpin its good management and future sustainability.
  In Costa Rica, early success with ecotourism defined the market positioning of the country as a nature based destination and has stimulated an emphasis on sustainability in the country's tourism strategy. In Kaikoura (New Zealand) the focus on environmental management underpins the town's appeal as a green destination based on a stunning coastal setting and a whale watching product. In Scotland and Australia, the initial interest stemmed from the importance of the fine natural environment for the country's tourism.

- The need and opportunity to develop a form of tourism which would bring income to rural communities and benefit conservation, with a supportive policy framework.
  This is the situation in Bulgaria, where individual ecotourism projects were failing through lack of coordination and marketing. In Ghana the creation of a network of community-based tourism projects has raised the level of interest in tourism as a tool for sustainable development and the fight against poverty.

Tourism and Sustainability

This chapter examines two basic questions:

- What is meant by making tourism more sustainable? and
- Why should governments be concerned about it?

In developing an answer, the chapter outlines why tourism is in a special position with respect to sustainable development; discusses some of the key challenges that need to be addressed; and reviews the international recognition that is being given to the sustainability of tourism. Using this as a basis, it goes on to outline some guiding principles that should be observed and then presents an agenda for sustainable tourism, in the form of twelve aims. Finally, it is shown that, although visitors and the tourism industry are becoming increasingly responsive to these issues, governments nevertheless have a critical role in creating the context and stimulating actions to ensure that tourism is more sustainable in the future.

1.1 Tourism: dynamism and growth

With 760 million international arrivals recorded in 2004, accounting for almost US$622 billion of receipts, tourism is a major global activity that has grown by 25 per cent in the past 10 years.[1]

Predicted growth rates remain high and, although global and regional patterns have fluctuated from year to year (most recently owing to fears over terrorism, health crises (e.g. SARs) and natural disasters), tourism has shown a strong and rapid ability to recover. More and more people have the desire and means to travel and the World Tourism Organization (WTO) is predicting over 1 500 million international arrivals by 2020, more than double the current level.[2]

Forecasts to the year 2020 predict growth in tourism in all regions of the world, with the strongest relative growth occurring in parts of the developing world. Although Europe, the Americas, and East Asia and the Pacific will account for 80 per cent of total arrivals, and thus continue to dominate in terms of volume, international tourist arrivals to Africa are forecast to grow, on average, by 5.5 per cent per year during this period and those to South Asia by more than 6 per cent, compared with a world average of just over 4 per cent.[3]

International travel is only one aspect of tourism. In many countries, domestic tourism outweighs international arrivals in terms of volume and income generated. This is also predicted to grow strongly.

Tourism is also a major source of employment, supporting 74 million jobs directly according to a World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) estimate, and 215 million (8.1 per cent of the world total) if all the indirect economic effects of the sector are taken into account. It represents US$4 218 billion of GDP (10.4 per cent of the world total), with travel and tourism making a particularly significant contribution to international trade, at over 12 per cent of total exports.[4]

1.2 Sustainable development: an evolving agenda

The most commonly used definition of sustainable development is still that given in the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), i.e. sustainable development is '*a process to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*.'

Sustainable development is therefore about creating a better life for all people in ways that will be as viable in the future as they are at present. In other words, sustainable development is based on principles of sound husbandry of the world's resources, and on equity in the way those resources are used and in the way in which the benefits obtained from them are distributed.

The concept has evolved since the 1987 definition, notably through Agenda 21, the plan of action which emerged from the UN Conference on Environment and Development (Rio, 1992), and the plan of implementation from the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, 2002). Three dimensions or 'pillars' of sustainable development are now recognized and underlined. These are:

- Economic sustainability, which means generating prosperity at different levels of society and addressing the cost effectiveness of all economic activity. Crucially, it is about the viability of enterprises and activities and their ability to be maintained in the long term.

- Social sustainability, which means respecting human rights and equal opportunities for all in society. It requires an equitable distribution of benefits, with a focus on alleviating poverty. There is an emphasis on local communities, maintaining and strengthening their life support systems, recognizing and respecting different cultures and avoiding any form of exploitation.

- Environmental sustainability, which means conserving and managing resources, especially those that are not renewable or are precious in terms of life support. It requires action to minimize pollution of air, land and water, and to conserve biological diversity and natural heritage.

It is important to appreciate that these three pillars are in many ways interdependent and can be both mutually reinforcing or in competition. Delivering sustainable development means striking a balance between them.

1.3 Tourism and sustainable development: a special relationship

Tourism is in a special position in the contribution it can make to sustainable development and the challenges it presents. Firstly, this is because of the dynamism and growth of the sector, and the major contribution that it makes to the economies of many countries and local destinations. Secondly, it is because tourism is an activity which involves **a special relationship between consumers (visitors), the industry, the environment and local communities**.

