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Responsible Tourism Destinations: A Win-Win Situation for Sustainable Tourism Development?

Abstract

Since the middle of the 1950s, tourism has become a constantly increasing and one of the most important parts of the economy; it has produced an ever growing impact on physical and cultural environments. In order to react to the evolved—both negative and positive—impacts of tourism, since the 1990s, a new approach of sustainable tourism development has been initiated, more or less globally. One of the most recently evolved areas of this process focused on responsible tourism destinations. Along with the newly formed international organisations of responsible tourism development in destinations the tourists became more and more aware of sustainable tourism issues, and as a result of this process tourists became more and more responsible as well seeking for those destinations which lay a special emphasis on sustainability.

The article intends to present the most important steps and forms of the creation of responsible tourism destinations and its importance in modern tourism development. Such issues will be dealt with as raising awareness of responsible tourism and sustainable tourism destination development, responsible destination branding or the behaviour of the new tourists with a strong focus on the impacts on the physical environment.

Key words

Responsible tourism; Destination; Responsible tourist; Impacts, Tourism development

1. Introduction

Having a look at the topic of the article from a historical perspective, the *Global Code of Ethics for Tourism* published by the 13th *WTO General Assembly* in *Chile* in 1999, provided one of the first and also most important answers and a fundamental frame of reference for the new challenges of tourism. It has been dealing and managing 10 complex issues (Articles) from the contribution to mutual understanding and respect between people and societies (Article 1) to the implementation of the principles of the *Global Code of Ethics for Tourism* (Article 10). With these guidelines, the *Global Code of Ethics* laid the foundations for sustainable and responsible tourism as well (UNWTO, 1999).

After the formation and introduction (to public awareness, as well) of this holistic approach, the next important step in the formation of responsible tourism destinations can be connected to the *Cape Town Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destinations* which was organised by the *Responsible Tourism Partnership* and *Western Cape Tourism* as a side event preceding the *World Summit on Sustainable Development* in *Johannesburg* in 2002 (CAPE TOWN DECLARATION, 2002).

This conference, and the 280 responsible delegates from 20 countries, published its results in the *Cape Town Declaration* laying down the foundations for responsible tourism and responsible tourism destinations by proposing guiding principles for economic, social and environmental responsibility.

Having realised that “*responsible tourism seeks to maximise positive impacts and to minimise negative ones*” (CAPE TOWN DECLARATION, 2002) this declaration also highlighted that the proposed principles cannot be totally adapted to a certain destination, the local differences and peculiarities have to be reflected in the process of becoming a responsible destination.

2. Aims of the study

The aim of the present article is, on the one hand, to introduce and summarise the basic results in the field of responsible tourism destination building and, on the other hand, to serve the most modern examples and

emerging issues in a critical perspective of this important aspect of tourism development.

In this respect, the study presents the most important steps and forms of the creation of responsible tourism destinations and its importance in modern tourism development. Such issues will be dealt with as raising awareness of responsible tourism and sustainable tourism destination development, responsible destination branding or the behaviour of the new tourists with a strong focus on the impacts on the physical environment.

3. Research methods

This study is largely based on the thorough examination and evaluation of the related scientific literature so the most important research method was desk research. Parallel with the literature covering responsible tourism outstanding and important policies were elaborated and analysed after which representative case studies and best practices were collected in order to demonstrate their role in responsible tourism development issues.

4. The tourism destination

Before we deal with and thoroughly investigate the issues of responsibility in relation to destinations, we have to make clear what a tourism destination is. According to the UNITED NATIONS WORLD TOURISM ORGANISATION (UNWTO, 2002), *“A local tourism destination is a physical space in which a visitor spends at least one overnight. It includes tourism products such as support services and attractions, and tourism resources within one day’s return travel time. It has physical and administrative boundaries defining its management, images and perceptions defining its market competitiveness. Local tourism destinations incorporate various stakeholders often including a host community, and can nest and network to form larger destinations”*.

