



WORLD TOURISM ORGANIZATION  
ORGANISATION MONDIALE DU TOURISME  
ORGANIZACIÓN MUNDIAL DEL TURISMO  
ВСЕМИРНАЯ ТУРИСТСКАЯ ОРГАНИЗАЦИЯ  
منظمة السياحة العالمية

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Tourism accounts for around 10% of the world's economic activity and has become one of the main generators of employment. It has a major impact on natural and built environments and on the wellbeing and culture of host populations, and these effects can be positive or negative, depending on how tourism is developed and managed.

At the same time, the concept of sustainable development has become widely accepted as the way to a better, more humane and socially responsible future. There is a growing belief that tourism can play a significant role in sustainable development. The World Tourism Organization, in its new capacity as Specialised Agency of the United Nations, wishes to encourage all countries to ensure that their policies and actions for the development and management of tourism fully embrace the principles of sustainability. In this context, WTO has been increasingly putting at the centre of its activities the concern for sustainability, undertaking research on different aspects regarding tourism policies, and its development, management, regulation, and similar issues of public concern. We will soon be launching, in a joint effort with the United Nations Environment Programme, a new publication on Policies and Tools for Sustainable Tourism, that I will summarise to you later in this presentation.

The relationship between tourism and sustainable development has become apparent and made explicit since the mid-1990s, although WTO had been promoting environmentally friendly tourism since the 1980s. Somehow, the socio-economic and socio-cultural aspects had not been given, until then, the priority they deserve. The UN Commission on Sustainable Development devoted its 7<sup>th</sup> session, in April 1999 to examine the tourism sector, making a number of recommendations to governments and the tourism industry. The importance of tourism and its sustainability was more clearly underlined at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, when our Organization was called firstly, to evaluate the level of progress made by governments and the tourism industry in sustainability terms, and secondly, to play a greater role in ensuring the adoption of sustainable policies for tourism development by governments, and sustainable operational practices by private companies.

Many countries declare that they are pursuing, or wish to pursue, policies for 'sustainable tourism'. Despite this interest, there remains a degree of uncertainty over the scope and priorities for making tourism more sustainable and only partial appreciation of how to put this into practice.

### **All forms of tourism should be more sustainable**

Making tourism more sustainable is not just about controlling and managing the potential negative socio-cultural, environmental and economic impacts of the industry. Tourism is in a very special position to benefit local communities, economically and socially, and to raise awareness and support for the conservation of the environment. Within the tourism sector, economic development and environmental protection should not be seen as opposing forces – they should be pursued hand in hand as aspirations that can and should be mutually reinforcing. Policies and actions must aim to strengthen the benefits and reduce the costs of tourism.

Big issues are at stake here. Massive growth is predicted for tourism in the forthcoming years, providing excellent opportunities for spreading prosperity in developing countries and also in depressed areas of industrialised nations, but at the same time presenting considerable challenges and potential threats to the environment and local communities if not well managed. For instance, climate change is recognised as a major global issue, with significant implications for tourism. Similarly, sustainable forms of tourism can be strategically important for preserving delicate ecosystems and biodiversity, providing a sustainable form of economic use as opposed to more aggressive industrial activities. There is also an increasing appreciation of the potential role of tourism in addressing world poverty, through bringing a source of income to the heart of some of the poorest communities.

### **Main stakeholders in sustainable tourism**

Many different interests can benefit from tourism being made more sustainable:

- **Tourism enterprises**, which, while seeking long term profitability, should be concerned about their corporate image, the relationship with their staff, and their impact on the global environment and that immediately around them.
- **Local, host communities**, which are seeking increased prosperity and new employment opportunities, but without exploitation or damage to their quality of life, including their culture, beliefs and traditions.
- **Environmentalists**, who are concerned about the harmful impacts of tourism upon the natural environment, but also recognise that it is a valuable source of income for conservation and a unique, effective tool for further developing environmental awareness among the general public.
- **Tourists**, who are seeking a high quality experience in safe and attractive environments, in which they can appreciate different cultures or simply enjoy different climates. Tourists are becoming more aware of the impacts of their travelling, while not willing to renounce to it, but rather becoming more selective about their choice of destinations.

In seeking more sustainable tourism, **governments** must recognise the different positions and motivations of these stakeholders and work with them to achieve common goals. Sustainability is the responsibility of all those involved in tourism, but governments must play a leading role.

