

# Analysis of the Main Concepts and Discussions Involving Sustainable Tourism

Veruska C. Dutra, Mary L. G. S. Senna

**Abstract**—The development of tourism is on the use of landscapes, natural or constructed, which involves a number of factors that contribute to the deterioration of nature. Tourist activity coupled with sustainable development has led to the emergence of many questions about these terms, since they are not well defined in this sense through literature searches. The present study was to analyze the main concepts and discussions involving sustainable tourism, providing reflections that can cause answers about one of the main questions in today's activity sector on whether its sustainability is a myth or reality. The methodology of this study is discussions, theoretical studies and bibliographic research. The results showed that the scholars who address the issue, often leave uncertainty about some discussions that demonstrate that there are still many studies to be conducted in order to prove that the claims so as to form the basis of what will be Tourism sustainable.

**Keywords**—Tourism, sustainability, development, discussions.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THE tourism activity allied to sustainable development is raising many questions about the terms used to determine the activity, since they are not well defined.

Sustainable development is a process of change in which resource exploitation, investment orientation, directions for technological development and institutional change are in line with current and future needs [1]. In this context, sustainable tourism is seen as ecologically sustainable in the long term, economically viable, as well as ethically and socially equitable for local communities. It requires integration among culture, society and environment, respecting the fragile balance that represents many tourist destinations, particularly small islands and environmentally sensitive areas [2].

The pursuit of tourism development means natural or artificial landscapes exploitation, which in itself involves a series of factors that contribute to the deterioration of the environment.

Tourists do not visit a destination in search of solely contemplating of the landscapes; they also look for a local structure (housing, food, transport, etc.). The local facilities are responsible for the local development, but also for the environmental and social problems that come along with the progress. Thus, the sustainable tourism becomes a challenge for scholars of the area.

This study proposed an analysis of the main concepts and discussions involving sustainable tourism, which provides reflections capable to stimulate answers about one of the main nowadays questions about sustainable tourism being a myth or

Veruska Dutra is with the Federal University of Tocantins, Brazil (e-mail: veruska@ifto.edu.br).

reality.

## II. METHODOLOGY

In the accomplishment of this study, the scientific parameters of the applied social sciences were followed, in which are found the theoretical - technical principles of touristic knowledge and of the interdisciplinary sciences that form the base principles of sustainability.

Discussions, theoretical studies and bibliographic research were the cornerstone of this study.

## III. RESULTS

When we refer to the term development, it is necessary to mention its definition: to grow, to progress, to increase, to improve, and to produce. The definition of sustainability is "to support, to stand, to bear, and to protect" [3]. Nevertheless, a contradiction is observed in expression Sustainable Development, which raises the idea of a growth that must be bearable. The fact of seeking development of tourism implies the use of natural or artificial landscapes, which leads to the degradation of local nature.

Tourists go to a destination looking for more than local attractions; they also need basic structure, which are responsible not only for the progress in the region but also for social and environmental problems. That is the reason why sustainable tourism becomes a challenge for scholars of the area.

One of the most controversial questions about the subject is the local investments in infrastructure, which should be suitable for the tourist demand, protecting the environment from the negative impacts and at the same bring benefit for public agencies.

For the local managers, such tourism infrastructure represents "profits" because there will be used a return. When the infrastructure is created for the local community by the government (water, energy, sewage, etc.), even though it is necessary for the development of the activity, it represents expenses to the funds of public agencies, however they do not have the monetary return of that investment. Hence, even if tourism is seen as an economic factor, namely, "a business that is worth investing in, as it generates benefits", the social sphere is not often considered, opposing to the basic principles of Sustainable Tourism, which should be based on the economic, social and environmental sectors, as explained in the document Our Common Future [1].

Concerning the planning of sustainable activity tourism, the time spent on maintenance and balance of the ecosystems is not considered and it has been destroyed by the tourist

visiting. Sustainable tourist activity emerges as a myth capable of solving present and future problems spreading the idea of a non-destructive economic activity with the purpose of conservation and preservation.

