Innovative Practices in Tourism: Sustainability and Quality nexus in Destination Management

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ABSTRACT

Management of destination is a challenging task before the stock as well as stakeholders of tourism, whether; it is a government agency, nongovernmental organization or any other stakeholder of today. Two major objectives often used or identified in the management of various forms of destinations across the world are sustainability and quality. Globally large numbers of initiatives were suggested to meet these goals of destination management. The present study tries to examine the parameters of UNWTO pertaining to these goals of destination management. The study also throws light on linkages of various components of sustainability and quality criteria of destination management suggested by UNWTO

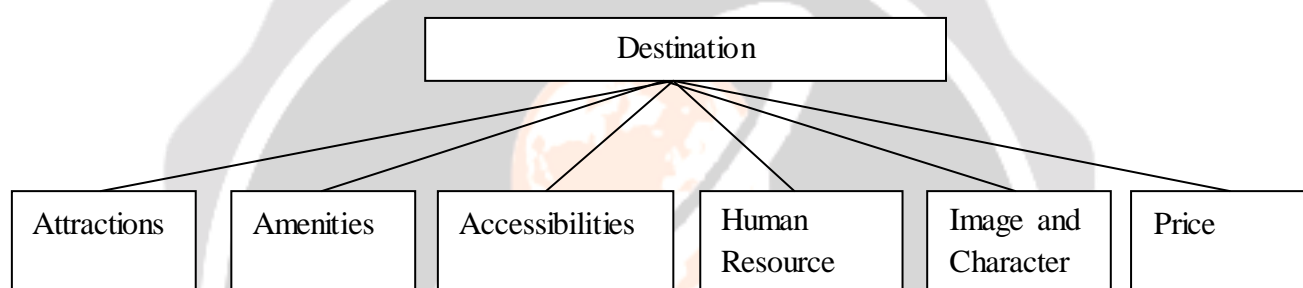**Key words:** *Sustainability, Quality, Destination*

1. Sustainability

Sustainability is a systemic concept, relating to the continuity of economic, social, institutional and environmental aspects of human society. It is intended to be a means of configuring civilization and human activity so that society, its members and its economies are able to meet their needs and express their greatest potential in the present, while preserving biodiversity and natural ecosystems, and planning and acting for the ability to maintain these ideals in a very long term. According to Wilderer, (2007) the word Nachhaltigkeit (the German term for sustainability) was first used with this meaning in 1713. Since 1962 the issue of sustainability has been discoursed in different forms and context globally. This wakeup call was given by the 'Silent Spring'. The concept of sustainability relates to the maintenance and enhancement of environmental, social and economic resources, in order to meet the needs of current and future generations. The term sustainability is the ability to use and retain the resources, means and ends for present as well as future generations. Initial reference about sustainability has confined to natural environment (Ceballos-Lascuraı́n 1988). Sustainability may then be defined as maintaining well-being over a long, perhaps even an indefinite period. This covers largely the environmental dimension of the triple bottom line, but environment and sustainability are not synonymous. The definition of sustainability adopted by the United Nations (1997) in its Agenda for Development defines as a Development is a multidimensional undertaking to achieve a higher quality of life for all people. Economic development, social development and environmental protection are interdependent and mutually reinforcing components of sustainable development

2. Destination Sustainability

UNWTO defines tourism destination is a physical space in which a tourist spends at least one overnight. It includes tourism products such as support services and attractions and tourist resources within one day's return travel time. It has physical and administrative boundaries defining its management, and images and perceptions defining its market competitiveness. Local destinations incorporate various stakeholders often including a host community, and can nest and network to form larger destinations (UNWTO,2007).

Destinations contain a number of basic elements (Cho, B. H. 2000), which attract the visitor to the destination and which satisfy their needs on arrival. These are summarized in Figure-.The provision and quality of these elements will be influential in the visitor's decisions to make their trip.

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                          │     Destination      │
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Attractions	Amenities	Accessibilities	Human Resource	Image and Character	Price

According to Buhalis, (2000) defines destinations as places that offer an amalgam of tourism products and services, which are consumed under a brand name of the destination. He argues that 'they are well defined geographical regions, understood by visitors as unique entities with a core of six main provisions, i.e. attractions, accessibility, available packages activities and ancillary services. Tourist destination is a target area in a given region for which a significant offer of attractions and infrastructure of tourism are typical. In a broader sense these are countries, regions, human settlements and other areas that are typical with their high concentration of tourists, developed services and other tourist infrastructure, thereby greater concentration of visitors in the long run.

