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## TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE TOURISM: ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

**C.ARULJOTHI**  
**RESEARCH SCHOLAR**  
**DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS**  
**GANDHIGRAM RURAL INSTITUTE- DEEMED UNIVERSITY**  
**GANDHIGRAM**

**DR. S. RAMASWAMY**  
**PROFESSOR**  
**DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS**  
**GANDHIGRAM RURAL INSTITUTE- DEEMED UNIVERSITY**  
**GANDHIGRAM**


**ABSTRACT**

*Tourism is a socio-cultural and economic event, which have multiple environmental consequences along with economic and social benefits. This may be due to the natural and environmental resources create tourism mosaic- the basis of tourism development. Moreover, tourism may be accepted not only as an economic activity that creates positive economic impulses and expand rapidly, but also as an activity, that can harm artificial and natural environment and thus, create social and cultural problems. It is known fact that tourism seems to be a stable at the same time less volatile growth sector. If the revenues are distributed to the relevant stakeholders, including the community and the efforts on tourism are based on a sustainable future target, this growth can be translated and transformed into development, for which, sustainable tourism and policy are suggested by leisure economists. Sustainable Tourism refers to tourism, that is, long-termed, integrated, participatory, and environmentally, socially, culturally and economically compatible. Whereas, Sustainable Tourism Policy (STP) deals with a set of regulations, rules, guidelines, directives, and development objectives and strategies. Besides, STP should provide high-quality tourism services that can maximise the benefits from leisure enjoyed by tourists' (guests) and can bring maximum revenue for the stakeholders (hosts) without compromising the tourism needs of the present and future generations. In other words, tourism resources must be made available to our childrens' children, for which, the present generations should use the tourism resources more efficiently and take efforts in conservation and preservation of natural environment. With this backdrop, the authors have made an attempt to study the importance of sustainability in tourism and its policy. While framing STP, geographical and environmental resources should be considered for the sustainable tourism which should have a proper linkage to the rest of the economy that will bring the sustainable development conceived by the development thinkers like J.C.Kumarappa, who was the first person propounded the concept of Economy of Permanence and whose idea was translated into the concept of Sustainable Development.*

**KEYWORDS**

Sustainable tourism, Sustainable Development, tourism policy.

