

Sectoral Brief

Hotels, catering and tourism

Sustainable tourism

The rapidly growing tourism industry offers vast potential in terms of employment and economic growth. Simultaneously, it is detrimental to the environment and sometimes also local cultures and communities. Tourism contributes 9 % of the world's GDP, 8 % of employment and 5 % of green house gas (GHG) emissions.¹ Challenges related to the tourism industry are reduction of energy and GHG emissions and water consumption, promotion of waste management and resource efficiency, combatting loss of biological diversity and effective management of cultural heritage. These challenges can be tackled through greening of the economy, and the tourism industry provides an area where big steps can and need to be taken towards sustainable development.

‘Sustainable tourism’ or ‘tourism in the green economy’ has been defined as tourism activities that can be maintained indefinitely in their environmental, social, economic and cultural contexts and despite their effect on these areas of life (UNEP & UNWTO, 2005). The ILO’s definition of sustainable tourism is, that it is “composed of three pillars: social justice, economic development, and environmental integrity. It is committed to the enhancement of local prosperity by maximizing the contribution of tourism to the destination’s economic prosperity, including the amount of visitor spending that is retained locally. It should generate income and decent employment for workers without affecting the environment and culture of the tourists’ destination and ensures the viability and competitiveness of destinations and enterprises to enable them to continue to prosper and deliver benefits in the long term”.² Sustainable tourism, as something all tourism activities should aim for, should be distinguished from eco-tourism, which is a sub-sector of tourism focusing on travel activities that contribute to environmental protection and social development.

Without changing consumption and production patterns in the tourism industry, the environmental implications become unbearable. Tourism business models are currently dependent on energy intensive transportation and setting up ecosystems that are not integrated into and supportive of the communities they locate in. As the IPCC (2007) points out, worryingly little is known about the employment and livelihood impacts of climate change. The sectors most likely affected are the ones most directly dependent on the weather, agriculture and tourism. The greening of the tourism industry in pursuit of moving towards sustainability has risen in the global agenda of sustainable development because its vast potential and increased awareness of tourists demanding greening of the industry and better information on the effects of their travelling to the surrounding natural and social environments.

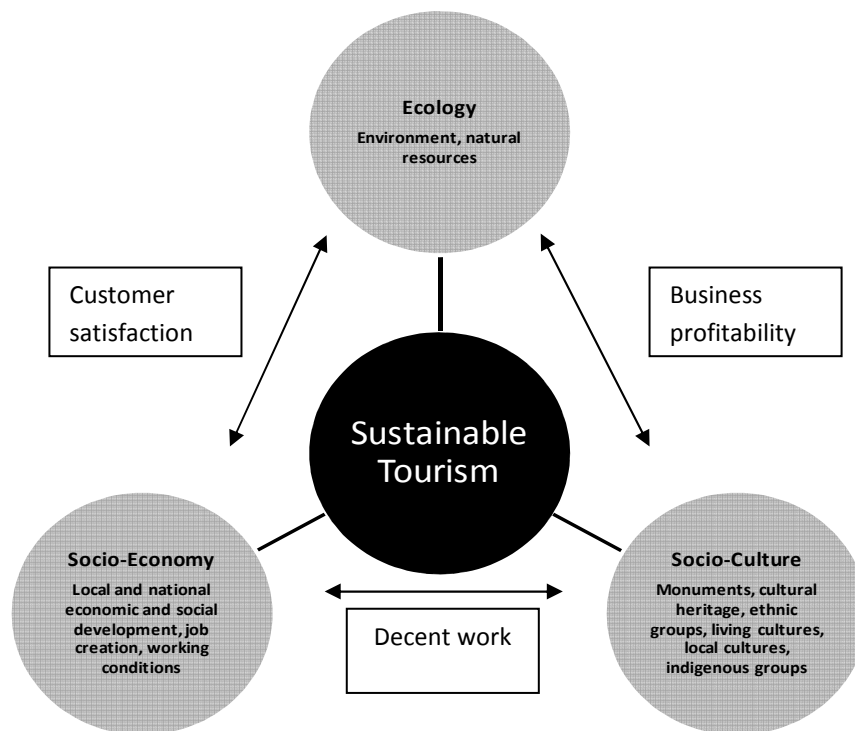
¹ UNEP Green Economy Report: Tourism, 2010

http://www.unep.org/greeneconomy/Portals/88/documents/ger/GER_11_Tourism.pdf

² Developments and challenges in the hospitality and tourism sector. Issues paper for discussion at the Global Dialogue Forum for the Hotels, Catering, Tourism Sector (23-24 November 2010)

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Components of sustainable tourism³



Greening the tourism industry contributes to solving global problems of environmental degradation and climate change, and can benefit the development of the industry itself:

- *Employment creation* is expected to be reinforced as investments to sustainability lead to increased local sourcing and hiring. Furthermore, the indirect effect of tourism on employment is estimated to increase through creation of jobs in related areas of infrastructure, etc. Sustainable tourism thus has a potential of growing the multiplier effect of the industry from the current 1.5 indirect jobs as per one job in tourism.
- *Poverty reduction and local development* can be achieved through tourism: besides increased local employment, moving to the use of local services can increase tourists' spending in the local economy and contribute to economic development, products, etc. Sustainable tourism patterns can also help bring about sustained societal models into local communities by disseminating waste management, water saving systems, etc. Incentives to protect cultural heritage are estimated to be among the largest intangible benefits that the sustainability of the tourism industry can do.

³ ILO; *Developments and challenges in the tourism and hospitality sector*. Issues paper for the Global Dialogue Forum for the Hotels, catering and tourism sector, Geneva, 23–24 November 2010.

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The means towards greening the tourism industry touch upon all the stakeholders of the tourism industry. The private sector plays a major role in being the pioneer in developing new business models around sustainable tourism. Especially small and medium sized enterprises, predominant in the industry, need access to education, awareness raising and financing in order to be able to invest in new, green technologies and models.

Governments can facilitate the private sector in its shift towards sustainable tourism. Governments should also coordinate traditional policymaking between different ministries and areas of policy towards a joint effort to increase sustainability. This includes better understanding about the interplay between labour law and regulations with environmental regulation, land use, finance, agriculture, etc. In consultation with constituents, governments should gear the transformation of the tourism sector, along the whole economy, towards an integrated and harmonious system. National development strategies should be based on such multi-constitutional planning over a longer time span. In the international level, this should be taken into account when coordinating international development aid.

The ILO participates in this discussion by emphasizing that environmental protection and efficiency are not contrary to the economic development or job creation in the tourism sector. The ILO works to promote employment in tourism in the green economy by assist governments and constituents in investing in new tourism and development strategies that allow job creation in a sustainable way, thus aiming towards the creation of green jobs. Find out more about sustainable tourism and green jobs in the ILO's cross sectoral work on Green Jobs.

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Useful resources:

ILO's Green Jobs programme

<http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/green-jobs/lang--en/index.htm>

UNWTO STEP

<http://www.unwtostep.org/>