

THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN AFRICA

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South Africa

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1. Introduction

Tourism is currently the world's leading category of international trade. As the effects of globalization reach deeper into national economies, global trade becomes more significant for both developing and developed countries. The growing trend of globalization refers to the increasing flow of goods, services, people and money across national borders. As the world becomes increasingly integrated in a variety of economic and non-economic ways, export success is seen as a major route to economic progress for developing countries. This points to a major role for foreign tourism in generating foreign exchange and contributing to the Gross Domestic Products (GDPs) of developing countries. The African region has vast untapped tourism potential. However, there are risks associated with all forms of international trade, which may be heightened

by the particularities of the tourism trade. Thus it is not always clear whether the relationship between increasing tourism and socio-economic development is a positive or a negative one.

This article examines tourism in Africa and explores the question of the sustainability of the sector, and whether it is capable of fulfilling developmental and economic objectives in the African region. It does so by beginning with a definition of tourism and an examination of the nature of the tourism industry and its political economy, with a focus on the particular characteristics of the sector. This is followed by an exploration of the key principles of the concept of sustainable tourism. After an outline of the African tourism market, the development of tourism in South Africa serves as a case study to elaborate on these points and to link the idea of key principles developed with current practices. This focus is justified by the fact that South Africa emerged in 1998 as Africa's leading tourist destination, at 25th position in the world, having outstripped Egypt, ranked 34th; Tunisia, ranked 29th; and Morocco, ranked 38th. As neighboring African markets have good potential for further development, the possibility exists for greater integration of the continent through flows of travelers between north and south. After a consideration of the opportunities and constraints for the development of more sustainable tourism in South Africa, the focus broadens out again to conclude with future options and likely perspectives for the region as a whole.

2. What is tourism?

2.1 Definition

While there is no universally agreed definition of 'tourism' or 'tourist', the World Tourism Organization (WTO) uses the following:

"Tourism is the set of activities of a person travelling to a place outside his or her usual environment for less than a year and whose main purpose of travel is other than the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited."

This is essentially the understanding of the term used in this article, and includes both the holiday and the business market as parts of travel and tourism, but excludes migrant labor. However, day trippers, who constitute an important component of emerging domestic tourism in the case study location of South Africa, must also be considered to be part of the tourism equation, in contrast to the WTO formulation. The term region is used in this article to refer to the African region.

2.2 The tourism industry

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the tourism 'industry' includes sectors directly involved in tourism, such as the accommodation, catering, entertainment, recreation, transport and tourism-related services. However, one can distinguish between the travel and tourism 'industry' and the 'economy'. The wider travel and tourism 'economy' includes manufacturers and suppliers of goods and services to the industry, as indicated in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1

This wider tourism economy indicates the strong flow-through effects of tourism across the economy. It is because of these cross-linkages that many developing countries place great emphasis on tourism growth as an important stimulus to the economy. The industry is also labor intensive, and thus can play a key role in job creation. Foreign tourism results in tourists bringing foreign exchange into countries, and thus is important for balance of payments. However, the global political economy of tourism means that less money remains in the economies of developing countries than would be expected. This phenomenon is referred to as 'leakage' from the economy, and is estimated to be as high as 60% of total revenue from tourism on average.

Tourism's scale and shape are determined by a range of political, economic and technological factors. Economically, development of tourism is positively correlated with increased disposable income and free time. Thus economic crises such as the Asian crisis of the late 1990s could be expected to have, and indeed did have, a negative impact on global tourism. However, one needs to go beyond economic considerations, and to link these up with political factors, in order to understand how the global tourism system functions.

Figure 1 is a simplified and schematic representation of the global tourism system. The diagram illustrates that the modern tourism the product goes beyond travel and accommodation to include many services such as insurance, entertainment and shopping, as well as creation of the desire to travel. The complexity of the structure of the tourism industry, and the nature of the product supplied, means that it cannot adequately be depicted in a linear fashion, as could perhaps a commodity-exporting industry.