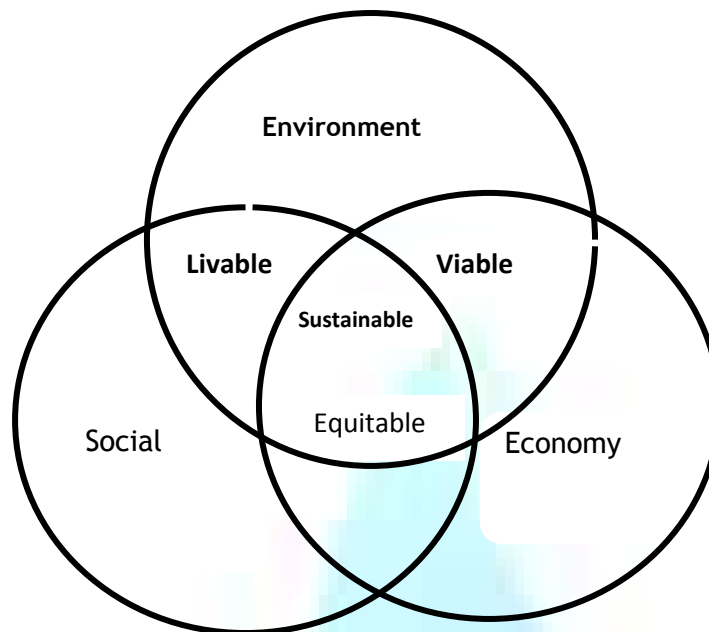
**INTRODUCTION**

ustainable Development (SD) is the slogan of 21<sup>st</sup> century, emerged from the ides of J.C.Kumarappa - a noted rural industrial economist- , who wrote a book entitled "Economy of Permanence". Later this concept was used by many others in their fields of specialisations. It is well known fact that Sustainable Tourism (ST) is one of the branches of SD, which seeks to improve the quality of human being, while living within the carrying capacity of supporting eco system, which performs the functions such as production function, information function, carrier function and regulatory function.(**World Conservation Union, UNEP, and World Wide Fund for Future, 1991**). Further, the base for ST is the segment of environment which includes lithosphere, hydrosphere and atmosphere and these spheres form part of biosphere, consisting of biotic and abiotic resources. These resources are considered as tourism resources thus, one can come to the conclusion that biosphere should be protected, preserved, and conserved for the sake of future generation, whose future needs are to be fulfilled. The needs of the present and the future generations are many and one such need is the desire for tourism along with other basic needs such as food, shelter and cloth. Tourism needs have been growing from primitive man to technological man. Hence, it is a time for relooking and redesigning the sustainable tourism policy aiming to achieve the economy of permanence vis-à-vis sustainable development.

**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: DEFINITIONS**

Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (**Brundtland Commission of 1987**) stated that "SD is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". In the words of **Vellinga et al (1995)**, SD refers to maintenance and sustainable utilisation of the functions (goods and services) provided by natural ecosystems and biospheric process. Similar view is expressed by **Cruz et al, (2007)**. They say that SD represents a balance between the goals of environmental protection and human economic development and between the present and future needs. It implies that equity in meeting the needs of people and integration of sectoral actions across space and time. Further, SD has used the concept of sustainability and explained in terms of environmental sustainability, economic sustainability, and social sustainability (**Panchamukhi, 2010**). Further, SD led by motives like spirit of enquiry, love of beauty, search for knowledge and respect for nature. However, it also aims for quality tourism that creates the least damage to the natural, social and cultural environment. SD also emanates to help the poor, to achieve self reliant development, to promote the issues of health control, to adopt the appropriate technologies, and to provide food, clean water and shelter for all.

FIGURE 1: CONCEPTUALISATION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



Sustainable development can also be achieved through the identified ST by increasing the levels of education and by promoting activism among travellers and making them more enthusiastic involving people to protect parks and other natural areas, and thus attracting more tourists (Pallavi Gupta). Development thinkers and the professionals have laid down certain SD indicators and they are: Pressure indicators, Impact Indicators and Sustainable Indicators. **Pressure Indicators:** It refers to flow variables. It shows development overtime of amount of emissions, discharges, depositions, extraction and interactions originating from a set of economic activities. It expresses the burden and takes places on stocks of environmental goods and services. **Impact Indicators:** It shows the development overtime of stocks and quantities of environmental goods and services. **Sustainable Indicators:** Difference between current and reference value should be added; and the reference values are based on scientific insights. Aggregating sustainability indicators could provide adequate information on an environmental system a whole.

#### SUSTAINABILITY: PRINCIPLES, COMPONENTS AND INDICATORS

SD principles refer to the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of development, and suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions (economic, social and environmental) to guarantee its long-term sustainability, and it advocates the wise use and conservation of resources in order to maintain their long-term viability (Eber, 1992). The essence of sustainability lies in finding balance between the development of tourism and tourist regions on the one side and the protection and preservation of the environment, resources and values of the regions and local communities on the other (Swarbrooke, 2005). In this context, one has to define the components of sustainability (economic, social and environmental) in the perspective of ST. Economic Sustainability is the ability of the local economy to sustain itself without causing irreversible damage to the natural resources base on which it depends, and implies maximising the productivity of the local economy (rural or urban) not in absolute terms but in the relation to the sustainability of social, natural, physical, and political capitals; Social Sustainability is the equity in distribution of resources among different such as gender equity, a variety of social systems, social justice, public participation, and cultural development; and Environmental Sustainability is the ability of the environment to function indefinitely without going into a decline from the stresses (such as soil, water, and air) that maintain life. When the environment is sustainable, humanity's present needs are met without endangering the welfare of future generations. (Ramaswamy and Sathis kumar, 2010)