Considering a tourism activity sustainable or part of the possibility of sustainable development is only to avoid focusing on the question without analyzing the complexity of an economic activity that is based on the consumption of exotic natural landscapes or past history [4].

Studies on the sector highlight that tourism allows and facilitates the ephemeral and intense use of the territory [4]. It converges with the conception of being an integral part of the ideal of modernity that considers development as a goal to be achieved, because at the same time that it considers nature as synonyms of preservation, "sells" it as a commodity, since it is paid to enjoy it. In this perspective, there is an incompatibility between tourism and the term sustainable development, as tourism transforms exotic places (or natural, not yet exploited in an intense way) into marketable, in the standards of comfort and quality of life in the modern world, initiating a constant process of changes in the local landscape, which include impacts that do go against sustainable development. This thought exploits landscapes as goods, without linking the components that are part of the landscape: society and its daily life, so, tourism creates signs that "mask" the reality of the place, which makes difficult the measurements and qualifications of the transformations that occur with the increase of the tourist activity.

If the attempts of economic measurements are added and planned for the social and political contexts, the complex dynamics of the transformations can be understood. This implies understanding the complexity of scientific research [4]. It is observed that the tourism activity is based, overall, on economic development.

Another topic debated is that there is no guarantee of sustainability in the long term, because there are many factors that condition it. Sustainable development of tourism should be seen as not being a fixed state of harmony, but as a constant process of change in which variations in resource use, investment management and development orientation at the institutional level are coherent with future and present needs, depending on an appropriate environment and tourism policy [5].

Sustainable tourism researches show that this new way of managing such activity will only be feasible if changes in the habits and customs of tourists happen, because they generate the most negative impacts on natural resources [8]. Some signs of these changes are already observed, since, currently, tourists seek, in the tourist itineraries, a greater relation with the environment visited, aiming at a responsible tourism. This tendency is confirmed by the World Tourism Organization [9], in which it is analyzed that these changes have occurred due to the increasing interest of the tourists in matters concerning the environment, particularly by the environmental quality of the place in the tourist destinations. They seek more authentic and convivial experiences, looking forward understanding the local customs and way of life, increasing the need of healthier

leisure practices.

The same agency states that tourists are being influenced by the rise of the offers and the marketing of "tourist products" related to rural and environmental contexts by operators and tourism agencies [10]. That new habit increases the demand for stillness and relaxation that life in the countryside offers in contrast to the stress of urban life [2].

Still, changes in habits on tourist practices can influence other sectors that involve it, as in public and private agencies, and may change the essence of tourism, based, above all, on economic development, which is a challenge.

We highlighted some steps for tourism to become sustainable [6].

- Stimulate the understanding of the impacts of tourism on the culture, society and environment.
- Ensure a balanced distribution of benefits;
- Seek to take decisions in all society, including local populations, inciting users of tourism and other resources to cohabit, including planning and the delimitation of areas that ensures the proper development of tourism facing the regeneration capacity of the ecosystem;
- Supervise, evaluate and manage the impacts on the environment and develop reliable methods to define responsibility and fight against any negative effects.

If on one hand there are studies [8], [9] that debate the contradiction of the term Sustainable Development, there are some scholars considering it as a prerequisite for sustainable tourism [8], [9]. Thus, the concept of Sustainable Tourism is seen as part of a broader concept on Sustainable Development, existing a strong relationship between both that need to be analyzed and discussed conjointly [7]. Fig. 1 illustrates this relation.

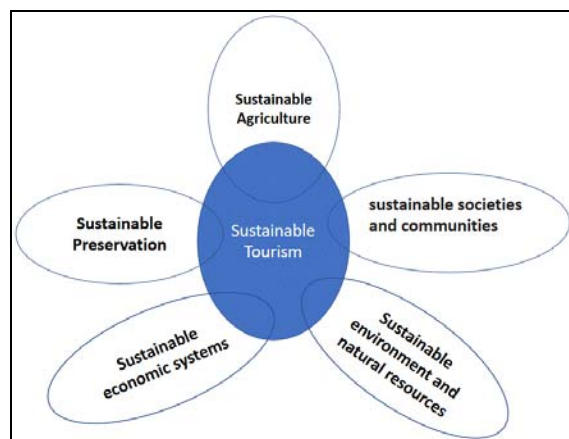


Fig. 1 Sustainable Tourism and Sustainable Development [7]