What may hence more accurately be referred to as the tourism trading system includes the standard three levels of demand, intermediaries and supply. Demand may be broken down into domestic, regional and overseas tourists, while the intermediaries consist of tour operators, wholesalers and travel agents, both international and local companies. The area of supply consists of the elements of accommodation, activities/entertainment, catering, transport and other services, as depicted in Table 1.

Supply Element	Accommodation	Activities/ Entertainment	Catering	Transport	Services
Components	Hotels Game lodges Guest houses B&Bs Self-catering Hostels Camping Traditional accommodation etc	Cultural Arts Culinary Festivals Hiking trails Scenic routes Nature-based e.g. birdwatching etc.	Restaurants Cafés Open-air theme restaurants Take-aways Traditional food Market/street vendors etc.	Airlines Trains Taxis Minibus Boats Animal power etc.	Information bureaux (public & private) Reservation systems Advertising Consultancies : (local & international) Tour guides etc.

Table 1. Components of tourism's supply elements

These three levels of supply, demand and intermediaries are surrounded by the broader travel and tourism economy that supplies and is stimulated by the industry. The economy is then located within two levels of what may be termed the operating or business environment, which includes international and national policy and regulatory frameworks, economic climate, free trade agreements, and 'intangible' factors like quality of life within the destination country. Note that the contextual components indicated in Figure 1 are not comprehensive. The element 'resource management strategies' is specifically included in view of the focus of this contribution on sustainable tourism. The tourism industry is clearly dependent on natural and cultural resources for its attractive power, and indeed for its very being. Any examination of the political economy of tourism will show that the division between international and national contextual elements is not always clear-cut, as indicated by the dotted line. For instance, the global economic climate and free market dictates may strongly influence national economic policies and strategies, as well as quality of life at the local level in the destination country.

Despite its non-linear design, Figure 1 is still clearly a simplification of the complex web of interactions between industry elements. Additionally, the schematic representation does not show the high degree of vertical integration (*The control of all or many aspects and activities of the industry is referred to as vertical integration within the industry.*) on either side of the intermediaries. As has been pointed out:

"These intermediary companies created and now control a global mass tourism market through their transnational operations in origin and destination countries. The largest have expanded vertically to the point where they have interests in all major sections of the industry and are not answerable to policies determined by any single government".

This autonomy of the large multinational countries within the current context of globalization and liberalization of economies has disturbing implications for the ability of countries to manage their tourism industry in a sustainable manner. Intermediaries such as inbound and outbound tour companies, as well as suppliers such as hotels and airlines have become increasingly transnational in their operations over the past 30 years. This high degree of vertical integration accounts for the leakage from developing countries that is well-established. Thus when tourists purchase package tours in their home countries, a large percentage of their total expenditure remains within the economy of the developed countries, as many of the tourism operations at all three levels are owned by developed country interests.

This brief outline of the political economy of the tourism system has highlighted the dominance of large multinational companies in the global trade. However, at the destination level, small tourism businesses are important components of the industry and have the ability to inject cash into local economies rapidly. They also constitute a flexible form of supply. On the downside, they may fail to deliver a professional tourism service due to a lack of marketing and managerial skills. This clearly points to the need for dedicated support for these small businesses.

Thus the growth path of tourism in an African country often depends on the precarious interaction of small local businesses with the giants of the global economy and the unpredictable forces of globalization. Rising social and environmental expectations in key export markets may further complicate this growth path. At the start of the twenty-first century, there are major concerns that the result of sustainable trade pressures, discussed below, will be new trade barriers and a loss of competitiveness for developing country producers. Mobilization around these concerns on the part of developing countries, together with militant civil society protests, were two of the hindering factors at the summit of the World Trade Organization in Seattle, USA in November 1999. These protest actions may be seen as attempts to intervene and re-shape the current political economy of tourism, in order to shift power relations away from the industrialized nations and increase the stake of the developing nations in this and other sectors.