It is true that most of the impacts of tourism are the result of actions taken by private sector enterprises and by tourists themselves. However, there is a clear need for governments to take a leading role if truly significant progress is to be achieved in making tourism more sustainable. There are a number of reasons that justify public, governmental action in the tourism sector:

- **The tourism industry is very fragmented.** It is difficult for the individual actions of many micro, small and medium sized businesses to make a positive difference and coordination is required; such coordination is normally provided, or at least stimulated by governments.
- **Sustainability relates to areas of public concern** – air, water, natural and cultural heritage, protected areas, public spaces such as beaches or mountains, and the quality of life in general, all of which relate to tourism in one way or another. Moreover, many of these resources and a good number of tourism attractions (such as beaches, museums, archaeological sites, airports, etc) are generally managed by governments.
- **Governments hold many of the tools that can be used to make a difference** – such as the power to legislate, make regulations and ensure compliance, the offer of economic incentives, fiscal measures, as well as the resources and institutions to promote and disseminate good practice.

Governments should provide an environment that enables and encourages the private sector, tourists and other stakeholders to respond to sustainability issues. This can best be achieved by establishing and implementing a set of policies for tourism development and management, drawn up in concert with others, policies that place sustainability at its centre.

The holistic principle behind sustainable development requires synchronization of policies and coordination of action between sectors. I will refer later to the different types of strategy that can be developed and also to the process for their implementation.

The principles of sustainable development place an emphasis on local determination and implementation of policies and actions. Yet, this should be placed within a supportive national policy framework.

This is why the new publication I mentioned before is aimed primarily at governments, at national or local level, while being also relevant to international development agencies, NGOs and the private sector to the extent that they are affected by, and can affect, tourism policies and their implementation. The main purpose of this document is to provide governments with guidance and a framework for the development of policies for more sustainable tourism, and a toolbox of instruments that they can use to implement these policies.

The sustainability of tourism is an issue of equal importance in both developed and developing countries, and this is made clear from the very outset of the publication. However, the balance of priorities may vary between them, and each country should adapt or apply with different emphasis the policies and tools recommended to its own particular circumstances, in terms of its overall development level, the size of its tourism sector, and especially the vision it has for its own future.

The document is in five chapters:

**Chapter 1** looks closely at what **sustainability means for tourism** and why governments need to address this. It introduces an agenda for more sustainable tourism, framed around a set of **twelve aims**, and some key principles of sustainability that must be taken on board in meeting these aims. **Chapter 2 deals with Policy implications of a sustainable tourism agenda**. Each of the twelve aims for more sustainable tourism is taken in turn and policy areas identified that are relevant to them

I would like to briefly mention these twelve aims and the corresponding policy areas that should be addressed to achieve the aims:

1. **Economic viability:** To ensure the viability and competitiveness of tourism enterprises, so that they are able to continue to prosper and deliver benefits in the long term.
2. **Local prosperity:** To maximise the contribution of tourism to the prosperity of the host destination, including the proportion of visitor spending that is retained locally.
3. **Employment quality:** To strengthen the number and quality of local jobs created and supported by tourism, including the level of pay, conditions of service and availability to all without discrimination by gender, race, disability or in other ways.
4. **Social equity:** To seek a widespread distribution of economic and social benefits from tourism throughout the recipient community, including improving opportunities, income and services available to the poor.
5. **Visitor fulfilment:** To provide a safe, satisfying and fulfilling experience for visitors, available to all without discrimination by gender, race, disability or in other ways.
6. **Local control:** To engage and empower local communities in planning and decision taking about the management and future development of tourism in their area, in consultation with other stakeholders.
7. **Community wellbeing:** To maintain and strengthen the quality of life in local communities, including social structures and access to resources, amenities and life support systems, avoiding any form of social degradation or exploitation.
8. **Cultural richness:** To respect and enhance the historic heritage, authentic culture, traditions and distinctiveness of host communities.
9. **Physical integrity:** To maintain and enhance the quality of landscapes, both urban and rural, and avoid the physical and visual degradation of the environment.

10. **Biological diversity:** To support the conservation of natural areas, habitats and wildlife, and minimize damage to them.
11. **Resource efficiency:** To minimize the use of scarce and non-renewable resources in the development and operation of tourism facilities and services.
12. **Environmental purity:** To minimise the pollution of air, water and land and the generation of waste by tourism enterprises and visitors.

**Chapter 3 is about establishing the right structures** through which governments can work together with others towards more sustainable tourism, and about the strategies that are required to develop and drive policies and actions. Particular attention is paid to the relationship between national and local structures and strategies for sustainable tourism.