Fig. 1 represents the fact that, even though sustainable tourism is part of a broader sustainable development system, they must be analyzed together, since the change in one element would have as consequence changes in other elements of the system. It is concluded that, to conserve a natural resource it is necessary to reduce the flow of tourists on it. So the problem would be solved, but it would affect the economic system (decrease of local income). Consequently, there are

several complex problems involving the planning of sustainable tourism. In addition, it can also be observed in this relation that the development of sustainable tourism would only be achievable in an occupied and managed sustainable environment [8].

Other topics on the subject refer to many uncertainties about some discussions such as: Small-scale tourism is always better than mass tourism; Independent trips are more sustainable than holiday tour packages. Such statements show that there are still many studies to be carried out to understand what sustainable tourism is [7].

When satisfactory results are sought in any activity, the actions to achieve it need planning in order to reach goals. When the objectives are the sustainability of an activity, the actions are uncertain, as seen previously and therefore, the activity should always be monitored.

From this perspective, as tourism encircles a large range of systems and services, it may boost socioeconomic local development, as well as it may increase the population awareness on the national patrimony conservation. Hence, the planning of its actions is the prime factor for its success, and it can be an important instrument to minimize the current problems, as well as the future ones.

Before initiating any tourism project, economic, social and environmental analyzes should be carried out, emphasizing attention to the different types of tourism to be developed, the social local way of living and environmental issues. Organizations, companies, groups and individuals must follow principles that respect the culture and the environment of the host area, as well as the social and traditional behavior of the community, leadership and political standards.

Tourism needs to be planned and managed in a sustainable way, considering conservation and appropriate economic use of the natural and human environment of the host areas. These guidelines must last during all phases of the development and operation of tourism. A program of evaluation, supervision and care that can enable the local population to take advantage of opportunities or adapt to the impacts, needs to be designed [9]. In this activity, due to the interaction with the environment, problems arise, but solutions can be presented through planning and actions, creating suitable conditions to develop tourism activity. Thus, tourism planning has to respect the local environment in order to incite sustainable development. Some scholars of the area consider [7] it as a system that offers and demands interact and can also be understood as an instrument that facilitates the decisions about planning future actions.

Some steps must be considered when planning a tourism project, such as [10]:

- 1) Definition of the object: what will be planned and place where the project will be developed are decided;
- 2) Data collection: An inventory of the place must be made and the maximum of information assembled;
- 3) Diagnosis: It is necessary to characterize the current situation of the place, its weaknesses and strengths;
- 4) Prognosis: a strategy to achieve the proposed objectives is created, the general and specific objectives as well as

goals are defined;

- 5) Implementation: All the steps of the project that have been prepared so far must be analyzed and actions have to be taken in order to reach the goals previously established;
- 6) Application: At this stage, the actions planned before need to be executed and monitored;
- 7) Evaluation: An evaluation of the results must be made after a certain period in order to analyze whether the objectives were reached, in negative cases, new actions and goals must be planned.

In the beginning of the transformation process of a place into a tourist destination or while organizing the tourist activity in a place that has already tourists visiting often, it is necessary that an adequate planning is conceived, in order to conserve its identity and establish necessary conditions to achieve the sought after objectives.

Planning brings coherence and convergence to activities in favor of tourism development. In addition, it must convert natural resources into tourist resources, organizing the territory and improving infrastructures, equipment, services and conservation of the physical, natural and urban environment. It is systemic and dynamic. The macro-environment must be permanently monitored aiming to keep the tourist system always with a current view of its surroundings [12].

The planning process should avoid improvised measures, which may correspond to local realities and potentialities; on the other hand, it allows the adoption of measures that could be misinterpreted in a different context. Only through this process, it is possible to start sustainable tourism, since it comes to integrating diverse interests.