2.3. The particular characteristics of tourism

Apart from the complexity of the industry, noted above and illustrated diagrammatically in Figure 1, it has a number of other fundamental characteristics that collectively set it apart from other sectors. The high degree of leakage of tourism receipts has been noted above. Other peculiar characteristics of tourism include its seasonality, fickleness, instability and vulnerability, and each of these has implications for the development of tourism in Africa.

The seasonality of tourism is well known, with peaks corresponding to traditional holiday periods in international markets, as well as to local vacation seasons. This seasonality means that many facilities operate at low occupancy levels for much of the year, and thus is a causal factor in the high level of temporary workers employed in the industry.

Tourism has been characterized as a "fashion" industry, and certainly the demand-supply relationships in tourism are particularly dynamic. Exponents of the 'tourism cycle' theory have sought to explain this natural tendency towards change. Put simply, destinations are initially colonized by "adventurers", seeking out new and unspoiled places away from the crowds. As tourism development proceeds, and infrastructure is put in place, new destinations become more accessible and appealing, the numbers increase and they may simply become a form of mass tourism—as the 'typical' product cycle for tourism. Thus more specialized forms of tourism often, although not always, tend to move towards mass tourism. The social significance of this is that the move towards mass tourism is generally characterized by decreasing control by local people as tourist numbers increase, together with increasing environmental and economic impacts, increasing control by industry, decreasing contact with local people, and increasing social disruption for locals.

Changing external factors compound this inherent fickleness. Instability of the industry relates to the high level of influence on it by uncontrollable factors such as political instability, weather and international currency fluctuations. The tourism industry is particularly vulnerable to the inconstancies of the world economy, as leisure activities

are often the first to be curtailed when household finances constrict. On the plus side, it is often stated that tourism in general requires a relatively short lead-in time in creating measurable economic impact, can create jobs for a relatively low level of investment, and, because of its cross-sectoral nature, has far-reaching flow-through effects in an economy.

Within each of these threats lies the germ of a great opportunity too. While this may be true for most industries, the inherent vagaries of tourism serve to deepen the dualities, meaning that this is an industry peculiarly reflective of the post-modern world. These peculiarities of the tourism industry necessitate careful management of the industry if it is to deliver on economic and social developmental promises.

Tourism is both an agent of change, and a respondent to it. The changing global environment has necessitated great changes to the mode of tourism management. The current nature of the global political economy described above means one must question whether tourism can in fact contribute to attacking under-development. For instance, as more and more economies open up to free trade, multinational corporations move increasingly into different parts of the world, often undermining local interests and resulting in a loss of access to resources and entitlements for locals. Does free trade necessarily equate with higher levels of foreign direct investment (FDI)? Early indications from South Africa are that this is not the case. In addition to a developmental and an economic role, a further question is whether tourism can serve as an instrument for world peace, through promoting inter-cultural tolerance? This article asserts that if tourism is to meet these goals, the current predominant form of tourism development needs to change to a more sustainable mode. But what exactly is meant by the term sustainable tourism?

3. Principles of sustainable tourism

This article focuses on the development of sustainable tourism in Africa, and thus it is necessary to be clear about the formulation of sustainable tourism that is used here. The definition of sustainable development used in this encyclopedia serves as a good starting point.

Sustainable development is defined for the purposes of this encyclopedia as wise use of resources through critical attention to policy, social, economic, technological, and ecological management of natural and human engineered capital. The goal of this is to promote innovations that assure a higher degree of human needs fulfillment, or life support, across all regions of the world, while at the same time ensuring intergenerational equity. Thus sustainable tourism would need to incorporate the basic components of this definition, which may be distilled into the following underlying key principles for sustainable tourism.

- Social, economic, technological and ecological factors are inter-related and must be considered holistically in tourism development.
- Policy at all levels has a key role to play in managing tourism for sustainability.
- Trade-offs between natural and human engineered capital will require long-term

- thinking—at least three generations into the future.
- Sustainable tourism development should promote meeting human needs and assuring the integrity of ecological life support systems.
 - Participation of local communities and other stakeholders in tourism development is critical.

