

# Chapter 67

## Sustainability Criteria for Tourism Attractions: A Case Study of Germany

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### ABSTRACT

*With the start of mass tourism in the 1980s, comprehensive concepts were developed not only to optimize these positive effects but also to minimize the negative impacts of tourism on the environment (Garrod & Fyall, 1998). Problematic with the development of these concepts is the variety of approaches, each with different emphases, as well as the diverse interpretations of the term 'sustainability' (Losang, 2000). However, the topic of sustainability will be one of the drivers of future tourism development and will further increase in significance (Lohmann & Aderhold, 2009). In response to the growing importance of sustainability, the government of the federal state of Baden-Württemberg, Germany, intends to implement and facilitate a sustainability check for tourism attractions. The aim of this study is to provide insight into the perception of sustainable tourism, to examine the ways how to implement it in tourism attractions in Baden-Württemberg and to determine specific sustainability criteria. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 experts of the tourism industry in Germany to better understand the requirements and expectations of such a sustainability check. The results of the interviews revealed that, in general, there is strong support for the government to implement a sustainability check for the highly diverse tourism attractions within the entire state. In this context, the interviews indicated the difficulties and individual particularities which would have to be considered when implementing a comprehensive sustainability check for different types of tourism attractions. The operationalization of the sustainability concept, such as ecolabels and guidelines, builds the foundation for the implementation of sustainable development.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

According to Enzensberger (1964), tourism destroys what it seeks, indicating emphatically that tourism and the carrying capacity necessarily have to be reconciled. The rise of income in large parts of the western industrial countries together with the reinforced global transport network which are mainly conditioned by the increase of disposable time, has caused the tourism sector and especially the number of arrivals to increase enormously since the 1980s (Mowforth & Munt, 2009; Bieger, 2006). Similarly, to other mature industries, the tourism sector's fordistic modes of production were established as a result (Smeral, 2005). Tourism destinations, suited to these 'economies of scale', were little but partially accommodated to the regional circumstances and frequently led to transgressions of the regional carrying capacities (Hall, 2008). In this context, the concept of carrying capacity refers to the number of tourists that a destination is able to accommodate without negative impacts on the environment, the society and the utilization of renewable resources (Telfer & Sharpley, 2008; Hunter, 1997).

However, parallel to these progresses an awareness for the negative impacts of tourism emerged. Up to that point the focus was on the positive (mostly economical) impacts of tourism, but little by little the negative impacts on the environment, the population and the culture were also examined within a sustainable development of tourism (Steinecke, 2006). With the accession to the political Agenda 21 of the government representatives of 182 nations, at the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the term 'sustainable development' was officially stated (Baumgartner, 2008). Based on this conference, the term was manifested as a leading concept for miscellaneous future-oriented strategies (Luft, 2007). Since then many governments have embraced sustainability "as their fundamental development policy" (UNWTO, 1998, p. 21).

Thus, the 2011 newly elected federal state government of Baden-Württemberg in Germany determined the realization of the concept of sustainability as one of their guiding principles including the sustainable tourism development of the region. In response to the growing importance of sustainability, the government of the federal state of Baden-Württemberg (BW), a significant tourism destination within Germany, intends to implement and facilitate a sustainability check for tourist destinations and attractions. Earlier research has indicated a need to utilize holistic and more collective approaches to sustainable tourism to promote its objectives. These approaches represent substantial gaps in the literature and have been suggested for both future research and practice (Bramwell, 2011). Therefore, the aim of this study is a) to provide insight into the perception of sustainable tourism, b) to consider its different operationalization approaches, to examine the ways how to implement it in tourism destinations or attractions and c) to determine specific sustainability criteria in the context of regional sustainable tourism practice.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Sustainable Development and Tourism**

With the publication of the report 'Our Common Future', by the World Commission on Environment and Development - also known as the 'Brundtland-Report' - the term 'sustainable development' was coined (Becker et al., 1996; Ritchie & Crouch, 2005). Since this release, sustainability has been one of the central themes of discussions on tourism and management policies (Saarinen, 2006). A sustainable development herein is defined as follows:

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