New Directions in International Sustainable Tourism Policy

"We have not inherited the earth from our ancestors; we have only borrowed it from our children."
Anonymous

David L. Edgell, Sr.
School of Hospitality Leadership
College of Business
East Carolina University, USA

Abstract

The travel and tourism industry both has a decided impact and a potential positive future which depends on the global sustainability of economies, ecologies, nature, cultures and the built environment. Issues with potential conflicts regarding the travel and tourism industry include the impact of tourism on the world's greenhouse gas emissions, climate change, global warming, nature conservation, and many more such dilemmas. These concerns need to be addressed by the business community, governments and academia. Many of these situations have recently come to the forefront as a result of the announcement by the United Nations that "2017 is the United Nations International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development." This designation by the UN highlighted the importance of the tourism community to find additional measures to protect the environment. One organization, the United Nations World Tourism Organization, has developed a sustainable tourism policy under the rubric of the "Five Pillars of Sustainable Tourism for Development."Impetus for concerns with respect to the environment date back to the 1987 Brundtland Report on the environment, which did not specifically mention tourism. The Report was a precursor for later activities on sustainable tourism. In addition, the eye-opening article on "International Sustainable Tourism Policy" published in 2015 by *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* noted that "International tourism,…, is faced with an impending dilemma as to whether it can maintain its dynamic growth rate without damaging or destroying the natural and built environments, both of which must be conserved and sustained if future generations are to enjoy the same benefits of travel and tourism as today's do." Many of these issues were also addressed in the 2016 book: *Managing Sustainable Tourism: A Legacy for the Future* as well as in the 2017 article "Sustainable Tourism Development: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow" in the *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*. Additional coverage of several of these topics are also contained in the forthcoming (2019) new book: *Tourism Policy and Planning*. Simply put, the

current magnitude and anticipated projected growth for the travel and tourism industry portent a need to immediately address new directions in international sustainable tourism policy.

Keywords: Sustainable tourism development, Responsible tourism, Sustainable tourism policy, Climate change, Global warming, Sustainable economic growth, Tourism and poverty reduction, Cultural values, Peace and security, The United Nations World Tourism Organization, The World Travel and Tourism Council, The United Nations Environmental Programme, The International Institute for Peace through Tourism, The Center for Responsible Travel, The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Introduction

The global tourism community of businesses, political institutions, governments, and academia saw the travel and tourism industry in a new and different light when the United Nations declared that "2017 is the United Nations International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development (UN 2017 Declaration)."[1]The UN 2017 Declaration particularly noted, among other important issues, the importance of addressing tourism growth with respect to the protection of the environment. This declaration became a clarion call for greater research and action in international sustainable tourism policy. It raised the bar for greater attention by the travel and tourism industry toward concerns for the environment. The travel and tourism industry both has a decided impact and a potential positive future which depends on the global sustainability of economies, ecologies, nature, cultures and the built environment. Critical decisions about sustainable tourism development must be made today – at the local, national, regional, and international levels – if tomorrow is to present a bright future for the tourism industry.[2]Problems such as the impact of the travel and tourism industry on the world's greenhouse gas emissions, climate change, global warming, nature conservation, and cultural resources need to be addressed now by businesses, governments at all levels and the academic community. The travel and tourism industry has been growing rapidly over the past few years and is likely to grow at an even greater magnitude in the future. This growth and the concerns for international sustainable tourism policies will need to be addressed by the international leadership in travel and tourism related organizations.

The Magnitude of the Tourism Industry

According to research and data collected by the World Travel &Tourism Council (WTTC), supported by the Oxford Economics forecasting model, the global travel and tourism industry generated US$8.3 trillion (10.4% of global GDP)

and 313 million jobs in 2017, equivalent to 1 in 10 jobs in the global economy. And, furthermore, the tourism sector accounted for 6.5% of total global exports.[3] The WTTC is the forum through which the leaders of over 150 of the world's foremost travel and tourism companies meet to discuss and formulate global travel and tourism policies and practices aimed toward the balanced economic growth and sustainability of a healthy tourism industry.[4]

In addition, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) reported that international tourist arrivals in 2017 reached 1.322 billion.[5] UNWTO is the United Nations agency responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism. It is the leading international organization in the field of tourism, which promotes tourism as a driver of economic growth, inclusive development and environmental sustainability and offers leadership and support to the sector in advancing knowledge and tourism policies worldwide. It serves as a global forum for tourism policy issues and a practical source of tourism knowledge.[6]