#### SUSTAINABLE TOURISM: DEFINITIONS

The natural environment is an important resource for tourism; resources can be interpreted as natural (water, energy, landscape, biodiversity etc), cultural and social. For natural resources, water and energy are the key concerns for sustainability since both are extensively used by the tourism industry in number of areas, most often at rates far exceeding use by local population. The resource use in the name of tourism threatens to become unsustainable. With a degraded physical environment, the tourists' destinations are in danger of losing its original attraction. Tourism is an industry just like any other, industry characterised by rapid, short-term ventures which have often damaged those assets upon which they depend. It is reflected in the words of Koeman "Tourism kills tourism". Tourism is not only a pleasure trip to the visitors, but also the largest and the fastest developing industry. Tourism serves as the most effective drivers for the development of regional economies, of both developed and emerging economies; and it also acts as one of the socio-economic tools for SD of many nations. In fact, ST minimizes negative impacts, develops environmental friendly alternatives, provides background information for successful implementation of tourism projects, promotes equity in development, improves quality of life of local communities, provides high quality experience to visitors; and maintains tourism as a long term economic activity.

ST has paralleled the evolution of the wider concept of SD with a number of approaches being developed to reduce the impact of tourism on the environment through the creation of environmentally acceptable tourism products (eg eco-tourism and green tourism). ST may be regarded most basically as the application of the SD idea to the tourism sector. ST involves the minimization of negative impacts and the maximization of positive impacts. ST is deliberately planned from the beginning to benefits local residents, respects local culture, conserves natural resources, and educates both tourists and the local residents. It produces more benefits than the conventional tourism, and therefore the local community may benefit from ST and local community may not allow reducing the quality of natural resources. The basic objectives of ST are to retain and maintain the economic and social advantages of tourism development, while mitigating any undesirable environmental impacts on the tourism resources. These resources include physical, historic and natural environment, but also the social and cultural environment of the tourism destination. This is achieved by balancing the needs of the present and future tourists with those of the tourism destinations. ST 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. In other words, ST is a level of tourism activity that can be maintained over the long term, because, it results in a net benefit for the social, economic, natural and cultural environments of the area in which it takes place. WTO defines "ST development meets the needs of the present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. It envisages 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." **World Conservation Union, (1996)** says that environmentally responsible travel and visitation to natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features, both past and present) in a way that promotes conservation, has a low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-



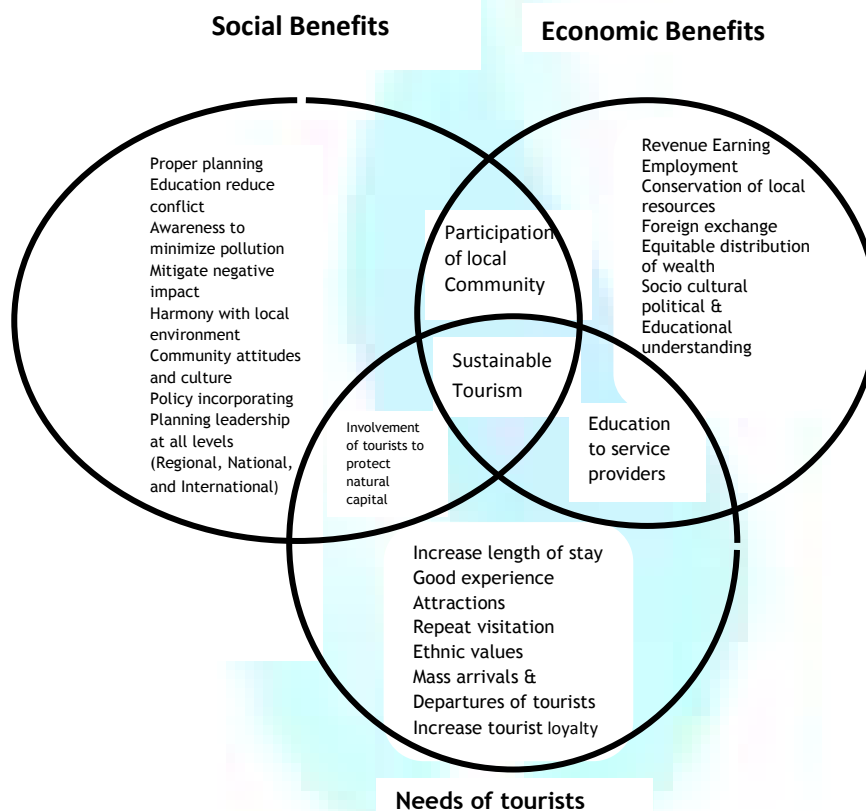
economic involvement of local peoples. **Beech and Chadwick** define ST is tourism that is economically, socio-culturally and environmentally sustainable. With ST, socio-cultural and environmental impacts are neither permanent nor irreversible. **Hunter (1997)** suggests that ST must be regarded as an 'adaptive paradigm' that accommodates both weak and strong interpretations of the SD idea. According to **Vera and Ivars (2001)**, ST is a process of quality change resulting from political initiatives that include the indispensable participation of the local population and that adapts the institutional and legal framework, and the planning and management tools, in order to achieve development, based on a balance between the conservation of existing natural and cultural resources, the economic viability of tourism and social equity in tourism development.