In order to obtain satisfactory results through the actions, the manager of the project needs to consider, mainly, the continuous monitoring, since it is the main key to indicate the progress of the actions, allowing an evaluation of it and, if necessary, drawing up corrective strategies.

Monitoring is considered by the Berlin Declaration as one [1] of the fundamental principles for tourism development and measures inspired by the principle of preventive action must be taken to inhibit and minimize the damage caused by tourism to biological diversity. Such measures should include monitoring existing activities and assessing the environmental impacts of the new activities proposed, including monitoring the negative effects of wildlife observation [11].

There are several examples of tourist destinations that currently show a consolidated and recognized tourist activity all over the world for their adequate monitoring activities. Costa Rica, a country in Central America, has been standing out in international tourism; in 2003, the country has received 1.4 million tourists, which was responsible for 12% of local job generation, according to the World Tourism Organization [13]. The activities of this modality are characterized by ecotourism (interpretive trails, contemplation of landscapes, bird watching, cycling and diving), adventure tourism (abseiling, rafting, mountaineering) and scientific tourism, type of activity that is different from others, since it involves

educational experience, the conservation of nature and the appreciation of local culture.

The results achieved in Costa Rica are due to the intense planning process concerning the communities of tourist destinations and tourist marketing that disseminates tourist destinations allied to environmental education, which has been providing a more responsible tourism development. The monitoring of the tourist activity has constantly allowed the correction of failures in planning and pointed out the evolution and future trends.

Kenya, a country in Africa, after a failed attempt to develop ecotourism in its national parks in the 1970s, which negative impacts have given the country a poor image, has nowadays been prominent in international ecotourism. Tourism managers, after that bad experience, have understood the importance of a planning focused on conservation and quality of the environment visited. There is, as well, a high priority on the participation of the local community in the process of developing the tourist activity, actions that transform the existing tourism of the country into a genuine ecotourism [14].

Kenya's park planning is monitored by its managers, which have been facilitating the creation of strategies for conserving the natural resources. For instance, through controlling the number of tourists in the attractions, it has been found that some places were more visited than others, which resulted in a degradation of the most visited places. Aware of this situation, the park managers began to charge higher rates in the most visited places and lower rates in the least visited attractions, stimulating the dispersion of tourists throughout the park, reducing the pressure on the main attractions, encouraging tourists to go to less visited places [15]. This strategy is a method of tourism management of protected areas, which can only be verified due to tourism monitoring. In Brazil, the State of Mato Grosso do Sul highlights if compared to other states of the country, [16] it is the fourth state with the largest number of tourists arriving via the airport. One of the main attractions of the state is a city called Bonito, which is considered a successful destination in the tourist activity of the country. This "positive image" is the result of intensive on-site planning and continuous monitoring. This destination is characterized by important natural attractions, such as lakes, caves, waterfalls, ecological trails, among other attractions, which receive tourists daily, being one of the main destinations and one of the most visited in Brazil. As it is a very fragile environment, tourism is monitored in a way that the progress of the activity is always followed, in the environmental, economic and social sectors.

The number of visitors in the attractions of Bonito is restricted; it means that each attraction has a maximum number of visitors per day. The activity involves the whole city; the tickets to the attractions are sold by travel agencies through vouchers. These tickets are accompanied by questions addressed to the tourists, which return to the local managing organization. Due to this process, managers are able to observe the number of people that are visiting each attraction, the level of satisfaction and the profile of tourists, as well as the economic impact of the activity in the region [17].

In view of the aforementioned, it is concluded that monitoring should always be implemented, when the main objective of planning is to develop responsible tourism.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