Another organization that works in tandem to support the objectives of the UNWTO, and is a major player in international sustainable tourism policies, is the International Institute for Peace through Tourism (IIPT). The IIPT is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to fostering tourism initiatives which contributes to international understanding and cooperation, and the improved quality of the environment, the preservation of heritage, and through these initiatives, helping to bring about a more peaceful and sustainable world. It is based on a vision of the world's largest industry, travel and tourism – becoming the world's first global peace industry; and the belief that every traveler is potentially an "Ambassador for Peace."[7]

There are other world organizations engaged in sustainable tourism policy such as the UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) which in 2005 co-authored, with UNWTO, a report: "Making Tourism More Sustainable: A Guide for Policy Makers." Then in 2016 the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Union of Concerned Scientists, and UNEP wrote an important report titled: "World Heritage and Tourism in a Changing Climate." These global organizations, along with such regional organizations as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, Organization of American States, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, Caribbean Tourism Organization, and others are also deeply involved in developing sustainable tourism policies.

Defining Sustainable Tourism

Many academics writing about sustainable tourism or the importance of protecting the environment start with the 1987 United Nations report titled

Our Common Future or generally referred to as the "Brundtland Commission Report" named for Gro Harlem Brundtland, chair of the "World Commission on Environment and Development".This comprehensive report would have a strong impact on the UN Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, June 3-14, 1992 often noted informally as "The Earth Summit".[8]While the "Brundtland Commission Report" and "The Earth Summit" were important documents with respect to the protection of the environment, neither the "Report" nor "Summit" referred to *tourism* or to *international tourism policy* or*sustainable tourism policy*.

Possibly the earliest recognition with respect to the foundation of international sustainable tourism policy appeared 28 years ago in 1990 with the publication of David L. Edgell, Sr.'s book: *International Tourism Policy*. He stated in the opening paragraph of that book:

"International tourism in the twenty-first century will be a major vehicle for fulfilling people's aspirations for a higher quality of life, a part of which will be through facilitating more authentic social relationships between individuals and, it is hoped, laying the ground work for a peaceful society through global touristic contacts. International tourism also has the potential to be one of the most important stimulants for global improvement in the social, cultural, economic, political, and ecological dimensions of future lifestyles. Finally, tourism will be a principle factor for creating greater international understanding and good will and a primary ingredient for peace on earth. This supports the author's view that the highest purpose of tourism policy is to integrate the economic, political, cultural, intellectual, and environmental benefits of tourism cohesively with people, destinations, and countries in order to improve the global quality of life and provide a foundation for peace and prosperity."[9]

The 1990s ushered in numerous meetings, research and other activities related to the need for international policies with respect to sustainable tourism.

In 2002 the "Cape Town Declaration" originating from a meeting in the City of Cape Town, South Africa referred to sustainable tourism as:

"Tourism that leads to the 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.[10]

In 2005 the UNWTO/UNEP defined sustainable tourism as:

"Sustainable tourism development guidelines and management practices are applicable to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, including mass tourism and the various niche tourism segments. Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic and sociocultural aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance must be established among these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability."[11]

In recognizing the UN 2017 Declaration, the UNWTO, as the lead UN agency for tourism policy, identified five key pillars required to ensure sustainable tourism for development. They are:

- Inclusive and sustainable economic growth

- Social inclusiveness, employment, and poverty reduction

- Resource efficiency, environmental protection, and climate change adaptation and mitigation

- Respect for cultural values, diversity, and heritage

- Mutual understanding, peace, and security[12]

The Center for Responsible Travel: Trends & Statistics 2017 report has an interesting and informative chronicle narrative geared to these five key pillars to ensure sustainable tourism development.[13] The following notes are an additional attempt to address these five key pillars.

Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth

Today, as noted earlier from data from WTTC and UNWTO, tourism is indeed an activity of considerable economic importance. This growing significance of tourism as a source of income and employment, and as a major factor in the balance of payments for many countries has been attracting attention from governments, regional and local authorities, and others with an interest in economic development. In effect, tourism helps local communities increase their economic development, realize increased revenues, create new jobs, benefit from a diverse economy, add new products, generate additional income, spawn new businesses and contribute to overall economic integration while enriching public and private partnerships and improving the quality of life of local citizens.[14]

Tourism brings in large amounts of capital from payments for goods and services by visitors, contributing an estimated 10 percent of the worldwide gross domestic product (GDP). Tourism creates additional opportunities for employment in the service industries associated with transportation such as

airlines, cruise ships, rental cars, and taxicabs; accommodations, that include hotels, bed and breakfasts and resorts; entertainment activities such as amusement parks, sports programs, casinos, music venues, theaters; food and beverage enterprises; and, shopping establishments. The plethora of tourism supply components such as stadiums, cruise ship docks, hotels, nature trails and entertainment options can be a major part of the commercial input to the economic activity of a local area. Tourism is also a major contributor to manufacturing and construction, as for example the need for the building of airplanes, airports, cruise ships, cruise ports, hotels, entertainment centers and other facilities necessary to meet the expectations of domestic and international visitors.[15] The question is whether these resources can be sustained in the future without having a negative impact on the environment and, at the same time, provide broader opportunities for social inclusiveness, employment, and poverty reduction.

Social Inclusiveness, Employment, and Poverty Reduction

Turbulence, strife, poverty, conflicts, and unrest aptly describe much of today's world. Nearly 80 percent of the world's population is in some form of poverty, 70 percent lack literacy skills, and more than 50 percent suffer from hunger and malnutrition. Issues relating to the world's hostile environment and continuous conflicts, economic crisis, misdistribution of wealth, belligerency, global warming, disaster relief, impoverishment, sickness and ineffectiveness of governments to find solutions to problem areas, are demanding creative leadership and policy attention by governments, international organizations, and the private sector.[16]

The key concern is to insure that the economic growth of tourism is a part of the overall management of sustainable tourism. Edgell (2006) wrote that "Responsibly managed tourism enhances and enriches natural, heritage, cultural values and embraces the need to preserve them so that the community and visitor have a quality tourism experience now and in the future…Sustainable tourism, properly managed can become a major vehicle for the realization of humankind's highest aspirations in the quest to achieve economic prosperity while maintaining social, cultural, and environmental integrity."[17]

As mentioned earlier, UNWTO is the UN organization charged with developing tourism policies and plans to address global poverty issues. UNWTO's tourism policy includes: "To harness tourism's potential for inclusivity, decent work and poverty eradication – while overcoming the challenges of unsustainable tourism activity – it will be important to:

● Pursue an 'inclusive growth' approach;

- Create decent jobs, redress the skills gaps while ensuring fair, productive employment;

- Support local communities and empower women and youth; and

- Provide tourism experiences for all, via a focus on universal accessibility."[18]

What appears to be a fairly recent movement toward reducing poverty is the increased transformation by some of the world's business leaders in utilizing their immense wealth to enrich the global well being of the poor throughout the world. For example, Microsoft mega-billionaire Bill Gates, in partnership with billionaire Warren Buffet, initiated, in 2010, a multi-billion dollar challenge to other billionaires of the world to use their wealth to fund global social change. Operating through the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, many of the world's billionaires are contributing money, ideas, and strategies toward innovative programs to reduce poverty and disease and increase the world's food supply and drinkable water. In 2017, 14 more billionaires joined the other 154 billionaires as part of the Buffett and Gates pledge to give away more than half their money to help address society's biggest issues – from poverty alleviation to healthcare to education.[19] It is these efforts by the private sector, in concert with the United Nations and individual country leaders, and the global tourism community that will ultimately support international sustainable tourism policies.

Resource Efficiency, Environmental Protection, and Climate Change Adaption and Mitigation

In *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* article on "International Sustainable Tourism Policy" it pointed out that:

"The greatest challenge in the twenty-first century with respect to international sustainable policy may well be the understanding of the ramifications of climate change and global warming on the tourism industry. While the scientific community may disagree on the causes or severity of climate change, there is no question that climate change has already affected our environment and will continue to do so. It is important for the international tourism community to better understand the connection that climate change and global warming have to the environment in order to mitigate the negative impact on the industry."[20]