In other words, destination is a physical geographical unit, area or region which is chosen by the tourists to be visited, having unique characteristics both due to its physical and cultural-historical background.

The destination provides space to the appearance of the concrete tourist attractions, of course in different scales, quality and quantity. It is also important to highlight that the destination as a complex phenomenon connects the attractions with the tourism infrastructure and services, providing a package for the visitor (AUBERT, A. *et al.* 2012; AUBERT, A. 2014).

For further analysis, we should also mention that the tourism destination is the fundamental unit for the academic, practical-business research and analysis of tourism studies, and is the basic unit for tourism policy strategies and actions. The spatial investigation on the tourism destination indicates the possibility for cluster studies as well where the tourism attractions and activities, so the complex supply, can spatially be connected in a network or a form of co-operation. According to the UNWTO (2002), a destination is a spatial unit where the tourist spends at least 24 hours at a commercial or private accommodation.



Figure 1 - The major components of the tourism destination

Based on UNWTO (2002), Edited by CSAPÓ, J. (2015)

The destination is not only having physical characteristics, but there is an intangible side of the concept as well. In this respect, the most important terms are image and façade which fundamentally influence, of course, the supply and demand sides of the tourism industry. The local image, the peculiar characteristics of a certain region will make the area different from the others (RAFFAY, Z. *et al.* 2013).

Based on the above mentioned, it is clear that the destinations are in the focus of not just the (spatially oriented) tourism researches, but with their complexity on both the demand and supply side, they become a central element in the system of tourism. The most important elements of the system of the tourism destination are the visitors, the local community, the regional authorities, the destination management organisations and the tourism industries services. These create an interdependent system having impacts vice-versa on the tourism destination and on each other as well (*Figure 1*).

5. Where do we start from?

In order to research what a responsible tourism destination is, one has to be aware of the concept of responsible tourism. The already mentioned *Cape Town declaration* states that responsible tourism:

- 'minimises negative economic, environmental, and social impacts;
- generates greater economic benefits for local people and enhances the well-being of host communities, improves working conditions and access to the industry;
- involves local people in decisions that affect their lives and life chances;
- makes positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, to the maintenance of the world's diversity;
- provides more enjoyable experiences for tourists through more meaningful connections with local people, and a greater understanding of local cultural, social and environmental issues;
- provides access for physically challenged people; and

- is culturally sensitive, engenders respect between tourists and hosts, and builds local pride and confidence' (CAPE TOWN DECLARATION, 2002).

Although having similar approaches and issues, experts state that this concept should not be confused with the term sustainable tourism, since responsible tourism is a term more often used by the tourism industry which is due to the fact the sustainability is overused and seems to be fashionable often without proper meaning.

However, if we want to understand what responsible tourism destination (RTD) means, we also have to take into consideration the 2004 declaration of the *World Tourism Organisation* what sustainable tourism and sustainable tourism development are about:

'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 heritage 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.” (UNWTO, 2004; UNEP-UNWTO 2005)

6. The basic requirements for responsible tourism destinations (RTDs)

Based on the above mentioned basic concepts and fundamental approaches on the new aspects of tourism and tourism development—both on the demand and supply sides—the author of this article focused on two major or decisive sources which initiated the basic requirements, indicators, etc. to the creation of RTDs. The earlier one, the 2004 *UNWTO Guidebook on Indicators of Sustainable Development for Tourism Destinations* (UNWTO, 2004) has established the most important aspects of sustainable tourism development both from theoretical and practical points of view. The other, the 2013 *European Tourism Indicator System*, based on the recommendations of the previous one as well, concentrated more on the management issues so this more practical approach is demonstrated here.