3. Dimensions of sustainability

Large numbers of studies discuss various dimensions of sustainability. According to Hart (1999) Sustainability defined as the balance between ecological, economic, and social values. Sustainability is frequently applied to communities, development and natural resource management (Hart, 1999;). It has been applied to tourism, as an element of development (Wall 1997; Cole, 2006).

Economic sustainability

Economic sustainability is a core aspect of all development initiatives. Emerging approaches like Pro- poor tourism, Inclusive tourism, Responsible tourism seeks to contribute to the wellbeing of the community both directly and indirectly. Tourism has come to be regarded by many as a development strategy that has the dual

advantage of benefiting the local economy while simultaneously protecting the local natural and cultural capital. (Thomlinson E and Getz D 1996). For example, Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) the first and largest conservation area of Nepal introduced various types of ecotourism products and enhanced the living standards of the local people by following the principles of maximum people's participation viz., employing 62 percent of the country's total trekkers for tourism (www.unep.org).

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Ecological sustainability

Tourism provides opportunities to enhance environmental management and reduce damage to the environment (Kangas et al., 1993). According to Blamey (2001) ecological sustainability involves the maintenance of natural capital consisting of both source and sink functions, over a specified time space. In other words, ecological sustainability involves the maintenance of natural capital on the basis: (a) output rule; waste emission within the capacity of local environment without unacceptable degradation, and (b) input rule; renewable within the limits of regenerative capacity and non renewable should limit within the renewable substitute (Weaver 2011).

Ecological sustainability indicates the conservation of natural resources in a minimum of status quo principles also promote application of natural resource for the economic wellbeing of the population that do not lead to the degradation of resource base through adverse impact of the living organism. In other words it is an environmentally sound resource processing and consumptions which take in to account optimization of resource use. It will bring environmental purity and resource efficiency at the destination by maintaining the biological diversity without altering the physical integrity of the environment.

In practice ecological sustainability implies the application of natural resources utilization that does not result in the degradation of the resource base through adverse impacts on the ecosystem, habitats, or species being harvested. It therefore entails environmentally sound harvesting processing and consumption patterns, which take into account optimization of resource use. In other words, environmental sustainability entails utilization of the resource base while maintaining its biological viability and ecosystem integrity.

Socio- cultural sustainability

Weaver, (2010) understand that the social sustainability of ecotourism is a fair distribution of benefits among relevant stakeholders, preservation of the local culture and norms, and maintenance of community structure. Preservation of local culture and values, capacity development ownership of property or business enterprises and community networking for ecotourism promotion as the indicators of social sustainability of ecotourism

Studies of Brunt and Courtney, (1999); Andereck et al., (2005) investigates how ecotourism affect the socio cultural characteristics of local communities, such as features of day to- day lives, habits, social activities, and beliefs and values, in both negative and positive ways. Further elaborates that ecotourism is considered to be sustainable when it affects these socio cultural attributes in a positive way.

Burchett (1992) studied all most all aspects of cultural sustainability. He states that by developing an appreciation of local communities and their customs and traditions a process of mutual respect and understanding between societies can be greatly enhanced and achieve successful interaction between hosts and

guests will only benefit and sustain the well being of the local communities.. Tourism may enhance the integrity of the host communities improve welfare of the people (Lindberg and Hawkins,1993) instill a sense of local pride to villagers (Cater, 1994) and may promote or strengthen cultural heritage (Brandon, 1996).

Social sustainability seeks to ensure that tourism policy does not undermine the development or survival of appropriate indigenous community structures, or even have an impact upon the nature of the local/regional social structure per se.

Political sustainability

Traditionally the word sustainability has been attributed to economic, socio-cultural and ecological aspects. However, entire aspects of sustainability become futile if the participative or the mode or structure of intervention of stakeholders is not included as part of resource appropriation. This intervention structure adopted by stakeholders/ stock holder is called political sustainability. In anthropocentric development arena this aspect plays a very important role. The participative role of the stake and stock holders could bring all other dimensions of sustainability. In reality, very little emphasis is being given to these directions in the developmental discourse.

Henry and Jackson (1996) in their study stated that while the physical and cultural environments have provided a focus in the literature on sustainability, insufficient attention has been paid to the sustainability of particular political programmes, and to particular approaches to management. In effect, the focus has been on the sustainability of ends (cultural and physical, and to a much lesser extent economic), than on means (the viability and desirability of specific political programmes and approaches to management). As no power relation is stable, continuous attempts of all parties to increase power are integral to continuous development of destinations (Blichfeldt et al., 2014).

Church and Coles (2007) in their study insist that Power in tourism to be clarified in detail. Tourism as a tool for rural development requires shifting economic and political control from governments, multilateral organizations, and NGOs to local communities. In other words, political sustainability represents the ability to promote and realize sustainable practices without sacrificing political legitimacy and employing participative approaches to policy development.

