

Tourism planning: impacts as benchmarks for sustainable development plans

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Purpose: The main objective of this article is to provide a comprehensive list of indicators to be used on the tourism sector, aiming the development of sustainable strategic plans. Specific objectives include making a comprehensive assessment and categorization of those indicators, allowing a more easily system that guarantees the use of those benchmarks, as a base for objectives definition and performance standards monitorization.

Design/methodology/approach: This research adopted a descriptive design using secondary data. The data was analysed using content analysis and *a posteriori* categorization system, resulting on 87 indicators divided into positive and negative within six categories.

Findings: The results showed that there are six key factors that may have a significant impact on tourism development, suggesting they could be used for setting objectives and performance indicators when developing a strategic plan and therefore, ensuring sustainability of a destination and its stakeholders.

Practical Implications: The framework adopted in this study offers a practical tool to be used by destination and organizations planners, improving a sustainable tourism performance, within economic, socio-cultural, psychological, political/administrative, tourism/commercial and environmental/physical measurement standards. This guidance may help decision makers to design, manage and control sustainable strategic plans in a more effective way.

Originality/value: This paper links the academic debate on impacts of tourism with the designing and implementation of sustainable tourism policies and strategies.

Keywords: Sustainable development; strategic plans; tourism impacts; performance indicators

Article Classification:

1. Introduction

In a period when social and environmental problems caused by the growth of tourism are requiring new solutions, demands for sustainable tourism practices have received increasing attention in academy and political arena. As a result, a wide variety of policies and strategies for dealing with tourism growth has been suggested and well debated among tourism stakeholders. However, despite the dominant discourse on tourism sustainability, its application in practice remains difficult.

Hence, the main objective of this article is to provide a comprehensive list of indicators to be used on the tourism sector, aiming the development of sustainable strategic plans. Specific objectives include making a inclusive assessment and categorization of those indicators, allowing a more easily system that guarantees the use of those benchmarks, as a base for objectives definition and performance standards monitorization.

For this purpose, the study adopted a descriptive design using secondary data, analysed using content analysis and *a posteriori* categorization system. It is hoped that these results could complement the tourism sustainable debate and provide advice on how to continuously implement sustainable tourism practices.

The structure of this article is as follows. After the introduction, section two briefly presents the theoretical background to the context of the study, by reviewing the literature on tourism planning, sustainable development and tourism impacts. The third section, using several tourism indicators, offers a framework for the development of sustainable tourism plans. Finally, the last section provides concluding remarks and makes suggestions for addressing future sustainable tourism development.

2. Tourism planning

A strategic plan is the document resulted from a strategic planning process that serves to guide future directions, activities, programs and actions, resulting on the impact that the process has on the organizations and their environment, as well on its stakeholders (Hall, 2001). Hall (cit. in Cooper and Hall, 2017) presents five approaches of tourism planning at the destination level: *boosterism*; an economic/industry-oriented approach; a physical/spatial approach; a community-oriented approach and a sustainable tourism approach. Nowadays, as mentioned by Cooper and Hall (2016), contemporary tourism planning is strongly oriented towards the notion of sustainable tourism development. Moreover, most of the actual models used on the tourism sector have a vision associated to sustainability and strategic goals that include to reinforce the competitive advantages, to ensure the quality of the touristic experience, to enhance the quality of life of the communities and to value the resources.

According to Cooper and Hall (2016), problems associated with the consequences of tourism are often treated in a one-dimensional, often disciplinary fashion rather than seen issues as being intertwined. The complexity of many impacts associated with tourism development suggests that more than one disciplinary viewpoint is required to help solve problems. They also emphasize an ideal: the symbiotic relationship or a win-win situation in which tourism positively contributes to the environment and vice-versa. In addition, destination planning tends to be undertaken by a combination of urban and regional planning bodies and economic development organizations. This scenery requires not only integrated assessments of tourism's effects but also an integrated planning strategy.