This special relationship arises because, unlike most other sectors, the consumer of tourism (the tourist) travels to the producer and the product. This leads to three important and unique aspects of the relationship between tourism and sustainable development:

- Interaction: The nature of tourism, as a service industry that is based on delivering an experience of new places, means that it involves a considerable amount of interaction, both direct and indirect, between visitors, host communities and their local environments.

- Awareness: Tourism makes people (visitors and hosts) become far more conscious of environmental issues and differences between nations and cultures. This can

affect attitudes and concerns for sustainability issues not only while travelling but throughout people's lives.

- Dependency: Much of tourism is based on visitors seeking to experience intact and clean environments, attractive natural areas, authentic historic and cultural traditions, and welcoming hosts with whom they have a good relationship. The industry depends on these attributes being in place.

This close and direct relationship creates a sensitive situation, whereby tourism can be both very damaging but also very positive for sustainable development.

On the positive side, tourism can:

- Provide a growing source of opportunities for enterprise development and employment creation as well as stimulating investment and support for local services, even in quite remote communities.
- Bring tangible economic value to natural and cultural resources. This can result in direct income from visitor spending for their conservation, and an increase in support for conservation from local communities.
- Be a force for inter-cultural understanding and peace.

Conversely, tourism can:

- Place direct pressure on fragile ecosystems causing degradation of the physical environment and disruption to wildlife.
- Exert considerable pressure on host communities and lead to dislocation of traditional societies.
- Compete for the use of scarce resources, notably land and water.
- Be a significant contributor to local and global pollution.
- Be a vulnerable and unstable source of income, as it is often very sensitive to actual or perceived changes to the environmental and social conditions of destinations.

The net result is that all those involved in tourism have a huge responsibility to recognize the importance of its sustainable development. Tourism has immense power to do good. Yet it can also be the vector for the very pressures that may destroy the assets on which it relies. Developed without concern for sustainability, tourism can not only damage societies and the environment, it could also contain the seeds of its own destruction.

For governments, tourism policies that address economic, social and environmental issues, and which are developed with an awareness of the potential both for harm and for benefit, can channel the forces resulting from the sector's dynamic growth in a positive direction. For the tourism industry, accepting this responsibility is not only about good citizenship, it should also be fuelled by a strong element of self-interest, since any harm that is inflicted to the natural, cultural or social environment of destinations can lead to their eventual destruction or loss of value as a tourism product. In economic terms, sustainability can guarantee that crucial factor already mentioned: 'the viability of enterprises and activities and their ability to be maintained in the long term'.

1.4 Making all tourism more sustainable

Some commentators and institutions have implied that sustainable tourism is a particular kind of tourism appealing to a market niche that is sensitive to environmental and social impacts, serviced by particular types of products and operators, and usually—in contrast with high-volume tourism—implying small in scale. This is a dangerous misapprehension. It must be clear that the term 'sustainable tourism'—meaning 'tourism that is based on the principles of sustainable development'—refers to a fundamental objective: to make **all** tourism more sustainable. The term should be used to refer to a condition of tourism, not a type of tourism. Well-managed high-volume tourism can, and ought to be, just as sustainable as small-scale, dispersed special interest tourism.

**Box 1.1: The World Tourism Organization's
definition of sustainable tourism**

Sustainable tourism development guidelines and management practices are applicable to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, including mass tourism and the various niche tourism segments. Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability.

Thus, sustainable tourism should:

1) Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural resources and biodiversity.

2) Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.

3) Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation.

Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary.

Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them.

Moreover, sustainable tourism should not be taken to imply a finite state of tourism. In fact, it is often argued that tourism may never be totally sustainable—sustainable development of tourism is a continuous process of improvement.

Confusion over the meaning of sustainable tourism has been compounded in some countries by use of the term 'ecotourism' as meaning the same as 'sustainable tourism'. Ecotourism does indeed embrace the principles of sustainability, but it refers explicitly to a product niche. It is about tourism in natural areas, normally involving some form of interpretative experience of natural and cultural heritage, positively supporting conservation and indigenous communities, and usually organized for small groups. The development of ecotourism can provide a useful tool within wider strategies towards more sustainable tourism, as was expounded in the Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism, 2002.[5]

The WTO has given the full definition of sustainable tourism presented in Box 1.1 emphasizing the need to make all tourism sustainable. Expressed simply, sustainable tourism can be said to be:

'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.'

Making tourism more sustainable means taking these impacts and needs into account in the planning, development and operation of tourism. It is a continual process of improvement and one which applies equally to tourism in cities, resorts, rural and coastal areas, mountains, and protected areas. It can apply to all forms of business and leisure tourism.

1.5 Key challenges for more sustainable tourism

Tourism, like others sectors, faces major global challenges. Five of these are discussed below. Although they do not encompass all of the challenges facing the sector, all are important issues recognized around the world. They serve here to illustrate the range of impacts and opportunities that relate to tourism, and also to highlight some of the many reasons why governments should pay serious attention to its sustainable development.

