

Sustainable tourist accommodation management

The roles and responsibilities of tourism sectors in sustainable development

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Tourism and sustainability

The integration of sustainability within the domain of tourism has recently made considerable progress. For instance, in the UK and the Netherlands, the most important federations of tour operators, the FTO and the ANVR, have introduced obligatory minimum standards to contribute to sustainability. In fact, most tourism companies seem now to accept that they have corporate responsibility for the integration of sustainability into their practices. The UN-WTO has recently identified 15 goals for member states that should be adopted as policy orientation to reach sustainability in tourism. Nevertheless, not all stakeholders in tourism are ready to accept their exact roles in this process. For example, the European representation of the hospitality sector (HOTREC) has had until now an active policy to *avoid* environmental restrictions upon their hotels and restaurants. Furthermore, if sustainability principles are applied in the tourism sector there is a broad tendency to focus on minimising environmental impact rather than maximising the contribution to sustainable development. Finally, this environmental focus seems to be exported to the tourism sector outside the EU as main aspect of sustainable tourism. This orientation has been heavily criticised by NGO's such as the International Ecotourism Society and the French GRET. So are we, considering the fact that there is a general willingness to take responsibility, on the right track or not?

Defining the focus

In this article it is noted that there is hesitation to take full responsibility for sustainability in tourism and there is confusion on what should be the focus of responsible tourism management. The current trend to address to corporate responsibility of *individual* tourism companies need to be complemented by a strong approach of *tourism sectors as a whole*. There is a need of a better insight on what is the exact relation between the effects of their actions, responsibilities and roles for sustainable development. First, the different tourism sectors should agree on a definition of what is exactly the relative pressure that their activities have on the *capacity of the region* (in this case tourism destination) *to develop in a sustainable way*. Secondly, the sectors need an agreement on a *fair assignment of roles and responsibilities* to enlarge the capacity of the region for sustainable development. The tourism sectors need to know what the priorities are in order to invest effectively their scarce resources.

How to take responsibility?

This article will assist one sector especially, the hospitality industry, to define their responsibilities for sustainable development. The model presented can be used to evaluate the relative importance of the contributions that this sector makes in a tourism destination to sustainable development. The main question of the article is to what extent the hospitality industry should take responsibility for sustainable development. Related questions that will be dealt with are:

- How can we define which capacities for sustainable development are mostly under pressure on tourism destination level and which role does the hospitality industry have in this?
- What instruments are available for the sector to reduce this pressure considerably?
- What is the feasibility of the different available instruments?
- How can responsibility for sustainable development be defined taking local differences into consideration?

Weights and priorities in sustainable tourism management

Priority areas and the roles for improvement of the hospitality sector relative to other (tourism) sectors are defined by reviewing existing carrying capacity studies. The relative pressure of a certain economic activity or "life cycle" of a product on the capacity of a region to develop in a sustainable way will be coined as *Sustainability Capacity Pressure* (also known as "Footprints"). This will be defined by a simple multi-criteria analysis. Except the environmental pressure, also pressure on biodiversity and habitats and on culture and economic sustainability are part of the model. The footprints are measured by *Sustainability indicators*. Here also existing studies are taken as basis as there is a growing consensus on the definition of sustainability indicators. *Sustainability Priority* expresses the demand for focus in a given time and

context to improve the performance of certain indicators. The priority is defined by the *Sustainability Urgency* that expresses the indicators with the greatest impact multiplied by the *Space for Sustainability Improvement*. These are extra roles that can be adopted by companies to contribute to sustainability. Suggested are: initiator (launching environmental management within the destination), innovator (developing environmental technologies) or educator (f.e. demonstration as "best example"). There are also roles that need to be adopted throughout the whole sector such as monitoring, communicating, benchmarking and certifying. The concepts used can be grasped in the following formula:

Weight of instrument	=	Sustainability priority x Instrument feasibility
Sustainability priority	=	Capacity impact + Sustainability improvement space
Capacity impact	=	Current impact x Sustainability urgency

Conclusion

There are two major conclusions that can be made from applying the model on the hospitality sector. The first is that social corporate responsibility as part of sustainable management, has a larger weight in developing countries than in more developed countries. Therefore the social and economic based criteria of Fair Trade-, ProPoor- and Community Based Tourism reflect the right orientation in those destinations rather than environmental approaches of sustainability. Second, the model gives no arguments for the hospitality sector in the economically more advanced countries to deny any longer responsibilities for contributing to sustainable development. To the contrary: measures with the highest weights do not require major investments (environmental communication to tourists) or have an attractive rate of return on investment (insulation, heat recovery, etc.).

Literature

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