Creating sustainable linkages between tourism and development

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Abstract

The paper intends to provide the integrated planning approaches and mechanisms for sustainable development and tourism industry. The integrated approach is an unavoidable requirement which helps the local communities in realizing their true potential in the form of heritage wealth and developing a sustainable approach of development, while providing the distinct high-end products and services to the customer. The integrated approach makes the tourism as a contributor of the upliftment of the society than creating an environmental threat to the ecosystem. The paper covers the international reports that drive the political actions being taken regarding tourism and the specific aspects of the principals, plans and policies being framed with the environmental considerations. The Brundtland's commission 1987 report, United nations conference, namely Rio, Rio+10, and Rio+20, play a huge role in driving the sustainability sensitivities of various administrations. A deeper study of the reports can provide a better study of the issues considered unavoidable regarding the tourism industry. The integrated approach can help in realizing the tourism industry aspirations while serving the economy, environment and society justifiably.
1. Introduction

The recent environmental burden faced by the countries owing to the uncontrolled tourism inflow, implying not only environmental but adverse social and economic impacts, has led to devise more strategic ways of handling tourism. The sustainable practices of tourism were developed to meet the economic objectives of tourism while preserving the natural environment abundance. The sustainable tourism practices ensure the best utilization of the environmental resources, but ensuring the preservation of these resources at the same time. The tourists get attracted to the premium destinations, providing a major source of earning for the local inhabitants. The increasing attraction of the tourists towards well preserved serene natural abundance provides impetus for further preservation and maintenance of the natural heritage. Sustainable tourism represents a set of policies, principles and methodologies for tourism development such that the area’s environmental resources remain protected for future (Lane, 1994).

The adoption of sustainable development concept since late 1980s (WCED, 1987) drew more attention towards environmental management. Tourism industry shared the same concerns of sustainability deriving direct links to the concept. The objective of the paper is to provide the integrated planning approaches and mechanisms for sustainable development and tourism industry. The integrated approach is an unavoidable requirement which helps the local communities in realizing their true potential in the form of heritage wealth and developing a sustainable approach of development, while providing the distinct high-end products and services to the customer. The integrated approach makes the tourism as a contributor of the upliftment of the society than creating an environmental threat to the ecosystem. 5 international reports viz. UNCHE (1972), WCED (1987), UNCED (1992), WSSD (2002), UNCSD (2012); which are believed to affect the stream of sustainable development at a political level, have been studied. The understanding of sensibilities derived from these reports help in identifying various issues and strengths gained by the concept over the period of time.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism is as vague a concept as sustainable development is. It is interpreted in various contexts, leading to be deficient in consensus and clarity on its meaning and objectives. While it remains to be an economic activity for some, it is believed to be an area of defined sustainable development policies for others (Cronin, 1990). Sustainable tourism should reflect the ideologies of sustainable development, yet the two concepts differ sharply. Despite its future-oriented and holistic approach, tourism remains to be a product centered affair (Sharpley, 2000). Tourism has been an economy dependent activity, whereas
sustainable development implies major concern over the environmental deterioration. "The essence of sustainable tourism development is to making the tourism and natural, cultural and human environment as a whole" (Lei, Ning and Zhang, 2015). The concept of sustainable tourism, as developed by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) in the context of the United Nations sustainable development process, refers to tourist activities “leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems” (see UN, 2001a). Sustainable tourism as defined by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) is "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities" (UNEP and WTO, 2005). As per WTO, Sustainable tourism should

a) optimally utilize environmental resources maintaining and conserving the natural resources and biodiversity.

b) Conserve and contribute to the socio-cultural heritage and traditional values of the host communities.

c) Ensure long-term and equitable distribution of socio-economic benefits derived from economic operations.

Sustainable tourism is a continuous process implying equal participation of both local communities as well as the administration, reaping socio-economic benefits for both while maintaining the natural heritage.