### ST: OBJECTIVES, PRINCIPLES, INDICATORS, ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

The **objective** of ST is to retain the economic and social advantages of tourism development, the long term sustainability of tourism by reaching equilibrium between the environmental, social and economic aspects of development. Hence, environmental sustainability must remain a key component of ST.

The **principles** of ST are: using resources sustainably, reducing over-consumption and waste, maintaining diversity, integrating tourism into planning, supporting local economies, involving local communities, consulting stakeholders and the public training staff, marketing tourism responsibly and undertaking research (**Eber, 1992**). **Hamblin (2001)**, points out that tourism activity must carry the principles of Visitor satisfaction, Industry profitability, Common acceptance and Environmental protection which is commonly known as (VICE) because ST is based on what community considers to be acceptable, and it is subjective and value based concept.

FIGURE 2: SUSTAINABLE TOURISM VALUES



Source: Compiled by authors from various sources

ST indicators may be defined as "measures of the existence or severity of current issues, signals of upcoming situations or problems, measures of risk and potential need for action, and means to identify and measure the results of our actions. Indicators are information sets which are formally selected to be used on a regular basis to measure changes that are of importance for tourism development or management." (**UNWTO Guidebook, 2004**). ST indicators like the sustainability indicators are about integrating the tourism with environmental and socio-cultural indicators. Moreover, ST indicators should be formulated in such a way that the weak sustainability indicators must be identified and thus examined their sectoral linkages with the tourism related activities along with environmental resources, so as to achieve overall tourism sustainability in the long run. Besides, measuring the tourism patterns could be done through the use of ST indicators and estimate the economic, natural and socio-cultural environmental implications of tourism development. Tourism researchers have frequently used some of the indicators for ST development. The indicators are: water consumption, volume of tourists, occupancy rate of the main accommodations and restaurants, level of tourist satisfaction, level of satisfaction of the local population, number of tourist per km<sup>2</sup>, existence of tourism plan in the community, number of people encroaching on vulnerable sites, ratio between tourists and local population at events, percentage of real estate development intended for tourism, percentage of jobs in the tourism sector held by local residents, average stay of tourists, percentage of return visits of tourists, total number of arrivals of tourists (annual average and in high season), volume of waste recycled, percentage of revenue generated by tourism in the community, energy consumption, canopy cover index, area of natural protected space, environmental vulnerability, local employment during low season, local population working in the tourism sector, ratio of jobs in tourism over total jobs, percentage of business and establishment open year-round, spending by tourists, use of renewable energy sources, and number of establishments that participate in the water conservation process (**Tanguay, 2011**). In addition to above, the indicators such as tourism assets (natural and cultural); tourism activity (frequenting and spending by characteristics of tourists); linkages with other sectors of the economy (that necessitate access to input-output matrix); and tourism-related leakages (that necessitate input-output matrix and data on origin of tourism operators) are used as gauge for tourism-related infrastructure (**Cernat et al 2007**). Site protection, pressure, intensity of use intensity, social impact, development control, waste management, planning, fragile ecosystems, consumer satisfaction, satisfaction of the inhabitants, contribution of tourism to the local economy, carrying capacity, site disturbance and interest are yet another indicators evolved by **WTO, (1997)**.