As stated, destination planning tends to be undertaken by a combination of urban and regional planning bodies and economic development organizations. This scenery requires not only integrated assessments of tourism's effects, but also an integrated planning strategy. Pointing on this direction, Ruhanen et al. (cit. in Cooper and Hall, 2016) claim that strategic planning requires a process that is integrative in terms of bringing stakeholders together, being also well structured in terms of effective analysis, the

development of clear goals and measurable objectives, evaluation and monitoring and a clear implementation strategy. Likewise, according to Silva (2017), developing a strategic plan normally occurs in a complex set of institutional arrangements that include many different organizations and is made through phases: diagnosis, conception, implementation and control (Silva, 2017). Our assumption is that, especially on the second (e.g. definitions of objectives) and fourth (e.g. performance indicators) phases of a strategic plan, the use of indicators that reflect sustainability concerns can help its development. Having a comprehensive list of indicators available to the planners, can ensure that this question is contemplated and more easily incorporated on the plans.

Hall (2001) defends that strategic planning is an essential component for sustainable tourism planning. One of the most important factors in strategic planning for sustainability is the identification of relevant indicators for sustainability which are measurable, meet objectives, and on which stakeholder agree as to their relevance and as to how results should be interpreted. So, it seems clear that the use of indicators that help achieving these goals, when developing strategic plans for destinations or companies is highly relevant.

3. Sustainable tourism development and tourism impacts

The concept of sustainable tourism development is not new in the theoretical and practical debate. In fact, more than two decades ago, UNWTO already defined sustainable tourism as the guiding vision for the development efforts of all destinations, establishing that:

“Sustainable Tourism development meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. It is envisaged as 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 system.”

(UNWTO, 1993, p.19)

Likewise, various international conventions have elaborated principles for sustainable tourism development (e.g. *Marrakesh Task Force Sustainable Tourism*, 2006, *Sustainable Tourism for Development*, UNWTO, 2013, *International Forum on Sustainable Development of Tourism and Innovation*, 2014). More specifically, it is argued that sustainable tourism is an effective tool to minimize potential economic, sociocultural and environmental negative impacts (such as changes in values and traditions, congestion, inflation, overcrowding, air and noise pollution) as far as possible and, at the same time, it is an instrument to provide a variety of returns that generates mutual benefits to hosts and visitors (such as employment, quality of life, among many others). For that, as Byrd, Bosley and Dronberger (2009) argue, all stakeholders need to be involved in the process.

On the other hand, sustainable tourism has also been an important topic in the academic tourism literature and the input of a significant number of tourism strategic plans, resulting in a renowned worldwide current trend towards tourism development (e.g. Buclkey, 2012; Buttler, 1999; Canna & Theuma, 2013; Cardoso and Silva, 2018; Duran *et.al.* 2015; Faulker & Tideswell, 1997; Fyall & Garrod, 1998; Sharpley, 2009). In a general sense, much of these studies or plans recognize that sustainability is an effective

vehicle of development that brings together social-cultural, environmental and economic planning methods (Hall and Lew cit. in Cooper and Hall, 216).

Nonetheless, it was over the last decade that increasing concerns for adverse tourism impacts, together with new challenges and opportunities brought by tourism growth, have placed sustainable tourism development under the spotlight. As a result, the discussion between sustainability and impacts of tourism became extremely popular among managers, policymakers and academics and many contributions have been published in the literature. According to Buckley (2012), it has been estimated that there are in excess of 5,000 published works on these topics.

Most probably, because economic aspects are more readily quantifiable and measurable, much of the early literature focus primarily on such impacts (Andriotis and Vaughan 2003; Huh and Vogt 2008, Haralambopoulos and Pizam, 1996; Vargas-Sánchez et al. 2009). In a general sense, it has been widely recognized that, despite of the perception of some negative aspects, tourism generates significant economic benefits and supports a wider social and cultural development of the destination (Andereck et al., 2005; Brida et al., 2011). Aiming a sustainable tourism development, the focus of tourism impacts shifted to a growing interest in the impacts of tourism under other distinct labels, especially, the socio-cultural and environmental ones, but also psychological or commercial impacts (e.g. Cooper and Hall, 2016). For instance, several studies reported that the socio-cultural impacts, as they related as social change, education and conservation; quality of life or cultural exchange, have been recognized as fundamental precondition for a sustainable tourism development (Andereck et al. 2005 and 2007; Haralambopoulos and Pizam 1996). In the same line of thought, Postma & Schmuecker (2017) underline that tourism may cause stress on the community, if incorrect tourism development occurs. Actually, in the recent years, growing concern has been expressed about the impacts of tourism on residents of host destinations (e.g. Brida et al, 2011; Cardoso and Silva, 2018; Duran *et.al.* 2015; Postma & Schmuecker, 2017; Sharpley, 2009). On the other hand, tourism can also produce positive socio-cultural effects, such as an increase in the community services, recreational facilities or cultural exchanges.