2.2 Sustainable Development

World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) proposed sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987). The concept generated concern over inter-generational and intra-generational aspect of development, while concentrating on economic, environmental and social aspects of the development. “The development to be sustainable, it must take into account of social and ecological factors, as well as economic ones; of the living and non-living resource base; and of the long term as well as the short term advantages and disadvantages of alternative actions” (IUCN, 1980). The natural resources and other available materials are being consumed at an uncontrolled and unchecked rate for the developmental activities. The depleting amount of the resources, raises a concern about their availability for the coming generations. Humans, for their survival and other basic activities, are dependent on the nature. All economic activities and objectives will seize in the absence of appropriate living conditions. Hence, the issues of sustainability and survival have been raised around the development agenda, which contributes largest harm to the environmental and natural conditions. However, the concept has been ambiguous and
vague lacking clarity and unanimous approach. "The concept of sustainable development represents a shift in understanding of humanity’s place on the planet, but it is open to interpretation of being anything from almost meaningless to of extreme importance to humanity" (Hopwood et al, 2005). Development depends on harnessing resources at its disposal to develop further whereas sustainability advocates about conservation of the resources creating conflict about the two opposing words. Also, sustainable development is considered to be a human-centered view of future requirement of environmental and other resources for their survival.

However, sustainable development shares the same basic concern of deteriorating environmental conditions with that of tourism. Sustainable development is known to be the parental paradigm of sustainable tourism. Hence, five international reports that have implied major impact on the objective of sustainable development have been studied to understand their implications for the sustainable tourism.

2.3 International Actions

Various international events and actions have recognized the importance and need to integrate tourism and sustainable development principles. The discussions over the environmental issues started internationally through the United Nations Conference on Human Environment (1972) in Stockholm. The impact of developmental inspirations over the environment and its ecological balance was looked upon. World Conservation Strategy (WCS) published in 1980 by International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources defined development as "the modification of the biosphere and the application of human, financial, living and non-living resources to satisfy human needs and improve the quality of human life " (IUCN, 1980). The report stressed upon conservation of essential ecological processes, life-support systems and genetic diversity; without a direct mention about the tourism activities. It did mention about the concern for the sustainable development. The 1987 report 'Our Common Future' by World Commission on Environment and Development brought the issue of sustainable development on an international platform where the development was analyzed for its sustainability. Then United Nations started a series of conferences on sustainable development in 1992, 2002 and 2012; known as Rio, Rio+10 and Rio+20 conferences. These conferences have been discussed here to understand their concern about the tourism development.

a) United Nations conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE), 1972

This conference, organized in Stockholm, shared its concern over the depleting environmental conditions as a result of the developmental activities yielding material benefits. The report comprised of 26 principles and 109 recommendations drawing attention towards conservation of ecosystem, management of renewable as well as non-renewable resources, environmental education, economic and social equality and
development among various other associated issues. It also established 5 June to be observed as the 'World Environment Day' every year. Regarding tourism, the report mentioned about protection of tourist sites and wildlife (Recommendation 24.c, 37); formation of group of experts in environmental disciplines and activities concerning the tourism sector also along with other areas; to enable information exchange between countries with similar environmental conditions and developmental levels (96.d, UNCHE, 1972).

b) World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987
Our Common Future
This 1987 report dealt with the problems arising from the development initiatives and activities. It established that development can be sustainable if the environmental and social considerations are taken along with the economic objectives. Regarding tourism, the report mentioned that though tourism is seen as a medium to earn foreign exchange for developmental objectives, but increasing population lays a huge stress on the existing resources thus affecting the tourism. Hence, population explosion needs to be controlled. Tourism should be more wildlife based promoting wildlife management, anti-poaching and protected area management. Hence, tourism can aid in conservation and development programmes.

