Sustainable Development of Tourism

A. Introduction

Society’s sensitivity to environmental issues, which emerged some 30 years ago in an organized manner, has consolidated itself globally. The initial movement, focusing on the natural environment, has been extended to the social, economic and cultural spheres and is now a basic requirement in any project related to the development of a territory.

Thus, considering the opportunities that tourism offers to society as a driver of job creation, infrastructure development and the wealth distribution, it is necessary to promote tourism management policies that include the principle of sustainability as the central axis of their approaches.

B. Origins of sustainable development

The concept of sustainable development emerged in the 1980s. Specifically, the document “World Conservation Strategy”, prepared in 1980 by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) together with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), was the first document that integrated conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.

This document also laid down the philosophical and scientific foundations of the “Brundtland Report” that the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) presented to the UN General Assembly in 1987 and where the term “Sustainable Development” is applied to three dimensions: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental balance.
The report, entitled “Our Common Future”, defined the concept of “sustainable development” as: “Development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

Pursuant to this report, the General Assembly convened the “United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)”, also known as “Rio Conference” or the “Earth Summit”, whose objective was to “elaborate strategies and measures to halt or reverse the effects of environmental degradation.”

Among the different measures proposed, of special note was the adoption of an action plan for the 21st century: “Agenda 21”. This programme is a detailed plan of actions to be undertaken at the global, national and local levels, by UN entities, the governments of its member states and by major groups in every area in which there is a human impact on the environment. To implement this programme, the Commission on Sustainable Development was created within the UN. Today Agenda 21 is the reference document for the implementation of sustainable development in territories.

A decade later, during the holding of the “World Summit on Sustainable Development” (2002) in the South African city of Johannesburg, it was clear that the concept was not considered complete without mentioning three dimensions as key elements of sustainability: the economic, environmental and sociocultural dimensions.

Therefore, when talking about Sustainable Development, the following must be ensured:

1. **Environmental sustainability**: development must be compatible with the maintenance of resources, ecological processes and biodiversity.

2. **Sociocultural sustainability**: sustainable development must be compatible with the values of the people and strengthen the identity of the community.

3. **Economic sustainability**: development must be economically efficient, it has to benefit all people and the resources must be managed so as to preserve them for future generations.

### C. Sustainable development of tourism

Having defined sustainable development, a further step needed to be taken to adapt this concept to tourism in the world. Thus, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), taking the definition of sustainable development from the Brundtland Report as its basis, defined sustainable tourism at the “Euro-Mediterranean Conference on Tourism and Sustainable Development” (1993) as: “Sustainable tourism development meets the needs of present tourists and host regions
while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social, and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems.”

The UNWTO specifies that sustainable tourism cannot be regarded as a specific category of tourism, but rather, the principles of sustainable development should be applied to any tourism development.

Although there exist numerous approaches to the concept of sustainable tourism, some common principles can be pointed out:

- Planning based on economic, sociocultural and environmental objectives.
- The use of the concept of “carrying capacity” to quantify the limitations of tourism resources.
- Participatory decision-making.

Furthermore, according to the UNWTO, tourism in the context of sustainable development should:

- Improve the quality of life of the local population.
- Increase the quality of the visitor's stay.
- Maintain the quality of the environment, on which both the local population and visitors depend.
- Increase the economic profitability of tourism.

**Economic factor**

This refers to the efficiency of the economic development model, which should benefit all people and “manage resources so as to preserve them for future generations”.

Economic sustainability ensures equitable economic growth that benefits everyone and provides residents the opportunity to grow and develop. Locals should be given the opportunity to decide whether they wish to create and maintain tourism activity linked to the territory. Under this premise, it is necessary to create the enabling conditions for sustainable economic growth and enable the creation of stable and productive work, minimizing the potential negative impacts of the activity itself.
Sociocultural factor

Sociocultural sustainability refers to the fostering of relations among individuals and the collective use of shared goods. Tourist activity facilitates contact between people of very different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. This interaction evolves in different stages and, although early in the development of tourism it is usually received with enthusiasm by the residents, as it develops, a withdrawal of this initial support is observed.

This change of attitude is displayed when the tolerance threshold is crossed and the impact of tourism begins to adversely affect the local population. This phenomenon likewise affects tourists, since the lack of satisfaction of the former is usually perceived by the latter, which could result in a loss of quality in their experience at the destination.

Meanwhile, cultural sustainability refers to the respect and enhancement of the culture or cultures that exist in the destination. Thus, special importance should be given to the destination’s history, customs, celebrations, beliefs, etc., which make up a specific and unique identity that must be taken into account in the tourism development of the territory.