Destination Quality

The term Quality is always contextually defined and there could be any specific criteria for adoption and replication to show case or for measurement. However, quality destinations are one of the factors for sustainability of the destinations. According to ISO Quality is totality of features and characteristics of a products or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs Quality has become very important in this age of increasing competition in destination management. Tourists' expectations are constantly rising, therefore service quality is a necessary growth strategy for the tourism industry these days (Augustyn and Ho, 1998).

According to Gitelson and Crompton (1984) out of the five factors that lead customers to revisit a destination, two are related to the service quality in the destination. One factor which makes customers revisit a destination is the reduced risk due to proper safety and security measures due to policy and operational interventions. The other factor is to expose others to the experiences which had been satisfying to the vacationers.

Even then, Studies (Laws, 1995; Woods, 2003) states that importance of managing quality at the destination level is increasingly recognized. Studies on destination quality are in infancy, those aspect in the context of emerging and matured destinations, urban destinations, golf, or sun and beach destinations and nature parks have been highlighted in Vogt and Fesenmaier (1995).

According to UNWTO (2007) quality management and assurance systems are fundamental to a healthy and growing tourism industry. It is of primary importance to ensure the overall quality of the destination (the public realm) – the quality and availability of public toilets, clean and safe streets and a clean environment. The quality of natural resources and cultural resources as well as the host communities can be sustained and enhanced by programmes such as Geotourism.

Components of destination quality

According to UNWTO Guide for Local Authorities on Developing Sustainable Tourism (WTO, 2003) major component of destination quality consists of:

Safety and security: Safe and secured destination for the free movement of visitors

Hygiene: Destination should be clean and hygiene with proper management

Accessibility: Physical, communication and service barriers must be done away

Transparency: Truthful information on the characteristics and coverage of the product and its total price

Authenticity: Making the product markedly distinct from other similar products. Authenticity must meet consumer expectations

Harmony: Harmony with the human and natural environment pertains to sustainability .

Relevance of Destination Quality

Ecotrans (2002) analysis shows that 60 per cent of German tourists are concerned about litter, 51 per cent about noise pollution and 46 per cent about good nature protection in the destination. Travel Industry Association of America and National Geographic Traveler, The Geotourism Study of National Geographic Traveler (2002) states that 61 per cent of US tourists are looking for travel experiences involving well preserved natural, historical or cultural sites. Added that 53 per cent had a better travel experience when they learn as much as possible about their destination's customs, geography and culture. In their study Harold Goodwin and Justin Francis (2003) reiterates that three in four British tourists agree that their trip should include experiences of local culture and food.

According to Weaver and Lawton (2006), in order to market tourism products and services the very basic nature of service industry need to understood. By providing high quality services, tourist destinations are more likely to entice both first-time and repeat visitors. Tourists who have a quality experience are likely to communicate favorable reports to friends and relatives. This creates both repeat business and potential for new business. Unfortunately the reverse is also possible. If a quality tourist service is not experienced, then tourist business is lost. Not only do the unsatisfied tourists not return to the destination, but they will tell others about their disappointment. So destination quality is the key factor necessary for the sustenance and promotion of a destination, also to;

- Gives the edge over other destinations
- Performance makes destinations to satisfy tourist and branding becomes easy
- Create repeat visitors

- Increase revenue to the destination

- For a stable tourism industry and protects jobs and also to reduce the seasonality to an extent.

- Provide a better quality of life for local residents.

- Avoid further erosion of quality of destinations

Jiang Bo,Zheng Hong-hua (2007) Comparing the advantages and disadvantages of the existing service quality assessment models, based on framework concept of 'destination eight factors′ evolving from "tourism six factors", the paper presents the innovative principles and objectives of the evaluation model as well as the destination of the eight elements of a service quality evaluation model of tourist destination. The model includes tourist destination service quality factors and evaluation of service quality at tourist destination.