Managing dynamic growth

The doubling of international tourist movements predicted for the next 15 to 20 years will bring considerable pressures. If serious harm to the very resources on which tourism depends is to be avoided, this growth must be well managed. This will require careful planning of the location and types of new development, improved environmental management practices and influencing consumption patterns.

Certain types of location, including those listed below, are particularly vulnerable to pressure:

- Marine and coastal environments, where badly sited development, poor management of waste from resorts and cruise shipping, and general over-use by

tourists leads to serious loss of amenity and natural habitats.
- Historic towns and cities and cultural heritage sites, where pressures and congestion from visitors and their traffic affect overall amenity and residents' quality of life.
- Fragile natural environments, where even quite low levels of visitation can threaten biodiversity.

Climate change

Climate change is a major issue for the long term sustainability of tourism in two senses: climate change will have consequences for tourism, and tourism is a contributor to climate change.

Effects of climate change, such as rising sea levels, increased frequency and energy of surges and storms, beach erosion, coral bleaching, and disrupted water supply threaten many coastal destinations. Mountain resorts will also suffer, from rising snow lines and shortening winter sports seasons. Changes in temperature and rainfall will affect market appeal in most parts of the world, although in different ways, depending on the interplay of push and pull effects in countries of origin and destination. Tourism may also be affected by other factors such as the spread of tropical diseases and the availability of water. Some of these impacts are already being felt.

It is estimated that tourism may contribute up to 5.3 per cent of global anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, with transport accounting for about 90 per cent of this.[6] Estimates suggest that aviation accounts for 2–3 per cent of the world's total use of fossil fuels and up to 3.5 per cent of the anthropogenic greenhouse effect. More than 80 per cent of this is due to civil aviation.[7] Based on current trends, these impacts are set to increase significantly as air transport is one of the fastest growing sources of greenhouse gas emissions.

Poverty alleviation

Halving world poverty by 2015 is the foremost UN Millennium Goal. The potential for tourism to contribute to this reduction is increasingly recognized, partly because it is one of the few sectors in which poor countries' cultural and natural resources give them a comparative economic advantage. The development of tourism provides a good opportunity to help alleviate poverty because it is often a new source of revenue in rural areas, where three-quarters of the world's poor are to be found. It is also a labour intensive activity and one that has low entry barriers. The challenge is to find better ways of channelling visitor spending towards poor people, including through the informal economy.

There is a parallel challenge here: to reverse the tendency for tourism jobs to be low paid. All countries need to ensure that people employed in tourism are properly remunerated, receive proper treatment and are given opportunities for advancement.

Support for conservation

The need to find more financial resources to support conservation is a worldwide issue, although the severity of the problem varies from country to country. Protected

areas in developing countries receive less than 30 per cent of their basic funding needs, and some governments have cut spending on conservation by over 50 per cent in the past decade.

Tourism already makes a major direct contribution to income for protected areas and heritage sites, through entry fees, permits, concessions, etc. and this can be extended. More widely, tourism can become a force for more sustainable land management in all parts of the world by providing an additional or alternative form of livelihood for farmers and rural communities that is dependent on well maintained natural resources.

Health, safety and security

In recent years, uncertainty about the health and safety of travel and of certain destinations has caused significant fluctuations in tourism flows. Although this may be a short term phenomenon and recovery is often fast, it should be regarded as a global issue for the sustainability of tourism. There are policy implications for image, for management of information, and for specific measures to improve the safety and security of tourists.

1.6 International recognition

The importance of tourism to sustainable development and of the need for tourism to integrate sustainability principles has been increasingly recognized in international fora, and echoed in policy statements.

The UN Commission on Sustainable Development, 7th session, 1999

The seventh session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) urged governments to advance the development of sustainable tourism. Particular emphasis was placed on the need for the development of policies, strategies and master plans for sustainable tourism based on Agenda 21, as a way of providing focus and direction for relevant organizations, the private sector and indigenous and local communities. It underlined the need for consultation with all the above stakeholders and for working in partnership with them. It called for capacity building with local communities and for the deployment of a mix of instruments including voluntary initiatives and agreements. Clauses included support for small and medium sized enterprises and appropriate information for tourists.

The WTO Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, 1999

This code was endorsed by the UN General Assembly in 2001 which invited governments and other stakeholders in the tourism sector to consider introducing the contents of the code into relevant laws, regulations and professional practices. The code contains many of the principles of sustainable development of tourism articulated by the CSD and others. It also places particular emphasis on the special role of tourism in contributing to mutual understanding and respect between peoples and as a vehicle for individual and collective fulfilment. Separate articles set out the right to tourism ('The prospect of direct and personal access to the discovery and enjoyment of the planet's resources constitutes a right equally open to all the

world's inhabitants') and freedom of movement of tourists, based partly on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It also sets out the rights of workers and entrepreneurs in the tourism industry with regard to recognition, training, social welfare and other matters.