Other studies also demonstrate that the tourism development should protect natural resource and preserve wildlife to avoid some common perceived impacts of tourism on the environment: such as air and noise pollution; littering and degradation of landscape. (Andereck et al., 2005; Andriotis and Vaughan, 2003; Ap and Crompton, 1998; Deery *et al.* 2011; Frauman and Banks, 2011; Kuvan and Akan, 2005; Vargas-Sánchez *et al.* 2009). This reflects the growing concern of *overtourism*' problems that can be foreseen as result of the growth of tourism movements, such as water shortages, traffic congestion, sewerage problems and electricity supply shortfalls, among others (Milano et al, 2019).

Hence, it is not surprising to have a contemporary tourism planning strongly oriented towards the notion of sustainable tourism development, based on the combination of distinct variables, linked to economic, environmental and socio-cultural aspects. As noticed before, most of the actual models used on the tourism sector have a vision associated to sustainability and strategic goals that include: to reinforce the competitive advantages; to ensure the quality of the touristic experience; to enhance the quality of life of the communities and to value the resources, and so, being aware of the consequences of the visitation is not only important in terms of community, environmental and social responsibilities, but also in terms of good business practices (Gössling et al.; Coles et al.,

cit in Cooper and Hall, 2016). Therefore, it seems clear that the use of indicators that help achieving those strategic goals, when developing strategic plans for destinations or companies, is highly relevant.

4. Methods and results

Based on the primary objective of this research, that is, to develop a tool that can be used when designing strategic plans that helps ensure their sustainability, a descriptive research was conducted, collecting secondary data from 40 studies (e.g. Mathieson and Hall; Ritchie; Krippendorf; Hall; Lew et al.; Gössling and Hall; Hall and Page, cit. in Cooper and Hall, 2016; Rushmann; Santana; Cooper et al. cit. in Oliveira e Salazar, 2011), published on English-speaking peer-reviews journals between 1987 and 2018, as well as some official publications (e.g. ETIS, 2016; UNWTO, 2013).

The data was analysed using a content analysis method. Three categories were *a priori* selected to classify those impacts: economic, environmental/physical and social/cultural impacts. Three new categories were then added, during the analysis: psychological, political/administrative and tourism/commercial, resulting on *a posteriori* categorization system. A total of 87 impacts was collected and divided among those categories, and each one of these on positive and negative, as presented on the table below.

Table 1. Tourism impacts classification

| Positive economic impacts (10) | Negative economic impacts (10) |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased expenditures • Creation of employment • Increased in labour supply • Increased value of real estate • Increased in standard of living • Improved investments in infrastructures and services • Increased free trade • Increased foreign investment • Increased entrepreneurship & Investments • Creating new markets for the local products | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Localised inflation and price increases • Replacement of local labour by outside labour • Real estate speculation • Increased income gap between wealthy and poor • Opportunity cost of investment in tourism means that other services and sectors do not get support • Inadequate consideration of alternative investment • Increased free trade • Loss of local ownership • Increased seasonal jobs |
| Positive environmental/physical impacts (11) | Negative environmental/physical impacts (9) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in natural processes that enhance environmental values • Maintenance of biodiversity • Architectural conservation • Preservation of natural and built heritage • Maintenance and recreation of habitat and ecosystems • Conservation measures to reduce impact (energy, water, sewage, solid waste, transportation) • Biosecurity measures • Improved sewage systems • Water conservation measures • Increased awareness of environmental issues • Host community benefits from recreation and sport facilities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in natural environmental processes • Loss of biodiversity • Architectural pollution • Destruction of heritage • Destruction of habitat and ecosystems/competition for existing lands uses • Introduction of alien species • Increased run-off leading to eutrophication and algal blooms • Increased demand of water supply • Increased carbon footprint of tourists |