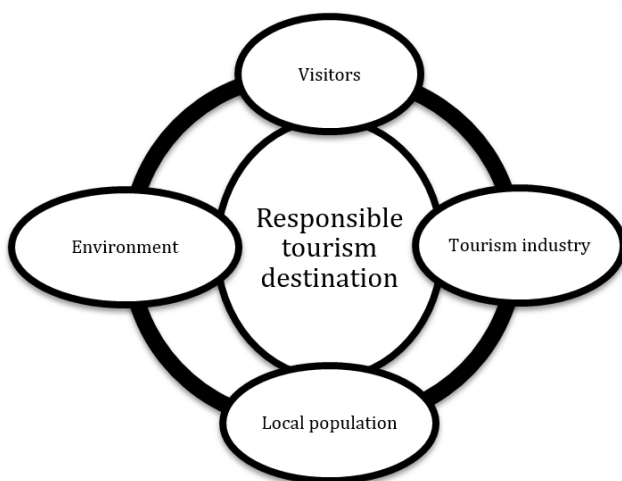


Figure 2 – The most important actors of a responsible tourism destination
Edited by CSAPÓ, J. (2015)

However, before the representation of the EU approach, the author would like to stress that a responsible tourism destination relies and, at the same time, affects 4 major players, namely the visitors (demand), the tourism industry, the local population and, of course, the physical environment (*Figure 2*).

7. The European Tourism Indicator System

The European Commission has published this comprehensive material as a deliverable of the Study on the *Feasibility of a European Tourism Indicator System for Sustainable Management at Destination Level* in 2013. The most important result of the study from the point of view of this article is the creation of a comprehensive and complex system of indicators which allows a destination to become sustainable and responsible, at the same time when adapting them to its operation (*Table 1*).

Table 1 – The main criteria of destination indicators of the European Tourism Indicator System

Source: EUROPEAN COMMISSION (2013)

Section	Criteria
<i>A. Destination Management</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A.1 Sustainable Tourism Public Policy • A.2 Sustainable Tourism Management in Tourism Enterprises • A.3 Customer Satisfaction • A.4 Information and Communication
<i>B. Economic Value</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • B.1 Tourism Flow (volume & value) at Destination • B.2 Tourism Enterprise(s) Performance • B.3 Quantity and Quality of Employee • B.4 Safety and Healthy B.5 Tourism Supply Chain
<i>C. Social and Cultural Impact</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C.1 Community/Social Impact • C.2 Gender Equality • C.3 Equality/Accessibility • C.4 Protecting and Enhancing Cultural Heritage, Local Identity and Assets

<i>D. Environmental Impact</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D.1 Reducing Transport Impact • D.2 Climate Change • D.3 Solid Waste Management • D.4 Sewage Treatment • D.5 Water Management • D.6 Energy Usage • D.7 Landscape and Biodiversity Management • D.8 Light and Noise Management • D.9 Bathing Water Quality
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8. Pushing factors for the creation of a responsible destination

So, that was a theory but what is the reality? The above demonstrated approach is modern, up-to-date and, in a way, fashionable, as well. However, in order to realise these requirements, we need to have exact pushing factors that would promote both the supply and the demand side to act responsibly or take part in responsible tourism destination development.

One of the most decisive aspects of the realisation or the rejection of this approach is from the financial perspective. In order to introduce and adapt such new techniques, both the supply and the demand side has to understand that creating sustainable and/or responsible tourism might (not necessarily) increase prices (GOODWIN, H. 2012; GOODWIN, H. *et al.* 2014). Nevertheless, the pushing factors are far more valuable in the holistic approach.

9. Behavioural changes of the new tourists with a special attention to responsibility

So on the demand side, the appearance of the 'new tourist' was very much needed in order to establish the social involvement for the creation of responsible tourism (GOODWIN, H. 2014). Who is this new tourist then? According to earlier researches (YEOMAN, I. 2008; LEE, T. *et al.* 2013;) the most important characteristics of the 'new tourist' and at the same time of the 'new tourist demand' can be derived from the phenomenon of changing from mass tourism to different forms of alternative

tourism (HAJNAL, K. 2007; WINKLER, K. 2007; CSAPÓ, J. 2012; VARGA, D.-DÁVID, L. 2013).