Convention on Biological Diversity, Guidelines on Biodiversity and Tourism Development, 2003

These guidelines were adopted in 2003 by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Governments are invited to integrate them into the development or review of their strategies and plans for tourism development, national biodiversity strategies and action plans, and other related sectoral strategies, in consultation with interested stakeholders. The guidelines set out a 10-stage process for policy making, development planning and management of tourism in destinations or sites. This includes data gathering, identifying visions and objectives, review of legislation, impact assessment and management, decision making, implementation, monitoring and adaptive management. The guidelines also set out requirements for notification of any intended development and for capacity building to strengthen the overall process.

Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism, 2002

This is the declaration of the World Ecotourism Summit, which was the peak event of the International Year of Ecotourism, 2002, as designated by the United Nations. It sets out recommendations, from the participants in the summit, to governments, the tourism industry and other stakeholders, on the various measures they should take to foster the development of ecotourism. A number of these include recommendations on specific instruments considered elsewhere in this publication. The declaration explicitly recognizes the relevance of approaches developed for ecotourism to the wider task of making all tourism more sustainable.

World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, 2002

In its Plan of Implementation, the WSSD specifically called for the promotion of sustainable tourism as one of a number of strategies for protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development. Although not very prescriptive, the plan (in its Article 43) places emphasis on international cooperation, technical assistance to communities, visitor management and improved market access. Tourism development was also specifically referred to amongst measures for the sustainable development of small island states and for Africa, and in relation to the management of energy and biodiversity conservation.

1.7 Guiding principles and approaches

The development and implementation of policies for sustainable tourism should be based on a number of overarching principles and approaches. Some of these are inherent to the principles of sustainability while others have been identified over time by those working in the field. Guiding concepts and principles are presented below.

Setting the course

Taking a holistic view

Planning and development of tourism should not take place in isolation. Tourism should be considered as part of the sustainable development of communities, alongside other activities. Its impact on other sectors, in terms of competing resource use and mutual support, should be considered. Over-dependency of an economy and society on tourism should be avoided. A holistic approach is also about taking account of all impacts and relationships within the tourism sector itself, and considering how all public policies may affect or be affected by tourism.

Pursuing multi-stakeholder engagement

Sustainable tourism is about local control, but also about working together. All those implicated by tourism should have an opportunity to influence its development and management. This may involve formal partnerships or looser arrangements, as well as strengthening and utilizing local democratic structures.

Planning for the long term

Short term approaches should be avoided and the long-term view encouraged, with resources committed accordingly. Where possible, actions should be self-sustaining. Projects that are structured around short term inputs and finance must take account of how initiatives, once started, can be maintained into the future.

Addressing global and local impacts

Impacts on the local environment and communities are often apparent. It can therefore be easier to gain support for policies that address these local impacts rather than for policies that address global issues. However, the sustainable development of tourism should pay equal attention to global impacts, especially with respect to pollution from tourism (such as greenhouse gas emissions) and the use of non-renewable resources. Such global impacts also have a direct effect on tourism itself (e.g. climate change).

Promoting sustainable consumption

Sustainability is not just about the supply side. Equal consideration should be given to influencing the pattern and impact of consumption. This means influencing the volume and nature of tourism demand, the choices made by tourists (such as products selected and mode of travel), and their activities and behaviour.

Equating sustainability and quality

It should be increasingly accepted that a quality tourism destination or product is one that addresses the full range of sustainability issues rather than simply concentrating on visitor satisfaction. Indeed, tourists should themselves be encouraged to think in these terms—a place that cares for the environment and its workforce is more likely also to care for them.

Developing the approach

Reflecting all impacts in costs—polluter pays principle

Under the polluter pays principle it is the perpetrator of environmental impacts who bears the responsibility for costs incurred which, where possible, should be reflected

in financial costs. This principle has strong implications both for policies and for the use of economic instruments to influence consumption and pollution. In tourism it has implications, for example, for charges for activities such as transport, admission to sites and waste disposal.

Minimizing risk taking—precautionary principle
Careful risk assessment is an important component of sustainable tourism development. Where there is limited evidence about the possible impact of a development or action, a cautious approach should be adopted. The precautionary principle means putting in place measures to avoid damage before it occurs rather than trying to repair it afterwards.

Taking a life cycle perspective
Life-cycle assessment means taking full account of impacts over the entire life of a product or service, including initial resources used, siting and design, development and construction, all inputs to its operation, and disposal and after-use implications.