Box 1. Key principles for sustainable tourism

An abbreviated definition for sustainable tourism, often used inter-changeably with the term responsible tourism, is any form of tourism that tries to reduce the costs and increase the benefits of tourism to society and the environment. This is the understanding of the term used in the government policy on tourism within the case study country, South Africa.

The complexity of the tourism industry, as illustrated by Figure 1 and Table 1, means that sustainable tourism will involve more than just one element of the industry (e.g. accommodation) working in a sustainable way, i.e. in a manner that incorporates the key principles outlined above. The aim would be to ensure that all aspects of the industry, and the broader tourism economy, are working in collaboration towards a common goal. Thus sustainable tourism is not restricted to any particular scale or form of tourism development, although small-scale development may be easier to manage. However, as the discussion of the tourism cycle above highlighted, there is a tendency of development at a new destination to move towards mass tourism, if not specifically managed as low volume development. Whether this upscaling occurs or not, the relationship between individualistic and mass tourism in terms of environmental impact is not as clear-cut as may be expected. In some cases "low-impact" forms like trekking may be more than or as environmentally destructive as mass tourism. This connected nature of low density and mass tourism highlights the need for strategies designed to improve environmental and social performance to target all forms of tourism.

Much emphasis has been placed on the form of tourism known as 'ecotourism' to avoid the environmental and social impacts of both mass tourism and smaller scale operations that may also have negative impacts. However, any discussion of the contribution of ecotourism towards sustainable development is hampered by the multitude of definitions that exist. In fact, the term has become something of a bandwagon, exploited as a marketing ploy by operators who may be either unaware of the significance of the term, or unscrupulous in their use of it.

As the African region is particularly well-suited for ecotourism development, it is essential to spell out what is meant by this term. One definition widely used in developed countries is the following:

"Ecotourism is purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the culture and natural history of the environment; taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem, producing economic opportunities that make the conservation of natural resources beneficial to local people."

From this definition it is clear that ecotourism is a form of tourism that is based on natural attractions and people's culture and history, and that actively tries to prevent any damage to the natural and cultural environment. Ecotourism, like all forms of tourism, has to be viable in an economic sense, or the business will be short-lived. Ecotourism also promotes growing awareness and knowledge about nature and culture in the host destination. The definition also states that this type of tourism aims to make it worthwhile for local people to conserve their natural resources. However, in the developing countries of the African region, community development and empowerment in its own right is just as important an aim as conserving natural resources. Thus it is that ecotourism, or at least the formulation of the term that has the special characteristics summarized in Box 2, is seen as a powerful developmental tool.

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Based on the above discussion, it is clear that ecotourism is a form of responsible or sustainable tourism that has the following special characteristics:

- travel to natural areas
- educational - learning about host cultures and local environment
- low impact - on the environment and on host communities
- community participation, development and empowerment
- maximum local economic benefits
- maximum satisfaction for visitors
- promotes conservation

Box 2. Special characteristics of ecotourism

The fluctuations of tourism exert their negative effect particularly at the local level, where the economy, especially in certain rural areas, may be less diversified than the national economy. Environmental and social effects are also generally more significant at the local level. This indicates a special role for adopting a rural livelihoods approach to planning and development of community tourism, for it to achieve its developmental goal.

Whatever the form of tourism, a move towards sustainability is essential for the long-term survival of the industry. An important issue is the extent to which there are external stimuli promoting this move. Drivers for sustainable trade in goods and services from developing countries differ in their origins and operate at different levels, often with uncertain long-term impacts on developing country producers. They may include international and national government requirements, donor criteria, consumer demand, citizen campaigns, corporate supply chain management and the actions of innovative producers. There is very little research on drivers for sustainable tourism in Africa. This is an area that is further explored in the South African case study below.

A central assertion of this article is that sustainable tourism, as formulated above, has an important role to play in Africa's cultural and economic re-awakening. Before moving on to look at international and regional policies that promote this goal, an outline is provided of the African tourism market.

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