Environmental factor

The environmental factor is clear. Any development must be compatible with the maintenance of essential ecological processes, biodiversity and natural resources. A preserved environment has real value for tourism and as such, when featured, it contributes to increasing the income of residents.

Tourism can be a determining factor in increasing the value of the natural environment of an area and, more importantly, in its preservation, as a source of wealth for residents. However, tourism also generates negative impacts that will have to be managed to minimize its effects.

D. The institutional framework

The principles of sustainable development of tourism have been discussed in various international forums.

Some of the most important initiatives have been:

- **The World Charter for Sustainable Tourism of Lanzarote (1995):**

In 1995 the “World Conference on Sustainable Tourism” backed by the UNWTO, UNEP, UNESCO and the European Union was held.
The objective was to include tourism in the strategy of sustainable development, making it compatible with the maintenance of biodiversity, the cultural identity of communities and the management of resources.

The result was the generation and dissemination of the “Charter for Sustainable Tourism”, which states eighteen principles on which sustainable tourism development should be based. Furthermore, sustainable development is defined as: “A guided process which envisages global management of resources so as to ensure their viability, thus enabling our natural and cultural capital, including protected areas, to be preserved”.

- **Agenda 21 for the Travel & Tourism Industry (1996):**

The “Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry” published in 1996 by the UNWTO, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) and the Earth Council, set out actions to be taken by governments and the private sector to ensure the objectives of the “Earth Summit”. This Agenda specifies a number of aspects in order to integrate tourism and the environment in a way that makes it possible to ensure local sustainability, notably the following:

- Sustainable development must form part of the tourism business.
- Sustainable practices shall be the ones that will control the market in the long term.
- The importance of partnership between government, industry and civil society, establishing a set of implementation tools for the public sector and the private sector.

- **European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas (1997):**

The “European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas” reflects the worldwide and European priorities expressed in the recommendations of Agenda 21 adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, and by the European Union in its 5th Environment Action Programme.

The Charter is an initiative of the EUROPARC Federation whose overall objective is to promote the development of tourism in a sustainable manner in the protected natural areas of Europe, which entails the conservation of resources for future generations, viable economic development and equitable social development.

Geared towards managers of protected natural areas and businesses, it represents a voluntary commitment to implement the principles of sustainable tourism. Its fundamental aims are as follows:
- To increase awareness of, and support for, Europe's protected areas as a fundamental part of our heritage, which should be preserved for and enjoyed by current and future generations.

- To improve the sustainable development and management of tourism in protected areas, taking into account the needs of the environment, local residents, local businesses and visitors.

- **Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (1999):**

The Code adopted by resolution A/RES/406(XIII) at the thirteenth General Assembly of the UNWTO (Santiago de Chile, 1999), sets out the main principles of sustainable and responsible development of tourism.

**The Code sets out the principles that should guide the development of tourism with the aim of minimizing the negative effects on the environment and cultural heritage.**

It also establishes a series of principles that promote an equitable, responsible and sustainable world tourism order, to the mutual benefit of all sectors of society and in a context of an open international economy.

These principles, which serve as a framework for the various stakeholders of the tourism sector, establish the ethical standards that should be adopted for the development of tourism on the part of destinations, governments, tour operators, travel agents, workers of the sector and travellers. The principles of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism are summarized by the following articles:

1. Tourism's contribution to mutual understanding and respect between peoples and societies.
2. Tourism as a vehicle for personal and collective development.
3. Tourism, a factor of sustainable development.
4. Tourism, a user of the cultural heritage of mankind and contributor to its enhancement.
5. Tourism, a beneficial activity for host countries and communities.
6. Obligations of stakeholders in tourism development.
7. Right to tourism.
8. Liberty of tourist movements.
9. Rights of the workers and entrepreneurs in the tourism industry.
The Design of the Agenda 21 for Tourism in the EU

The social, economic and environmental sustainability of European tourism is considered crucial for the sustainable development of Europe and for increasing the competitiveness and growth of the tourism sector. Thus, the European Commission created the so-called “Group for Sustainable Tourism” (GST) composed of different stakeholders in the tourism sector, whose ultimate goal was to present to the Commission a document that formed the basis for the Commission’s adoption in 2007 of the Agenda 21 for European Tourism.

The content of the Agenda 21 project is premised on the need to integrate criteria for sustainability in the European tourism in its three aspects: environmental, sociocultural and economic, proposing a series of measures geared towards:

- Environmental protection as a key element in tourism development.
- Preserving the sociocultural authenticity of tourism host communities Tourism retaining their traditional values and contributing to cultural exchange.
- Development of sustainable long-term economic operations to ensure that socioeconomic benefits are distributed among the different actors of the sector.