Instead of one great vacation, tourists and visitors travelled for shorter times in the high season (summer holidays), but started to be involved more in active or cultural tourism in different parts of the year (ski holidays, hiking, or weekend breaks, etc.) (AUBERT, A. 2010). This was also supported by the changes in the transport industry for instance with the liberalisation of air travel in Europe and the appearance of the low cost airlines (CSAPÓ, J. – MATESZ, K. 2007).

Based on AKPINAR, S. (2003) and YEOMAN, I. (2008), PIRNAR, I. *et al.* (2010) summarised the characteristics of the new tourist in the following:

1. More learning, adventure and experience oriented tourists, seeking out authenticity looking for real experiences.
2. More flexible and independent in nature (new tourists are generating demand for better quality, more value for money and greater flexibility in the travel experience).
3. Very much interested in sustainability, even willing to pay more.
4. Very much interested in the living and participating the experience of local cultures.
5. Have changing preferences of destinations and length of stay for travels.
6. Demanding various tourism types, like cultural heritage tourism, agritourism, medical tourism, health tourism, soft tourism, sustainable tourism, sports tourism, hiking, rafting, volunteer tourism, bird-watching, photography, kayaking, wild life watching, visiting national parks, mountain climbing, cruise tourism, yachting, golf tourism, fishing, educational, city tourism, etc.
7. Have changing demographic profiles like aging population, changing family size, etc. in the future tourism establishments have to serve for everyone, from grandparents to grandchildren.
8. More stressed out and therefore are looking for relief and convenience.
9. More technology friendly, often using internet for booking and

purchasing tourism products.

10. Have growing anxiety about health and safety (PIRNAR, I. *et al.* 2010.)

10. Creating a sustainable tourism destination

According to the recommendations, the *European Tourism Indicator System Toolkit* offers a complete step by step guide to the stakeholders who would like to be involved in changing their destination to responsible requirements. Adapting to this system a destination should follow a 7 step guide (*Figure 3*).



Figure 3 – A Step-by-Step Guide to Using the Indicator System

Source: Based on EUROPEAN COMMISSION (2013); Edited by CSAPÓ, J. (2015)

Besides the mentioned major steps, the *Toolkit* determines core and optional indicators as well, which further on provides guidelines and

feedback information on the fields of destination management, economic value, social and cultural impact and environmental impact as well.

11. Best practices

Of course, it is much easier to find best practices of responsible tourism on the level of enterprises, tourism product development practices, or taking into consideration the tourism practice of a settlement, but not a complete destination. Nevertheless, we can find some examples which can serve as a basis, best practice, or as a standard for future RTDs.

Since the highlighted topic is relatively a new initiative, the author of this article is unable (yet) to choose from a very wide set of examples, so as a starting point here, the *Best Destination for Responsible Tourism* carried out by *Responsible Travel* (WRTA, 2015b) will be introduced. This organisation is supported by experts throughout the world chaired by *Prof. Harold Goodwin* (professor of responsible tourism at *Manchester Metropolitan University* and founder of the *International Centre for Responsible Tourism*) accompanied with competent authorities from *responsibletourism.com*, *ABTA*, *World Travel Market*, *bgb*, *UNEP*, and *CESHI*. This category is “*awarded to a holiday destination setting an inspirational and influential example for responsible tourism. ... The best destination category is for those destinations who put their unique community and environment at the heart of exciting and memorable tourism experiences; places which use tourism to make better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit, whether it be a village, a town, a city, a region, or a country, the best destination category is looking for places that inspire and promote responsible holiday experiences that celebrate and protect the best of their destination*” (WRTA, 2015a). The winners of this award, being pioneers in RTD development, are represented in *Table 2*.

12. Summary, final thoughts

So what are the most important advantages of the RTDs? Is really the creation of the new kind of destinations a win-win situation?