Moreover, tourism and leisure economists have further integrated different aspects of business environment in examining the concept of ST. According to them, sustainability assessment must be based on eight dimensions: political, economic, socio-cultural, production-related aspects, environmental impact, ecosystem quality, biodiversity and environmental policies (**Ko, 2004**). The above indicators can be considered as a guiding star for assessing the impact of ST on the host communities. The **WTO (1999)** has launched the Global Code of Ethics for tourism with a view to contributing to economic development, international understanding, peace, prosperity, and universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms which promote environmental, social

and economic principles for ST, particularly *Article 3* emphasis on Tourism, a factor of SD. Further, it addresses the environmental and social aspects of sustainability. Some of the issues in ST ecosystem, water, atmosphere, energy, waste, landscapes and nuisances, resilience and risk, security and safety, health, satisfaction, public participation, culture accessibility, investments, promotion of ecotourism, economic vitality, employment, marketing, distinction and traffic. Tourism **strategic planning** is essential for ST, for which one has understand the concepts if strong and weak sustainability. Strong Sustainability, considers physical and natural capital are not substitutes but decreases the natural capital can cause problems. It sacrifices current consumption to insure the welfare of future generations, and rates of consumption may cause irreversible damage and a loss of welfare in the long run. This should be achieved by conserving the stock of human capital, technological capability, natural resources and environmental quality (Brekke 1997). According to the **Strong Sustainability** tourism criteria, minimum amount of a number of different types of capital (economic, ecological, social) should be independently maintained, in (physical and biological) terms. The major motivation for this insistence is derived from the recognition that natural resources are essential inputs in production, consumption or welfare that cannot be substituted by physical or human capital. Even a small increase in tourism-related activity could result in unacceptable environmental or socio-cultural costs due to adoption if strong ST strategies. In **Weak Sustainability**, physical and natural capital are substitutes, and it tries to maintain total capital stock, decreases in natural capital over time will not be problematic in weak sustainability, if the development is non-diminishing from generation to generation. *Weak sustainable tourism* strategies apply to extensively modified environments such as the inner city, where the absence of undisturbed natural habitat makes tourism activity are not necessarily associated with environmental or social stress. Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry (WTO et al., 1995), and the Worldwide Code of Ethics in Tourism (Santiago de Chile, 1999), argued that ST must highlight the essence of the sustainability paradigm as the balance between economic growth, environmental preservation and social justice (OMT, 1993; Butler, 1993; Coccossis, 1996). The traditional strategic planning process recommends the use of the end-ways-means model for action plan, but for sustaining the growth of tourism sector, we need mean- end strategy plan. This helps in institutional strengthening by building adequate infrastructure and by protecting the eco system.

## CONCLUSION

There are three major linkages between tourism and SD viz: economic, social and environmental. ST has its own positive as well as negative impacts. The positive impacts are: increased foreign exchange earnings, increase employment opportunities, increased access to foreign direct investment, etc., and the negative impacts are: price changes on real incomes, reduced access to water and energy due to high demand, negative environmental impacts on health of human beings and wealth of nations. In tourism industry, idea of sustainability relates the three elements such as; the tourists, the place/local community and the service providers. The influences of these three elements are different but interrelated. Achieving ST requires motivation, determination and systematic planning. It also requires several steps to attain ST and they are: tourism operators have to improve existing tourism products without affecting the environmental resources, local government have to develop plans for strategic tourism development, tourism business have to create and improve the awareness of ST, tourism organisation have to identify new nature based tourism products, community groups have to consider the cost and benefits of tourism region, attraction managers have to effectively manage tourism resource without altering the environmental basis, indigenous community have to protect Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS) by conducting community meetings, regional development organisations have to check the issues of ST addressed adequately in regional planning, interpretation officers have to explore new avenue for strong decision making and everyone have to get together to discuss issues and develop common aims for long term benefit above all decision makers like bureaucrats and politicians could integrate economic planning with tourism planning by taking into consideration of tourism needs of the present and future generations. In short, ST implies, that making optimal use of environmental resources, maintaining ecological processes, helping in conservation of bio diversity, respecting the socio- cultural authenticity of host communities, conserving cultural heritage, contributing to inter-cultural understanding, distributing the socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders, creating employment and income earning opportunities, imparting social service attitudes to local communities and thus reducing regional and location specific poverty.

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