Considering functional alternatives
Consideration should be given to whether the same function can be performed and the same result achieved by doing things in a way that has more positive and less negative impacts on resources. For example, in a strategy to improve visitor satisfaction by adding further recreational opportunities, preference should be given to those options that bring the least environmental and social impacts and the highest economic returns.

Respecting limits
The readiness and ability to limit the amount of tourism development or the volume of tourist flows in a destination or site are central to the concept of sustainable tourism. Limiting factors may be ecological resilience, resource capacity, community concerns, visitor satisfaction, etc. These factors should be taken into account in setting limits that are respected by all concerned.

Ensuring ongoing progress

Adapting to changing conditions
Adaptive response and management is an important aspect of sustainable development. Tourism is sensitive to external conditions in terms of its performance and the level of its impact. Global threats, such as climate change and terrorism need to be considered in planning for future tourism and in introducing risk management policies.

Undertaking continuous monitoring using indicators
Sound management of tourism requires readily available evidence of changes in impact over time, so that adjustments to policies and actions can be made. Indicators that relate to sustainability aims and objectives should be established to monitor the condition, performance and impact of tourism. Cost effective monitoring programmes should be put in place.

1.8 An agenda for sustainable tourism

Consideration of the general concept of sustainable development, the special position of tourism and the agreements reached at international fora, helps to set an agenda for more sustainable tourism.

This agenda needs to embrace two, interrelated, elements of the sustainability of tourism:

- the ability of tourism to continue as an activity in the future, ensuring that the conditions are right for this; and
- the ability of society and the environment to absorb and benefit from the impacts of tourism in a sustainable way.

Based on this, an agenda for sustainable tourism can be articulated as a set of twelve aims that address economic, social and environmental impacts. The agenda formulated in this way can then be used as a framework to develop policies for more sustainable tourism that recognize the two directions in which tourism policy can exert an influence:

- minimizing the negative impacts of tourism on society and the environment; and
- maximizing tourism's positive and creative contribution to local economies, the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, and the quality of life of hosts and visitors.

The twelve aims for an agenda for sustainable tourism are:

1) Economic Viability
   To ensure the viability and competitiveness of tourism destinations and enterprises, so that they are able to continue to prosper and deliver benefits in the long term.

2) Local Prosperity
   To maximize the contribution of tourism to the economic prosperity of the host destination, including the proportion of visitor spending that is retained locally.

3) Employment Quality
   To strengthen the number and quality of local jobs created and supported by tourism, including the level of pay, conditions of service and availability to all without discrimination by gender, race, disability or in other ways.

4) Social Equity
   To seek a widespread and fair distribution of economic and social benefits from tourism throughout the recipient community, including improving opportunities, income and services available to the poor.

5) Visitor Fulfillment
   To provide a safe, satisfying and fulfilling experience for visitors, available to all without discrimination by gender, race, disability or in other ways.

6) Local Control
    To engage and empower local communities in planning and decision making about the management and future development of tourism in their area, in consultation with other stakeholders.

7) Community Wellbeing
    To maintain and strengthen the quality of life in local communities, including social structures and access to resources, amenities and life support systems, avoiding any form of social degradation or exploitation.

8) Cultural Richness
    To respect and enhance the historic heritage, authentic culture, traditions and distinctiveness of host communities.

9) Physical Integrity
    To maintain and enhance the quality of landscapes, both urban and rural, and avoid the physical and visual degradation of the environment.

10) Biological Diversity
    To support the conservation of natural areas, habitats and wildlife, and minimize damage to them.

11) Resource Efficiency
    To minimize the use of scarce and non-renewable resources in the development and operation of tourism facilities and services.

12) Environmental Purity
    To minimize the pollution of air, water and land and the generation of waste by tourism enterprises and visitors.

The order in which these twelve aims are listed does not imply any order of priority. Each one is equally important.

Many of the aims relate to a combination of environmental, economic and social issues and impacts, as illustrated by Figure 1.1 and by the examples below:

•   Economic viability of tourism depends strongly on maintaining the quality of the local environment.
•   Visitor fulfilment is about meeting visitors' needs and providing opportunities (a social aim), but is also very important for economic sustainability.
•   Cultural richness is often considered to be in the social sphere of sustainability, but it has a strong bearing on environmental aspects in terms of the built environment and cultural dimensions of society's interaction with nature.
•   Community wellbeing, which can be seen mainly as a social aim, is strongly related to environmental resource management, for example with respect to access to fresh water.
•   Employment quality and social equity issues, such as poverty alleviation, relate closely to both economic and social sustainability issues.