Under this premise, very diverse actions of a voluntary nature are proposed, including the design of criteria for the granting of an ecolabel applied to tourist accommodations, the “EU Ecolabel” or the approval of the “European Eco-Management and Audit Scheme” (EMAS).

E. Sustainability in a “smart” context

Far from being forgotten, the concept of sustainability has taken on greater importance over time. It has therefore been included as a premise in large territorial development projects of this century such as smart cities and smart destinations.

The smart city concept combines environmental protection, energy efficiency and economic profitability in an urban model. An ecosystem where infrastructure, services and technology come together to deliver a better quality of life for citizens.

On the other hand, destinations are no longer looked at purely in terms of quality, excellence or sustainability. These concepts are now amalgamated with technology and data processing (“big data”) and there is an evolution towards a new model: smart tourism destinations.
A smart destination combines the concepts of sustainability (taking as reference the definition of sustainability of the UNWTO, which is more focused on tourism), knowledge and technological innovation relative to tourism destinations.

There are already some cases of cities or destinations that are beginning to distinguish themselves due to their commitment to sustainability following the “smart” paradigm.

In 2009, Málaga began a pioneering project in the world to develop new systems and technologies to reduce energy consumption in the city. The project includes key concepts in smart energy to contribute to the 20-20-20 targets by 2020.

- Reducing emissions of greenhouse gases by 20% (30% if an international agreement is reached).
- Save 20% in energy consumption through improved energy efficiency, and furthermore, in every country 10% of transport needs should be covered using biofuels.
- Promoting renewable energies up to 20%

The initiative is a commitment to the rational use of energy, incorporating the use of smart electric meters and advanced telecommunication systems to optimize the distribution network and, in turn, enhance the quality of service. Furthermore, it will boost renewable energy by using them for street lighting and a fleet of electric vehicles that will encourage sustainable mobility.

Another initiative is that by Vancouver, a city that also announced in 2009 its 10-year sustainability plan: “Vancouver 2020”. Its goal is to make the city the world leader in sustainability by 2020. To achieve this goal, a series of actions were proposed, notably the following:

- Create 20,000 new sustainable jobs and become a major business centre.
- Reduce carbon emissions by 33% to establish itself as a leading city in the fight against climate change.
- Increase the use of renewable energy sources.
- Improve the efficiency of existing buildings by 20%.
- Encourage walking, cycling and public transport.
- Planting up to 150,000 trees to increase green spaces.
- Reduce per capita ecological footprint by 33%.
- Reduce the carbon footprint of food production by 33%. 
F. **Sustainable development indicator systems**

The development of environmental indicators has its origins in the decade of the 1990s. The G7 leaders requested the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to identify indicators to facilitate decision-making on economic and environmental policies.

Thus, a pioneering program of environmental indicators was initiated, which brought forward a vision that links environmental problems and opportunities to economic processes. The objectives of the OECD indicators are:

- To assess environmental progress.
- Mainstreaming environmental concerns into sectoral policies.
- Mainstreaming environmental concerns into economic policy.

In 1994 the OECD published the book “Environmental Indicators”, which was expanded and reissued four years later with a more general theme: “Towards Sustainable Development: Environmental Indicators” (OECD, 1998). The model proposed by this institution was based on the classification of the indicators according to the formula of Pressure-State-Response (PSR), structuring the information in a simple way to understand the causal links between the economy and the environment. The underlying premise of the model is that human activities exert pressures on the environment and on environmental resources, altering their initial state to a greater or lesser extent. Society identifies these changes and may decide to adopt measures (responses) to try to correct any negative trends observed. These actions are supposed or expected to result in an improvement of the state of the environment.

**Programme of Work on Sustainable Development Indicators (SDI) of the Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD)**

Chapter 40 of Agenda 21, the document adopted in Rio de Janeiro (1992) at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, reference is made to the need to implement Sustainable Development Indicators (SDI) to monitor progress in that area.

During the years following the Rio Conference, the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) of the United Nations promoted various initiatives for sustainable development. As a result of these, a work programme on sustainable development indicators (SDI) was approved in April 1995.

The work programme generated a set of 134 indicators and developed methodology sheets for all of them, which were published in the book “Indicators of Sustainable Development Framework and Methodologies” (United Nations, 1996), better known as the “Blue Book”. 
The European Tourism Indicators System

The European Commission has been committed for some time now to the promotion of sustainable development of tourism in Europe and has introduced a variety of tools whose purpose is to facilitate sound environmental management of businesses. In 2013, the Tourism Policy Unit of the European Commission launched the European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS), in order to help local authorities to measure and monitor the sustainable tourism actions of its destinations.