Agenda 21: Programme of Action for Sustainable Development
Along with conservation and management of resources for development, and social and economic dimensions of development, this report focused on strengthening the role of various groups for sustainable and equitable development. The role of women, youth and children, NGOs, indigenous communities, workers, farmers, scientific communities, and industries was stressed along with the role of the respective governments. Regarding tourism, it invoked the promotion of 'environmentally sound and culturally sensitive tourism programmes' as a part of sustainable development strategies (7.20.e), better utilization of economic instruments and marketing activities to promote tourism (8.33.a), adoption of eco-tourism (11.20, 11.21), diversify mountain economies by strengthening tourism (13.6.e), sustainable tourism (13.15.b), and promotion of tourism without affecting the marine environment(17.19, 17.72) etc.

d) World Summit on Sustainable Development, 2002
From our origins to the future
This Johannesburg conference reaffirmed its commitment to Agenda 21 principles and planned actions. It delivered its commitment to build 'a humane, equitable, and caring global society' (WSSD, 2002). It conversed about energy considerations in the
tourism sector (20.b), promote sustainable tourism development and eco-tourism (43), develop community based initiatives for sustainable tourism (58.g), and support Africa's sustainable tourism initiatives (70). It endorsed the initiatives and actions for both sustainable tourism and eco-tourism. It called for international support, technical assistance, promote education and training programmes, tourism business development and awareness programmes for sustainable tourism and eco-tourism.


The future we want

This conference, held in Rio De Janeiro, boasted the full participation of civil society while accepting poverty eradication as the biggest global challenge. It gave clear attention to sustainable tourism, stressing that well-managed tourism can contribute significantly in three dimensions of sustainable development as it had close linkages with all other dimensions of economy, environment and society. "We recognize the need to support sustainable tourism activities and relevant capacity building that promote environmental awareness, conserve and protect the environment, respect wildlife, flora, biodiversity, ecosystems and cultural diversity, and improve the welfare and livelihoods of local communities by supporting their local economies and the human and natural environment as a whole" (UNCSD, 2012). It invoked for the support of all to invest in and promote the tourism industry.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

Tourism acts as a mechanism to reinforce the ideologies of sustainable development. It can help protect and conserve the environment in areas where poverty implies a pressure on the environmental exploitation; prohibiting economically beneficial environmental degradation like wood logging, mineral extraction; and development of environmentally rich areas for tourism promotion (Hunter, 1997). Tourism as an activity is dependent on experience of unaltered natural environments and authentic cultural traditions, which implies a direct interaction of local communities, the environment and the visitors. This can act as an avenue to generate awareness about the environmental issues and concerns while cultivating intercultural understanding, employment generation and other economic benefits (UNEP and WTO, 2005).

The international arena slowly turned its attention towards the tourism industry since 1972. Initially, concentrating on the protection of tourism sites and places, it recognized tourism as a medium to earn foreign exchange only. In the late 1980s, it realized the impact of growing population on it, and hence the need to control population and promote wildlife tourism in spite of non-specific tourism activities. 1990s saw the concept like eco-tourism whereby the environmentally sound tourism practices were promoted. The impact of tourism on the
cultural heritage was also recognized. In the early 2000s, the other aspects of the tourism industry, which laid a direct impact on sustainability notions like energy conservation, technology application and research and education programmes were introduced. It also led to generation of concepts like sustainable tourism and eco-tourism. The 2012 report saw the direct interaction of tourism initiatives on all other three dimensions of sustainable development, hence called for its proper planning and management. It also clarified the distinction between sustainable tourism and eco-tourism.

The tourism industry has grown since its inception, which would continue to do so in the coming years. The growth optimized through proper management and actions can not only provide a better tourist base, but also aid in economic and social upliftment of various sections of the society with intact cultural and environmental heritage. Though sustainable tourism initiatives contribute towards minimizing the harmful effects of tourism activities on the environmental and ecological balance of the places, yet stronger policy implications and regulations to be devised to monitor and control the tourist activities which slowly brings a great harm to the local environmental balance. Greater technical and financial assistance can help in better regulation of the tourism activities. A controlled amount of tourist inflow should be enforced to maintain the cultural heritage while directing a focused tourism initiative. Informed decisions and actions can certainly aid in upgrading the tourism management without affecting the economic benefits drawn.

References