Figure 1.1: Relationship between the 12 aims and the pillars of sustainability
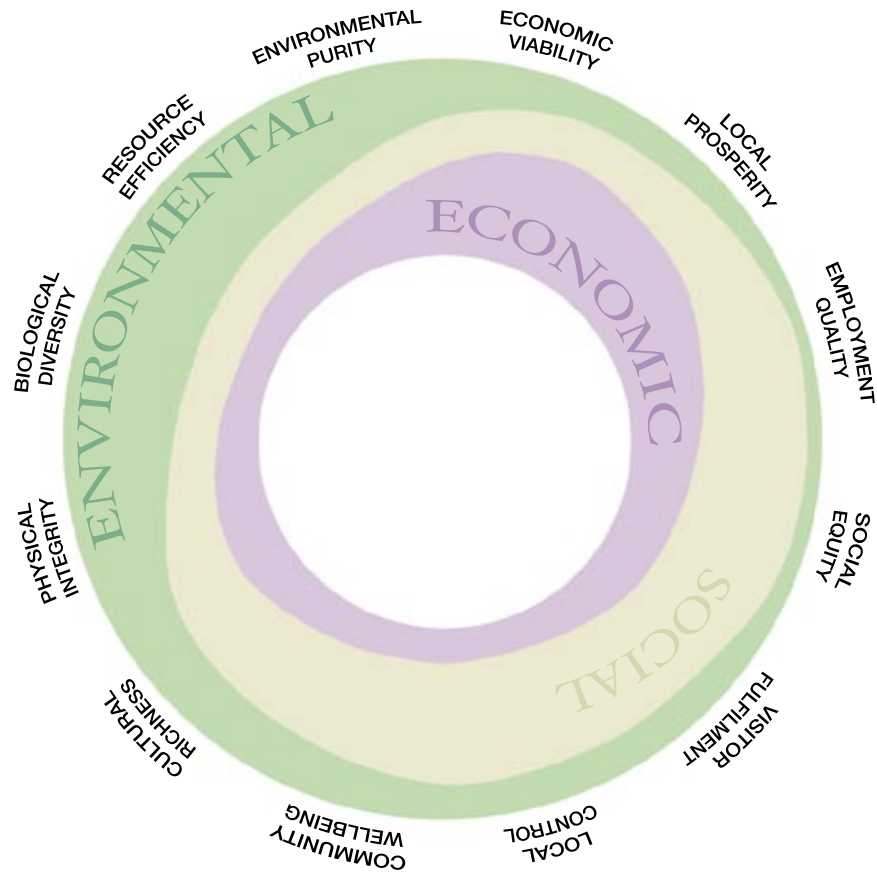
1.9 Governments, the market and the industry's view

Governments should recognize that interest in the sustainability of tourism is growing amongst many private sector enterprises and within visitor markets. They should take account of this when seeking to persuade the tourism industry to take sustainability more seriously, pointing out the advantages for attracting new business and the overall profitability of a more sustainable approach.

Understanding tourists' attitudes—more than a niche market response

Governments need to understand what is important to tourists if they are to influence their behaviour effectively. It has been suggested that tourists are not generally interested in the sustainability of the trips they take, and that this is a major constraint on the pursuit of more sustainable tourism. However, the interpretation of tourist response depends on the nature of the questions asked.

For example, although studies of the ecotourism market (e.g. those carried out by the WTO[8]) have concluded that this is indeed a small (albeit growing) niche market, such surveys attempted specifically to identify tourists and tour operators that were

looking for, or selling, special interest holidays involving nature observation and concern for conservation as a primary motivation for the trip. Wider surveys that have attempted to assess the degree to which general consumers are interested in the interrelationship between their activities as tourists and the environment and host communities (rather than their response to the concept of sustainability as a whole) suggest a far wider relevance in the market place. They point to:

- Very high levels of concern for environment and society in destinations, where the issue is likely to directly affect the tourist's own wellbeing (e.g. cleanness of the water and levels of safety).
- High and growing levels of interest by tourists in visiting natural and cultural sites during their holidays, and the authenticity and educational value of such experiences. This applies to general holidaymakers as well as to those with a specialist interest.
- Large numbers of tourists expressing concern about the impact of their travelling, both through their own actions and in their choice of tour operator or service provider.
- Considerable willingness to pay more to support local environments and communities.

Some statistical evidence backing up these conclusions is presented in Box 1.2.

Despite this positive feedback, it is important to be realistic about the balance of influences on holiday choice. Visitor surveys and practical experience suggest that overall perceived attractiveness of a destination, climate, convenience, quality of facilities, and price still far outweigh concerns for the impact of travel. However, the latter concerns do make a difference to holiday choices if the former factors are considered equal. It also appears that tourists are more likely to be concerned about impacts on the local environment and the quality of life of their hosts than about global issues. Finally, there is less evidence that tourists have actually taken actions to change their travel and consumption patterns, despite their expressed concern and interest.

The challenge therefore remains to provide more leadership, incentives and information to ensure a genuine response. In line with the broad approach advocated in this Guide, the strategy should be to encourage all tourists to be more aware of the impacts of their travelling and be more interested and concerned about host populations, rather than to try to seek out the 'sustainable tourist'.