UNWTO Quality Support Committee agreed that quality of tourism was "the result of a process which implies the satisfaction of all the legitimate product and service needs, requirements and expectations of the consumer, at an acceptable price, in conformity with mutually accepted contractual conditions and the underlying quality determinants such as safety and security, hygiene, accessibility, transparency, authenticity and harmony of the tourism activity concerned with its human and natural environment" (UNWTO, 2008).
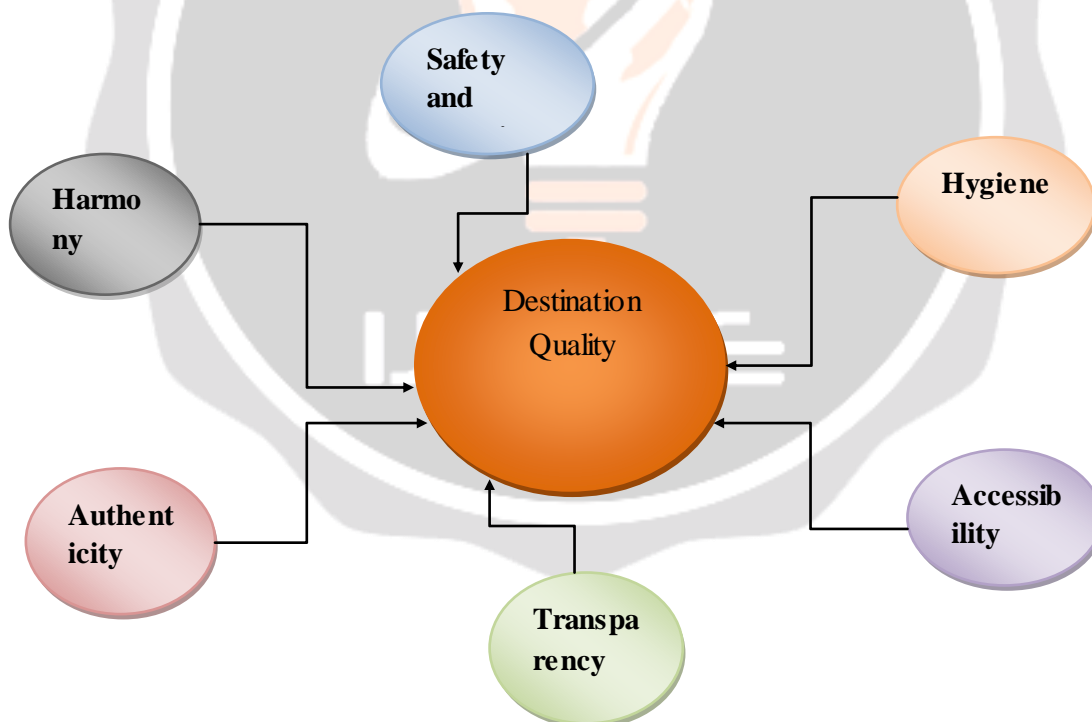
Source: WTO Guide for Local Authorities on Developing Sustainable Tourism (WTO, 2003)

Destination sustainability –quality nexuses

According to the WTO Guide for Local Authorities on Developing Sustainable Tourism, "Maintaining the sustainability of tourism requires managing environmental and socio-economic impacts, establishing

environmental indicators and maintaining the quality of the tourism products and tourist markets" (UNWTO, 2008 p 11).

According to Mohammed I. Eraqi (2009) Improving the quality tourist destinations is essential in satisfying tourists' needs, making the industry more competitive, and ensuring that tourism development is in a balanced and sustainable way. His research aims to explain how Integrated Quality Management (IQM), as an integrated management tool, can improve the level of sustainability in Egyptian tourism to enhance competitiveness. Study revealed that the level of indicators of IQM and of sustainability in Egyptian tourism is weak because the level of cost and externalities of tourism development is high the transport system is poor and operates in an inefficient manner. Together, IQM and sustainability provide the basis for building community, industry and agency capacity to manage tourism resources in a more integrated manner to improve the competitiveness of destination.

UNWTO Baseline Indicators of Destination Sustainability

- Local satisfaction with tourism
- Effects of tourism on communities
- Tourism seasonality
- Sustaining tourist satisfaction
- Economic benefits of tourism
- Energy management
- Water availability and conservation
- Drinking water quality
- Sewage treatment
- Solid waste management (garbage)
- Development control
- Controlling use intensity

When we examine these baselines indicators it can be found that certain variables like Drinking water quality, Sewage treatment, Solid waste management (garbage) directly contribute towards the quality destinations. However development control and controlling use intensity indicators call for optimality in resources use and warrant prudent norm for development or conversion of resources for the tourist consumption. The term local satisfaction, in practice it is very difficult to measure as it is the result of various other aspects other that tourism. For example even if tourism provides local jobs the community may not be satisfied in case where their opinions were not valued whole taking destination development decision. In this case a proper participative mechanism is also required for meeting local satisfaction. In practice, all dimensions of sustainability become important to gain local confidence. Sustaining tourist satisfaction is also an extension of maintaining sustainability at the destinations. Safety and security of the destination for both host as well as guest, authenticity of the tourism products offered, transparency of the transaction at in and enroute tourist sites, clean and hygienic environment and harmonious environment between human and ecosystem is possible through cautious resource use and standardized delivery of various products.

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