Table 2 – The winners of the Best Destination for Responsible Tourism award

Source: WRTA (2015a)

Year	Destination
2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> V&A Waterfront, Cape Town, Republic of South Africa
2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bonito, Brazil
2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> St. Kilda, Scotland
2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Røros, Norway
2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Cape Town, South Africa
2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Zealand
2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Forest (an organisation awarded for their achievement in responsible tourism)
2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aspen, Colorado

Certainly, responsibility is based on the principles of sustainability providing a new step towards a green economy and society. From the point of view of the tourist and the local population as well a greener environment provides more liveable circumstances for holidays or everyday living.

On the other hand the appearance and spread of the ‘new tourist’ indicates that during their travel decision they will be greatly concerned and so influenced by the presence or absence of responsible destinations. It means that the solvent demand will also further support the local economy and sustainable development of the destination.

So every aspect of tourism or tourism development proves the existence for the RTDs to be one of the most important challenges of modern tourism development.

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Appendix 1 – The main criteria of destination indicators of the European Tourism Indicator System

Source: European Commission (2013)

Section	Criteria	Indicator Reference #	Indicator (Core indicator = grey; optional indicator = white)
A. Destination Management	A.1. Sustainable Tourism Public Policy	A.1.1	Percentage of the destination with a sustainable tourism strategy/action plan, with agreed monitoring, development control and evaluation arrangement
		A.1.1.1	Percentage of residents satisfied with their involvement and their influence in the planning and development of tourism
		A.1.1.2	Percentage of the destination represented by a destination management organisation
	A.2. Sustainable Tourism Management in Tourism Enterprises	A.2.1	Percentage of tourism enterprises/establishments in the destination using a voluntary verified certification/labelling for environmental/quality/sustainability and/or CSR measures
		A.2.1.1	Number of tourism enterprises/establishments with sustainability reports in accordance with the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI)
	A.3. Customer Satisfaction	A.3.1	Percentage of visitors that are satisfied with their overall experience in the destination
		A.3.1.1	Percentage of repeat/return visitors (within 5 years)
	A.4. Information and Communication	A.4.1	The percentage of visitors who note that they are aware of destination sustainability efforts
		A.4.1.1	The percentage of businesses that communicate their sustainability efforts to visitors in their products, marketing, or branding

B. Economic Value	B.1. Tourism Flow (volume & value) at Destination	B.1.1	Number of tourist nights per month
		B.1.1.1	Relative contribution of tourism to the destination's economy (% GDP)
		B.1.1.2	Number of 'same day' visitors in high season and low season
		B.1.1.3	Daily spending per same day visitor
		B.1.2	Daily spending per tourist (accommodation, food and drinks, other services)
	B.2. Tourism Enterprise(s) Performance	B.2.1	Average length of stay of tourists (nights)
		B.2.1.1	Average length of stay of same day visitors (hours)
		B.2.1.2	Percentage of ten largest tourism enterprises involved in destination management/cooperative marketing
		B.2.2	Occupancy rate in commercial accommodation per month and average for the year
		B.2.2.1	Average price per room in the destination
	B.3. Quantity and Quality of Employee	B.3.1	Direct tourism employment as percentage of total employment
		B.3.1.1	Percentage of jobs in tourism that are seasonal
		B.3.1.2	Percentage of tourism enterprises providing student internships
	B.4. Safety and Healthy	B.4.1	Percentage of tourism enterprises inspected for fire safety in the last year
		B.4.1.1	Percentage of tourists who register a complaint with the police
	B.5. Tourism Supply Chain	B.5.1	Percentage of tourism enterprises actively taking steps to source local, sustainable, and fair trade goods and services
		B.5.1.1	Percentage of the destination covered by a policy promoting local, sustainable and/or fair trade products and services
		B.5.1.2	Percentage of tourism enterprises sourcing a minimum of 25% of food and drink from local/regional producers