Corporate Social Responsibility in the tourism sector

There is a general trend amongst private sector businesses to recognize their responsibilities to society beyond their traditional functions of generating wealth and profit. Governments can use this growing awareness when developing industry-related policies and activities and as a lever to achieve industry involvement and buy-in.

In companies, the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) means adopting transparent business practices that are based on ethical values. It has started to gain ground and many companies already include social and environmental commitments in their core mission statements. Some adopt triple bottom line reporting, whereby social and environmental results are measured and reported next to financial results.

Box 1.2: Statistical evidence of market response

a) Anxieties about visitors' own wellbeing
- 83 per cent of British package holidaymakers say that a dirty beach or polluted sea matter a great deal to them when choosing a destination. 74 per cent are similarly influenced by levels of crime, and 62 per cent by incidence of local illness.[9]
- 60 per cent of German tourists are concerned about litter, 51 per cent about noise pollution and 46 per cent about good nature protection in the destination.[10]

b) Interest in a diversified experience
- 61 per cent of US tourists are looking for travel experiences involving well-preserved natural, historical or cultural sites. 53 per cent agree that they have a better travel experience when they learn as much as possible about their destination's customs, geography and culture.[11]
- Three in four British tourists agree that their trip should include experiences of local culture and food.[12]

c) Concern for the impact of their actions
- Three-quarters of US travellers feel that it is important that their visits do not damage the environment.[13]
- 51 per cent of British tourists say that food or water shortages for local residents matter a great deal to them in their choice of destination.[14]
- 65 per cent of British tourists feel that the reputation of the holiday company on environmental issues is important.[15]
- 82 per cent of Dutch tourists believe that integrating environmental information into travel brochures is a good idea.[16]

d) Willingness to pay more
- 53 per cent of British tourists would be prepared to pay more for their holiday in order that workers in the destination could be guaranteed good wages and working conditions. 45 per cent would be prepared to do so to support preservation of the local environment and reverse the negative environmental effects of tourism. The average additional sum indicated is about 5 per cent of the holiday price.[17]
- 69 per cent of Danish tourists staying in eco-labelled hotels are willing to pay more for such hotels owing to their environmental designation.

In the tourism sector, some companies now have an environmental management system and have established foundations or other mechanisms for supporting social and environmental projects in the communities in which they operate.

Tour operators have been quite active in embracing sustainability principles in the design of tour programmes, selection of suppliers, work with local communities, and information for tourists, but this has applied mainly to smaller, specialist operators. Networks of operators committed to this approach exist in France, Germany, the Netherlands and some other countries. The Tour Operators' Initiative, supported by UNEP, UNESCO and the WTO, has members from a number of different countries and has pioneered good sustainability practice, both by tour operators and within the destinations in which they operate[18].

The response of small independent service providers is difficult to determine. Their reaction to issues such as environmental management often depends on the personal interest of the proprietor. The proportion of individual accommodation enterprises participating in eco-labelling (certification) is only between 1 and 10 per cent of the total of enterprises in countries where labelling exists. Nevertheless, there are some really excellent examples of individual enterprises supporting local environment and community projects. Governments can play a crucial role in stimulating widespread recognition and response across the industry.

1.10 The crucial role of government

Governments have a crucial role to play in the development and management of tourism and in making it more sustainable. The level of government engagement in tourism varies considerably across the world. Contacts with governments on sustainability nevertheless reveal that most are, at least nominally, seeking to pursue sustainable tourism. This applies equally to developed and developing countries, though the emphasis may be different. In developing countries, interest in sustainable tourism is more likely to be linked to poverty alleviation and the funding of conservation; in the developed world, issues of rejuvenation and visitor management are more prominent.

Whatever the motivation of governments, their role relates only partly to their own actions. Tourism is primarily an activity carried out by private sector enterprises, and it is their actions, together with those of tourists, that are responsible for most impacts, positive and negative. A primary function of government in fostering more sustainable tourism is therefore to create an environment that enables or influences the private sector to operate more sustainably, and influences patterns of visitor flows and behaviour so as to maximize the benefits and minimize the negative impacts of tourism.

The key reasons for the importance of the role of government are as follows:

- Much of the sustainability agenda is about areas of public rather than private concern. Although the private sector is beginning to recognize its responsibility, it cannot, on its own, be expected to take a lead on these issues.
- In all countries, the tourism sector is fragmented into many thousands of businesses, mainly micro or small enterprises. Collectively their actions can make a difference, while individually they cannot, so coordination is needed. Furthermore, very small businesses often need external support and advice if they are to change their operations successfully to meet a new agenda.
- Governments are responsible for many functions that are fundamentally important to the sustainable development of tourism, such as land use planning, labour and environmental regulations, and the provision of infrastructure and social and environmental services.
- Many governments are already actively engaged in supporting tourism through marketing, information services, education and in other ways, often through joint public-private frameworks. These functions need to continue and to be more closely aligned with sustainability objectives.