The U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's January 18, 2018 report observed that "2017 was 3rd warmest year on record for the globe." The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration scientists confirm Earth's long-term

warming trend continues. Earth's globally averaged temperature for 2017 made it the third warmest year in NOAA's 138-year climate record, behind 2016 (warmest) and 2015 (second warmest).[21]Climate change has multiple impacts on the tourism industry. Weather conditions and climate changes have a direct impact on the traveling public, often dictating why, where, how, and when people travel, as well as the length of time visitors stay at a destination. Furthermore, climate change's impact on the natural environment itself, through erosion of the coasts, damage to coral reefs, and the melting of ice and snow found at high altitudes, will change the appeal of tourism in natural areas.[22]

While the Paris Climate Agreement was signed on November 4, 2016, many different global organizations engaged in travel and tourism policies have been concerned for some time about the impact of climate change on sustainable tourism. Organizations like the UNWTO, WTTC, and IIPT are well known advocates of sustainable tourism policies that include the impact of climate change on the tourism industry. A lesser known not-for-profit organization deeply involved in global climate change issues is the "Strong Universal Network" generally referred to as SUN[x]. SUN[x] is a program of the Green Growth & Travelism Institute established in Belgium in 2010. "SUN[x] is about "Climate Change because it is eXistential" – if we don't act now to fix our fossil fuel addiction our grandchildren will freeze or fry." SUN[x] will help tourism destinations and stakeholders build climate resilience in line with the Paris Agreement through a new concept of "Impact-Travel", that is a template for sustainable tourism that is Paris Climate Agreement linked.[23]

Respect for Cultural Values, Diversity, and Heritage

Cultural tourism, including the components of diversity and heritage, like other aspects of sustainable tourism, is defined differently depending on the organization or the country involved. For example, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines cultural tourism as: "To create a discerning type of tourism that takes account of other people's culture." In the United States, in 1995, then President Bill Clinton held a special White House Conference on Travel and Tourism in which one of the outcomes was the following definition of cultural tourism: "...travel directed toward experiencing the arts, heritage, and special character of a place." After researching many of the differing global definitions of cultural tourism, this author settled on the definition used by the U.S. National Trust for Historic Preservation which refers to "cultural tourism" as "cultural heritage tourism" and defines it as: "...traveling to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. It includes historic, cultural and natural resources."[24]Basically then, cultural

tourism is a subset of "sustainable tourism" that encompasses the lifestyle of the people based on their history, their art, architecture, religion(s), and other elements that helped shape their way of live.

According to UNESCO, "Cultural tourism is growing at an unprecedented rate and now accounts for around 40% of global tourism."[25]UNESCO has a special World Heritage Site program that encourages travel to important cultural and historic destinations. UNESCO sets out the requirements for nations to maintain and protect the sites that are designated as "World Heritage Sites." UNESCO leaves it to the individual countries to determine how they will define the sites as tourism destinations and promote and market such sites.

"COLLOQUY's travel-habits research shows that the millennial consumer, born between 1981 and 1997, is significantly more attracted to destinations with cultural or historical significance (76% versus 63% of the general population)."[26]Certainly this growing market has a strong desire to travel. However, the millennial consumers often lack the financial resources to travel often and to travel to many of the expensive destinations where major cultural sites are located (Greece, Italy, France, etc.). The generation that is having the greatest economic impact with respect to cultural tourism are the baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964). Ian Patterson in the *Journal of Tourism & Hospitality* in an article titled "Baby Boomer Travel Market is on the Increase!" notes that the baby boomer population is increasing and they have the money and time for travel. More than 50 percent of Boomer travelers choose a destination based on its cultural value. They seek educational enrichment with every tour decision.[27]

Mutual Understanding, Peace and Security

The old adage "When peace prevails, tourism flourishes" (author unknown) has a strong and truthful ring to it. In other words, the more peaceful the world, the greater the opportunity for tourism to grow. If greater world cooperation takes place, there is the potential for tourism to be one of the most important stimulates for global improvement in the social, cultural, economic, political, and ecological dimensions of future lifestyles, adding to the possibilities of a more peaceful world.[28]