C. Social and Cultural Impact

C. Social and Cultural Impact	C.1. Community/ Social impact	C.1.1	Number of tourists/visitors per 100 residents
		C.1.1.1	Percentage of residents who are satisfied with tourism in the destination (per month/season)
		C.1.1.2	Number of beds available in commercial visitor accommodation per 100 residents
		C.1.1.3	Number of second/rental homes per 100 homes
	C.2. Gender Equality	C.2.1	Percentage of men and women employed in the tourism sector
		C.2.1.1	Percentage of tourism enterprises where the general manager position is held by a woman
		C.2.1.2	Average wage in tourism for women compared to average wage for men (sorted by tourism job type)
	C.3. Equality/ Accessibility	C.3.1	Percentage of commercial accommodation with rooms accessible to people with disabilities and/or participating in recognised accessibility schemes
		C.3.1.1	Percentage of destination served by public transport that is accessible to people with disabilities and people with specific access requirements
		C.3.2	Percentage of visitor attractions that are accessible to people with disabilities and/or participating in recognised accessibility schemes
		C.3.2.1	Percentage of visitors satisfied with the accessibility of the destination for those with disabilities or specific access requirements
	C.4 Protecting and Enhancing Cultural Heritage, Local Identity and Assets	C.4.1	Percentage of the destination covered by a policy or plan that protects cultural heritage
		C.4.1.1	Percentage of residents who have positive or negative views on the impact of tourism on destination identity
C.4.1.2		Percentage of the destination's biggest events that are focused on traditional/local culture and assets	

D. Environmental Impact	D.1. Reducing Transport Impact	D.1.1	Percentage of tourists and same day visitors using different modes of transport to arrive at the destination (public/private and type)
		D.1.1.1	Percentage of visitors using local/soft mobility/public transport services to get around the destination
		D.1.2	Average travel (km) by tourists to and from home or average travel (km) from the previous destination to the current destination
		D.1.2.1	Average travel (km) by same day visitors from and to destination
	D.2. Climate Change	D.2.1	Percentage of tourism enterprises involved in climate change mitigation schemes—such as: CO ₂ offset, low energy systems, etc.—and ‘adaptation’ responses and actions
		D.2.1.1	Percentage of the destination included in climate change adaptation strategy or planning
		D.2.1.2	Percentage of tourism accommodation and attraction infrastructure located in ‘vulnerable zones’
	D.3. Solid Waste Management	D.3.1	Waste volume produced by destination (tonnes per resident per year or per month)
		D.3.1.1	Percentage of tourism enterprises separating different types of waste
		D.3.2	Volume of waste recycled (percent or per resident per year)
	D.4. Sewage Treatment	D.4.1	Percentage of sewage from the destination treated at least at secondary level prior to discharge
		D.4.1.1	Percentage of commercial accommodation connected to central sewage system and/or employing tertiary sewage treatment
	D.5. Water Mana- gement	D.5.1	Fresh water consumption per tourist night compared to general population water consumption per person night
		D.5.1.1	Percentage of tourism enterprises with low-flow shower heads and taps and/or dual flush toilets/waterless urinals

	D.5.1.2	Percentage of tourism enterprises using recycled water
	D.5.1.3	Percentage of water use derived from recycled water in the destination
D.6. Energy Usage	D.6.1	Energy consumption per tourist night compared to general population energy consumption per person night
	D.6.1.1	Percentage of tourism enterprises that have switched to low-energy lighting
	D.6.1.2	Annual amount of energy consumed from renewable sources (MWh) as a percentage of overall energy consumption
D.7. Landscape and Biodiversity Management	D.7.1	Percentage of destination (area in km ²) that is designated for protection
	D.7.1.1	Percentage of local enterprises in the tourism sector actively supporting protection, conservation, and management of local biodiversity and landscapes.
	D.7.1.2	Percentage of destination covered by a biodiversity management and monitoring plan
D.8. Light and Noise Mana- gement	D.8.1	The destination has policies in place that require tourism enterprises to minimise light and noise pollution
	D.8.1.1	Percentage of the destination and percentage of population covered by local strategy and/or plans to reduce noise and light pollution
D.9. Bathing Water Quality	D.9.1	Level of contamination per 100 ml (faecal coliforms, campylobacter)
	D.9.1.1	Number of days beach/shore closed due to contamination