| | |
|---|--|
| Positive tourism/commercial impacts (7) | Negative tourism/commercial impacts (4) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased destination awareness • Increased investor knowledge concerning the potential for investment and commercial activity in the destination • Developing of new infrastructures and facilities, including accommodation and attractions • Increase in accessibility • Improvements in destination image • Increased customer satisfaction and positive behavioural intentions • Increased use of locally produced products | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquisition of poor reputation as a result of inadequate facilities, improper practices or inflated prices • Negative reactions from existing enterprises due to the possibility of competition for human resources and state assistance • Inappropriate destination images and brands are used • Negative effects on destination image |
| Positive social/cultural impacts (10) | Negative social/cultural impacts (13) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased local participation in destination activities and events • Community renewal • Strengthening of community values and traditions • Exposure to new ideas through globalization and transnationalism • Creation of new community space • Increased number of women in management positions • Increased number of facilities, attractions and transportations accessible for people with disabilities • Increased liveliness • Understanding of different people and cultures • Changing of lifestyle | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercialization and commodification of activities, events and objects that may be of a personal nature • Changes in community structure • Weakening or loss of community values and traditions • Increases in criminal activity • Loss of community space • Social dislocation • Exceeding social carrying capacity • Loss of authenticity • Overtourism • Seasonality • Overdependency of tourism • Decrease in houses for residents • Loss of local residents in the historic centre |
| Positive psychological impacts (4) | Negative psychological impacts (3) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased local pride and community spirit • Tourism as a force for peace • Increased awareness of non-local values and perceptions • Increased number of residents satisfied with tourism | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tendency toward defensive attitudes concerning host regions • High possibility of misunderstandings leading to various degrees of host/visitor hostility • Increased alienation as a result of changes to what was familiar |
| Positive political/administrative impacts (4) | Negative political/administrative impacts (2) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced international recognition of destination region • Greater political openness • Development of new administrative institutions • Increased number of enterprises using a certification/labelling for sustainability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic exploration of local population to satisfy ambitions of political elite/growth coalitions • Tourism used to fund repressive regimes and legitimate their ideologies |

The findings revealed 46 positive impacts and 41 negative ones. The most frequent are negative social/cultural ones (n=13), followed by positive environmental/physical impacts (n=11). In terms of economic impacts, there are balanced, as 10 from each arise on the results.

The use of this tool must certainly be adapted, depending on the type of stakeholders, range of the plan, conditions or resources of the destination, because not all impacts are applicable to every scenario. For planners and decision-makers it is relevant to consider which specific impacts might be considered and, in particular, which of them are most significant, so they can adopt tourism development policies to control the main challenges

brought by tourism growth. It is also noted that the concept of development differentiates from growing by changing the perspective from short run to long run with a vision directed to sustainable development, that includes welfare creation and distribution, population's quality of life, nature conservation and future sustainability (Silva, 2017). This leads to the conclusion that on the context of sustainable tourism planning and development, there is a need for a more cohesive interaction amongst all stakeholders.

5. Concluding remarks

Assuming that current trends continue, aspirations for a more sustainable world will be increasingly out of reach. The challenge posed by the UN International Resource Panel is to know which significant changes those trends will require the global community to jointly pursue towards a sustainable world. Our proposal to the tourism sector, is exactly a better planning for the use of resources involved on that activity, aiming to emphasize the positive effects and mitigating the negative ones. This can be facilitated by being aware of those effects, which is the proposal presented on this paper: a comprehensive list of the potential impacts that planners, either destination or organizations, can use as benchmarks when developing sustainable strategic plans for the tourism sector. These benchmarks are divided into six topics: economic, environmental/physical, tourism/commercial, social/cultural, psychological and political/administrative.

A suggestion for future research is to develop a more complete tool, by adding new indicators considered relevant for sustainable development, and to, in a near future, use it as a standard for certificate strategic plans as sustainable.

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