

World Tourism Organization



UNWTO

Measuring Sustainable Tourism





THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which contributes to economic growth, social development and mutual understanding around the world. It has an impact on the economy, the natural and built environment, the local population in the places visited and the visitors themselves. Tourism therefore depends on the environment, the social and economic structures, including employment, and on governance. It is of vital interest for the sector to sustain the basis of its prosperity – the tourism destinations – in all its dimensions.

The concept of sustainable tourism has been advancing for over 20 years, becoming increasingly relevant in national and international agendas. The United Nations (UN) General Assembly has adopted several resolutions acknowledging its importance as a tool for development, poverty eradication and environmental protection, culminating in the UN declaration of 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development (IY2017). This is especially timely following the adoption of the United Nations 2030 Development Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Tourism has significant potential to drive socioeconomic development and environmental conservation and is mentioned in 3 of the 17 SDGs, relating to sustainable economic growth and decent employment, sustainable production and consumption, and the conservation and sustainable use

of oceans. Indeed, the SDGs embody a worldwide commitment towards sustainable development through more holistic, integrated approaches. Integrated policy requires integrated data.

Sustainable tourism is 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. Sustainable tourism should thus make optimal use of environmental resources, respect host communities and ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing benefits that are distributed fairly among all stakeholders.

Making Tourism More Sustainable - A Guide for Policy Makers, UNEP and UNWTO, 2005

THE POLICY RATIONALE FOR A STATISTICAL FRAMEWORK

A common and robust set of data is critical for governments and stakeholders to design, implement and monitor effective sustainable tourism policies. Indeed, evidence-based decision-making requires the development of a rigorous, statistical approach to the measurement of sustainable tourism.

Important achievements have been made in tourism measurement over the past decades, in particular the two UN statistical standards adopted in 2008: the *International Recommendations on Tourism Statistics* and the *Tourism Satellite Account: Recommended*





Methodological Framework. Together, these statistical frameworks enable countries to produce data that is credible and comparable – across countries, over time and in concert with other standard-based data. These frameworks help integrate and organize data for the purposes of deriving indicators such as tourism GDP.

Earlier work, including the publications “*Making tourism more sustainable: A guide for policy makers*” (UNWTO/UNEP, 2005) and “*Indicators of Sustainable Development for Tourism Destinations: A Guidebook*” (UNWTO, 2004) have fostered participatory discussions, particularly at the local destinations level, and raised awareness about tourism as an essential part of the economic and social systems and the environment.

The need for more and improved data is patent across all stakeholder groups, cutting across global, national and subnational (including local) levels. In addition to the interest from national governments and its relevance in international agendas, sustainable tourism is especially important at subnational levels. For example, UNWTO’s International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories (INSTO) gathers Observatories that are dedicated to better understanding, monitoring and advising on policies for the sustainable development of tourism in their destinations.

In order to support measurement initiatives worldwide and building on this past work, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), with the support of the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), launched the Measuring Sustainable Tourism (MST) project to develop an international statistical framework for measuring tourism’s role in sustainable development. The resulting **Statistical Framework for Measuring Sustainable Tourism** (MST Framework) aims to extend the current statistical frameworks beyond their economic focus, to incorporate environmental, and social dimensions and at relevant spatial levels: global, national and sub-national.

Sustainable Tourism Information diagram

The Statistical Framework for Measuring Sustainable Tourism is a critical next step in supporting universal, cross-sectorial, sustainable tourism policies and practices that work from an integrated, coherent and robust information base. The MST Framework is also a response to the demand for high quality indicators that monitor progress towards the SDGs.





THE ADVANTAGES OF A MST FRAMEWORK

The MST Framework will expand the current range of tourism statistics to cover the economic, environmental and social dimensions of sustainable tourism at all relevant spatial scales. The benefits of this framework for decision makers and other stakeholders include:

- a) The provision of a common language for discussing sustainable tourism within the tourism sector and with other key policy areas such as planning, industry, infrastructure, environment, social affairs, finance and central banks;
- b) The capacity to compare the performance of the tourism sector and the impacts of different policies on a consistent basis with other sectors and in different destinations and countries;
- c) The provision of a basis for improving co-ordination in data collection and organization (including identification of data sources and data gaps), as well as for improving institutional arrangements for the governance and management of statistics on sustainable tourism;
- d) The provision of a single, coherent and complete picture of the state of sustainable tourism and its trends, in all its dimensions and across all spatial scales.

In the field of environmental sustainability, the MST Framework will bridge the UN standards of the Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) with

the System of Environmental Economic Accounting (SEEA) therefore addressing some vital policy questions, including:

- environmental impacts of tourism: emissions, solid waste, wastewater, disruption of ecosystems and biodiversity;
- dependency of tourism on the environment: water and energy requirements, healthy and good quality ecosystems (beaches, reefs, forests);
- environmental protection expenditure and environmental taxes;
- some socio-economic impacts and dependencies of tourism such as employment.

ENGAGEMENT

UNWTO is working with the support of the United Nations Statistics Division and leading country experts, under auspices of the UNWTO Committee on Statistics and Tourism Satellite Account and the United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting (UNCEEA).

To lead the development of the framework and facilitate wide stakeholder engaged, UNWTO and UNSD have set up the multidisciplinary Working Group of Experts on Measuring Sustainable Tourism.

Country pilot studies are being developed to contribute to the design and test the statistical framework under development for relevance and feasibility.

For more information on the MST project, please visit <http://statistics.unwto.org/mst> or contact UNWTO's Statistics, Trends and Policy Programme at: mst@unwto.org