It is possible to observe that many questions involving the concept of sustainable tourism can be raised, and scholars approaching the subject [7] suggest that small-scale tourism is always better than mass tourism and single visits are more sustainable than tour packages. Such statements show that there are still many studies to be carried out to prove that such ideas, among others, can be the base of the concept of sustainable tourism.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Comissão Mundial sobre Meio Ambiente e Desenvolvimento - CMMAD. Nosso futuro comum. Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 1991.
- [2] Organização Mundial do Turismo - OMT. Embratur. Desenvolvimento de turismo sustentável: manual para organizadores locais. Brasília: Embratur, 1994.
- [3] LUFT. Mini dicionário da língua portuguesa. São Paulo: Ática e Scipione, 1991.
- [4] A.M Rodrigues. O Mito Da Sustentabilidade Da Atividade Turística. In: Banducci, A.J; Moretti, E.C. Qual o paraíso?: turismo e ambiente em Bonito e no Pantanal (orgs), São Paulo: Chronos, Campo Grande: UFMS, 2001. p.19-35.
- [5] Kinker, S. Ecoturismo e conservação da natureza em parques nacionais. Campinas: Papirus, 2002. (Coleção Turismo).
- [6] Corrêa, M.V; Souza, A.M. Turismo, conceitos, definições e siglas. Manaus. 2a ed. Manaus: Valer, 2000.
- [7] J. Swarbrooke. Tradução de Saulo Krieger. Turismo sustentável, turismo cultural, ecoturismo e ética. v.5. São Paulo: Aleph, 2000. (Série Turismo).
- [8] D. Ruschmann, "Turismo e Planejamento Sustentável: A Proteção do Meio Ambiente". 8 ed. Campinas: Papirus, 1997. (Coleção Turismo).
- [9] Organización Mundial Del Turismo - OMT. *Lo que todo gestor turístico debe saber. Guía práctica para el desarrollo y uso de indicadores de turismo sostenible*. Madrid, España: Impreso por la Organización Mundial del Turismo, 1997.
- [10] Boiteux, B; Wener, M. Promoção, Entrenimento e Planejamento Turístico. Serie Turismo. São Paulo; SP: Aleph. 2002.
- [11] DIAS, R. Turismo sustentável e meio ambiente. São Paulo: Atlas, 2003.
- [12] M. Petrocchi. Turismo: planejamento e gestão. São Paulo: Futura, 1998.
- [13] World Travel Tourism - WTO. [www.wto.org](http://www.wto.org). date: 08 out. 2005.
- [14] D. Weaver, D. Magnitude of ecotourism in Costa Rica and Kenya. *Annals of Tourism Research*, v26, no 4, p. 792-816. 1999.
- [15] K. Lindberg, K.; Hawkins, D (orgs). Ecoturismo um guia para planejamento e gestão. 2º ed. São Paulo: Senac, 1999.
- [16] Instituto Brasileiro De Turismo - Embratur. Anuário estatístico básico. Rio de Janeiro: Embratur, 2001.
- [17] SITE ONDEIR. They present information about the tourism in Bonito. Available in: [www.ondeir.rec.br/turismo/artigo9.asp](http://www.ondeir.rec.br/turismo/artigo9.asp). Access in: 20 jan. 2006.

**Veruska Dutra**, Brazilian, graduated in Tourism, Master in Environmental Sciences from the Federal University of Tocantins / Brazil, PhD student in Science from the University of São Paulo Brazil (USP / IPEN). Researcher and Professor of Hospitality area courses and Leisure at the Federal Institute of Tocantins. Develops research since 2002, with an interdisciplinary approach, focused on the area of Tourism and Sustainability, focusing on the study of planning methodologies and monitoring of tourism and sustainability, which possesses articles and the book "Sustainable Development Indicators: A academic view" Network Sirius publisher, published in this area. Member of NEHTUS research group - Nucleus of Studies in Education, Tourism and Sustainability CNPQ / IFTO.

**Mary Lucia Gomes Silveira Senna**, Brazilian, graduated in pedagogy, Specialist in Tourism from the Catholic University of Brasilia (2005), Master in Environmental Sciences from the Federal University of Tocantins / Brazil (2008), PhD' in Science from the University of São Paulo Brazil (USP / IPEN). Professor of the Institute Federal do Tocantins. She worked in the pedagogical disciplines of Bachelor courses. Currently, Minister disciplines of the area of Tourism, Hospitality. Research on Environmental Indicators and the Tourism Research Group member NETUH - Center for Studies in Education, Tourism and Hospitality/IFTO.