These arguments and functions are applicable at both national and local government levels.

In many countries, many of the objectives and actions that governments are pursuing can be said to be in line with sustainability, and there is considerable recent interest in relating tourism policies to wider sustainable development or poverty reduction strategies. However, as has already been pointed out, the understanding of what the sustainable development of tourism entails, and even the terminology, is not consistent between governments. A more systematic approach to link sustainability aims and principles to policies and tools is needed.

Notes

1   WTO World Tourism Barometer, June 2005.
2   WTO Tourism 2020 Vision, 2004.
3   WTO Tourism 2020 Vision, 2004.
4   WTTC, World Travel and Tourism Forging Ahead, 2004.
5   The definition of ecotourism promoted by The International Ecotourism Society is 'responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people'. The Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism (2002) recognizes that ecotourism embraces the following specific principles which distinguish it from the wider concept of sustainable tourism:
    •   Contributes actively to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage;
    •   Includes local and indigenous communities in its planning, development and operation, and contributes to their well-being;
    •   Interprets the natural and cultural heritage of the destination to visitors;
    •   Lends itself better to independent travellers, as well as to organized tours for small size groups.
6   Gössling, S. (2002) Global environmental consequences of tourism. Global Environmental Change 12, 283 – 302.
7   International Panel on Climate Change, Special Report on Aviation and the Global Atmosphere (Penner et al.,1999).
8   WTO surveys, conducted in seven countries in 2001, indicated that this market niche accounted for no more than 2-5 per cent of organised or packaged leisure tourism.
9   ABTA survey, 2002.
10 Ecotrans/FUR Reiseanalyse, 2002.
11 Travel Industry Association of America and National Geographic Traveller, The Geotourism Study 2002.
12 Harold Goodwin and Justin Francis 'Ethical and responsible tourism: consumer trends in the UK', Journal of Vacation Marketing, Vol 9(3), 2003.
13 Travel Industry Association of America and National Geographic Traveller The Geotourism Study 2002.
14 ABTA survey, 2002.
15 Goodwin and Francis (2003).
16 FEMATOUR market study, 2000.
17 ABTA survey, 2002.
18 The Tour Operators' Initiative is a voluntary network of tour operators committed to integrate sustainable development in their operations. For more information visit http://www.toinitiative.org.

List of Abbreviations

CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CFCs	Chlorofluorocarbons
CSD	Commission on Sustainable Development
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
EIA	Environmental impact assessment
GRI	Global Reporting Initiative
ICZM	Integrated coastal zone management
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (World Conservation Union)
LA21	Local Agenda 21
LAC	Limits of acceptable change
MSME	Micro, small and medium sized enterprise
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
SEA	Strategic environmental assessment
TIC	Tourist information centre
TOI	Tour Operators' Initiative
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USAID	The US Agency for International Development
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development
WTO	World Tourism Organization
WTTC	World Travel and Tourism Council

About the World Tourism Organization

The World Tourism Organization is a specialised agency of the United Nations that serves as a global forum for tourism policy and issues. Its Members include 152 countries and territories as well as over 300 Affiliate Members from the public and private sectors.

WTO generates know-how for its members and the international tourism community. **WTO Sustainable Development of Tourism Department is currently involved in the following main fields of activity**:

> **Policies and planning for the sustainable development of tourism**: WTO has been providing technical assistance on sustainable tourism planning at the national, regional and local levels in all countries.

> **Sustainable tourism at specific destinations**: WTO supports the sustainable development and management of coastal, rural, and urban destinations, cultural heritage sites, protected areas, etc. and of Small Island Developing States.

> **Tourism and poverty alleviation**: at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, WTO launched the concept of "Sustainable Tourism as an effective tool for Eliminating Poverty" (ST-EP) and is currently implementing projects in this field. WTO is collaborating with Micro-Finance Institutions and governments in the developing world, encouraging them to coordinate efforts and to support micro, small and medium sized tourism enterprises.

> **The Global Code of Ethics for Tourism**, approved by the UN, is a comprehensive set of principles whose purpose is to guide the stakeholders in tourism development, including tourists, towards ethical behaviours.

> **Indicators of sustainable tourism**: WTO encourages the application of sustainability indicators at destinations, as fundamental tools for the planning and monitoring of tourism.

> **Climate change and tourism**: WTO is addressing the complex relations between climate change and tourism.

> **Voluntary initiatives for sustainable tourism**: certification systems, eco-labels and other forms of voluntary regulation represent an effective alternative to direct legislation.

> *WTO´s mission is to promote and develop tourism as a significant means of fostering international peace and understanding, sustainable economic development and international trade.*

For more information,
see **www.world-tourism.org**