Mahatma Gandhi observed that "I have watched the cultures of all lands blow around my house and other winds have blown the seeds of peace, for travel is the language of peace (cited in Theobald, 1994)." In addition, the late Pope John Paul II (now Saint John Paul II) noted in his address to the World Travel Congress of the American Society of Travel Agents held in Rome, Italy, November 14, 1995 that: "The world is becoming a global village in which people from different continents are made to feel like next door neighbours. In

facilitating more authentic social relationships between individuals, tourism can help overcome many real prejudices, and foster new bonds of fraternity. In this sense tourism has become a real force for world peace."Furthermore, U.S. President John F. Kennedy in an address in 1963 said: "Travel has become one of the great forces for peace and understanding in our time. As people move throughout the world and learn to know each other, to understand each other's customs and to appreciate the qualities of individuals of each nation, we are building a level of international understanding which can sharply improve the atmosphere for world peace."[29]

Peace through travel is not a new idea. While there appears to be no single moment in the history of travel and tourism that pinpoints a sole foundation for the idea of peace through travel there are references to the concept in ancient times. We do know that in ancient Greece, during the Olympic Games which began in 776 BCE, there was what became known as *The Olympic Truce.* The city-states of ancient Greece were almost continuously at war with each other. However, during the Olympic Games there was a "sacred truce" which meant that war was outlawed while the Olympic Games were taking place. After the Games were over, however, many of the city-state conflicts were resumed.[30]

Today's world does not necessarily represent one in which peace prevails. There are wars in the Middle East and civil strife in many nations throughout the globe. The ITB's (Internationale Tourismus-Börse Berlin - the world's largest tourism trade fair) *World Travel Trends Report 2016/2017* noted, with respect to the impact of "terrorism" on tourism that there is a "...level of fear about travelling to certain countries. Outbound travellers are more sensitive than ever about possible risks from terror attacks...As many as 45% of international travellers had serious safety and security concerns. About two-thirds of these respondents said they still plan to travel abroad but only to destinations they perceive as safe.[31] The *Report* mentioned a WTTC study that highlighted the fact that "...there is a clear link between peace and tourism...The research showed that countries with more open and sustainable tourism sector tend to be more peaceful and suffer from less conflict and violence. A sustainable and open tourism sector contributes to higher levels of 'positive peace', namely the attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies. Countries with a more sustainable and open tourism sector are more likely to enjoy higher levels of positive peace in the future."[32]

Conclusion

The academic community has weighed in with valuable research and knowledge to better explain the intricacies of international sustainable tourism policy. No one has said it better than Tracy Berno and Kelly Bricker, who noted that:

"The concepts of sustainable tourism, as difficult as they are to operationalize, do encourage consideration of long-term perspectives, foster notions of equity, encourage the critical evaluation of tourism, promote an appreciation of the importance of inter-sectoral linkages and facilitate cooperation and collaboration between different stakeholders. This represents significant progress towards sustaining tourism as a whole, as well as a progression towards more conscientious forms of tourism that sustain and maintain the attributes (social, cultural, environmental and economic) on which the tourism industry is predicated…"[33]

According to most global forecasts, and based on information from leaders and practitioners in the marketplace, the future of the tourism industry will be one of change, vibrancy, and growth. In addition, travelers are demanding high-quality tourism experiences that provide variety and flexibility as well as a clean, healthy, and safe environment. Stakeholders in all aspects of tourism development and management must safeguard and protect the natural and built environment and cultural heritage with a view toward achieving sustainable tourism and economic growth that meets the needs and aspirations of present and future generations. Value-based leadership, positive new directions for understanding the impact of climate change, reducing poverty through tourism development, inclusive cooperation on cultural values, a strong international sustainable tourism policy, dynamic strategic planning, good management, and an emphasis on peace and security will be the hallmarks crucial to economic prosperity, sustainability and quality-of-life opportunities for communities and global destinations in the future.

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About the Author
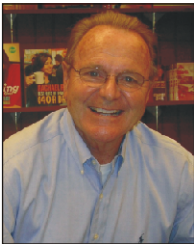
David L. Edgell, Sr. is a professor of trade, tourism, and economic development and a senior professor of graduate studies in tourism policy and sustainable tourism at East Carolina University. He has authored eleven books and over one hundred articles, has served as the U.S. Under Secretary of Commerce for Travel and Tourism, was the first Commissioner of Tourism for the U.S. Virgin Islands, a Vice President for Strategic Marketing for MMGY Global, and is a founding member of the prestigious International Academy for the Study of Tourism. He has co-authored a new book *Tourism Policy and Planning: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (third edition, Routledge – 2019). His book *Managing Sustainable Tourism: A Legacy for the Future* (second edition – 2016) has won several awards. (Email: edgelld@ecu.edu)