**Three types of strategy** can be identified that have relevance to sustainable tourism:

### 1. A tourism strategy that embraces sustainability

Every country should have a strategy, articulated through a published document, that provides a clear direction and framework for the development and management of tourism, thereby:

- Guiding the policies and actions of the tourism ministry and its agencies, such as the national tourism organisation.
- Influencing other government departments and ministries.
- Stimulating and controlling the private sector and potential investors.
- Providing a framework for tourism policies and action at a local level.

Rather than developing a separate strategy for 'sustainable tourism', mainstream tourism strategies should fully embrace the concept of sustainable development.

### 2. Effective coverage of tourism in other strategies, and vice versa

A second option, compatible with having a separate strategy for tourism that embraces sustainability, is that governments ensure that the sustainable development of tourism is fully recognised within other government strategies. There are three reasons why this is particularly important:

- Often it is only through specific and high profile inclusion within higher level strategies and policies that tourism will be taken seriously by ministries concerned with sustainable development and the environment, and afforded adequate resources.
- Legislation and regulations that may be necessary to control the impact of tourism, such as environmental legislation, may be initiated by environmental or developmental strategies and policies and therefore these must take tourism into consideration at the outset.
- The holistic principle behind sustainable development requires synchronization of policies and coordination of action between sectors.

### 3. More specific strategies, such as for ecotourism

In addition to general tourism strategies, it may be appropriate to develop strategies or sets of policies for specific aspects of tourism. These could be defined by product or market type, such as cultural, rural, health or sport tourism, conventions or the cruise ship sector. They should also reflect sustainability principles.

**Chapter 4: Shaping sustainable tourism.** This chapter looks at the process of developing a tourism strategy that embraces sustainability and identifies some of the strategic choices that need to be made. It looks at product and market selection, and introduces the tools that may be used to influence tourism development, the operation of tourism enterprises and the behaviour of visitors.

It is important to outline the main steps in the development of a tourism strategy and how they may be related to the objective of making tourism more sustainable. Fundamentally, this should be a participatory process that involves a multiplicity of stakeholders, thereby creating a greater adherence to the strategy and a commitment to its implementation. The mix of stakeholders engaged in developing the strategy should reflect the make up of partnership structures for tourism at a national or local level. I will detail briefly the ten major steps that we identify for the strategy formulation process:

1. Create a multi-interest working group
2. Agree on initial issues to investigate
3. Undertake a situation analysis and wide consultation
4. Analyse destination performance, needs and opportunities, and key issues to address
5. Consult and agree on key issues and priorities
6. Determine strategic objectives
7. Develop an action programme
8. Establish or strengthen instruments to facilitate implementation
9. Implement actions
10. Monitor results

**Chapter 5: Instruments for more sustainable tourism.** A detailed description is given of eleven separate tools and how governments can apply these tools. I would like to give you a quick overview of the different tools:

#### 1. Measurement instruments:

These can be used in determining levels of tourism and impact and keeping abreast of existing or potential changes:

- 1.1 Sustainability indicators and monitoring
- 1.2 The identification of tourism limits

#### 2. Command and control instruments:

These are instruments through which government is able exert strict control on aspects of development and operation, backed by legislation:

- 2.1 Legislation, regulation and licensing
- 2.2 Land use planning and development control

### **3. Economic instruments:**

These are about influencing behaviour of tourism companies and tourists, impact through financial means and sending signals through the marketplace:

- 3.1 Taxes, subsidies, prices and other incentives
- 3.2 Raising revenues

### **4. Voluntary instruments:**

These instruments provide frameworks or processes that encourage stakeholders voluntarily to abide by sustainable approaches and practices:

- 4.1 Guidelines and codes of conduct
- 4.2 Reporting and auditing
- 4.3 Voluntary certification

### **5. Supporting instruments:**

These are instruments through which governments can directly or indirectly influence and support enterprises in making their operations more sustainable:

- 5.1 Infrastructure provision and management
- 5.2 Capacity building
- 5.3 Marketing and information services

To conclude, I would like to reiterate that the main challenge faced by the tourism sector at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to ensure that tourism is developed and managed in a sustainable manner. Such a challenge requires a concerted action by all tourism stakeholders, public and private, including also a number of government departments other than tourism, as well as the host populations at destinations.

The World Tourism Organization would be pleased to count with Iceland as one of the countries committed to sustainable tourism, and we are of course ready to collaborate with you in achieving this aim.

Thank you