The objective of this initiative was to provide a set of tools for tourism destination management organizations enabling them to assess and manage their sustainability. Thus, the system consists of an instruction manual, a set of key indicators, an additional set of optional indicators and a database, with all components designed as a tool that can be used anywhere with no need for specific training.

The ETIS system is built around 67 indicators, 27 core and 40 optional, divided into 4 categories:

- Destination management.
- Social and cultural impact.
- Economic value.
- Environmental impact.

The “core indicators” are tourism indicators that are easily measurable and are often collected routinely in most tourist destinations, while the “optional indicators” are more difficult to obtain but allow a deeper analysis of the destination.

The system has been developed considering previous experiences with other indicator systems and has been refined based on information gathered on the ground in various locations in Europe.

In order to analyse the implementation of the ETIS system, the system has been tested by ten pilot locations in which positive results were obtained, namely: St. Ives (UK), Burduy (Belgium), Alqueva (Portugal), Florence (Italy), Maastricht (Netherlands), Soomaa National Park (Estonia), Calvià (Spain), St.Tropez (France) Oetzal (Austria) and Brasov (Romania).

The motivation for implementing this system is based on the need to meet the challenges of tourism by making smart decisions based on useful information from specific indicators that help destinations increase their competitiveness and achieve greater government support. By measuring its results, the tourism industry can ensure its leading role in the field of the green economy.
Indicators of Sustainable Development for Tourism Destinations (World Tourism Organization, 2005)

Since the early 1990s, the UNWTO has been at the forefront of the development of sustainability indicators and their application to tourism and destinations. Thus, studies have been conducted and workshops have been held in various regions of the world, with the aim of creating an effective system to support better decision making in tourism. In this way, the UNWTO develops the indicators guide, designed to help destination managers to obtain the best information to facilitate the adoption of appropriate decisions regarding sustainable tourism development. In this respect, indicators are proposed as fundamental components of sustainable tourism and as instruments that can respond to the most important problems of the managers of tourist destinations.

The guide developed by the UNWTO is structured as follows:

- An introduction to indicators and their use.
- The description of a participatory process for the development of indicators in the context of tourism planning processes.
- A list of the most common problems that destinations have to face, with suggested indicators.
- Basic issues and basic indicators that can be considered essential for most destinations.
- Applications in destinations, listing indicators and problems that are common to certain destinations.
- Application of indicators in the planning and formulation of tourism policies.
- Case studies illustrate 25 examples of comprehensive applications of indicators at different levels (national, regional, company, destination, etc.) as well as across different types of tourism activities (beach tourism, community tourism, ecotourism).
- Recommendations aimed at public authorities, private companies, research institutions, international organizations, etc.

G. Conclusions

The tourism sector has shown a remarkable ability to adapt to market changes, despite persistent economic problems, driving growth and job creation worldwide.

In fact, tourism has become a cornerstone of development in many countries due to its ability to also stimulate other sectors and generating wealth.
According to UNWTO estimates, in 2013 worldwide international tourist arrivals grew by 5% over the previous year, reaching 1.087 billion. Moreover, it forecasts growth of 4% to 4.5% in 2014, exceeding the long-term trend line of 3.8% per year.

This positive trend in the number of international tourist arrivals, is also reflected in international tourism receipts. In 2013, total export revenues generated by international tourism reached 1.4 trillion dollars, the income from tourist destinations due to visitors from other countries grew by 5% to 1.159 trillion dollars, while international passenger transport accounted for another 218 billion.

In light of these figures, it is clear that tourism is vital for the overall economy and for the economies of many countries. The global tourism industry will be influenced by the new demand, but mainly by the challenge of coping with this demand in a sustainable way.

Tourism development should be based on sustainability criteria, i.e., it must preserve and protect the environment, be economically viable and should respect local communities from a social and cultural perspective. In this way, tourism will preserve natural and cultural resources while minimizing the negative impacts (ecological, sociocultural and economic) and maximizing positive impacts.

Sustainable tourism features a new ethics of tourism, as it facilitates the development of quality stays in safe and attractive environments, where cultural exchanges are possible.

Thus, tourism can be used as an activity capable of promoting social and economic cohesion and as a creative force for mutual cultural enrichment. Good management of tourism requires ensuring the sustainability of the resources on which it depends.

H. Bibliography

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