


# Chapter 11

## Indigenizing Sustainable Tourism: Empowering Indigenous Voices in Tourism Education

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Extensive research on sustainability in tourism education emphasizes the importance of evaluating the industry's impact through social, economic, and environmental aspects. Integrating indigenous knowledge systems is essential for achieving true sustainability and decolonizing education. By prioritizing indigenous knowledge, we move beyond Western perspectives and recognize the value of localized methods for preserving cultural and natural heritage. This shift not only elevates the intellectualization of indigenous content but also addresses the broader epistemic violence imposed by colonial educational systems, as is in South Africa, which have long ignored or devalued local knowledge. In line with the objectives of this book, this chapter contributes to the indigenisation of the curriculum in higher education by advocating for the inclusion of indigenous knowledge in the teaching of sustainability in the tourism discipline, focusing on Sustainable tourism.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The notion of sustainable development, which was popularised by the Brundtland Report, “Our Common Future,” in 1987, is the foundation of sustainable tourism. To satisfy present needs without jeopardising the ability of future generations to do the same, the report underlined the necessity of striking a balance between environmental, social, and economic goals. The tourism sector, which is ideally situated at the nexus of environmental stewardship, cultural preservation, and global economic development, found great resonance with this idea. Resulting in sustainable tourism. To draw tourists, the sector makes use of community resources like land and develops them as tourist attractions. Therefore, this necessitates sustainable tourism, in which the tourism industry directly implements the principles of sustainable development. This is to that the sector meets the demands of tourists, supports community

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empowerment, and represents local communities' economic needs. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) has described sustainable tourism as one that “takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities” (UNWTO, 2024). This thorough definition emphasises how several components that support sustainable tourism activities are interrelated.

The United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights the importance of sustainable growth, emphasising the interconnectedness of the tourism industry to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) citing tourism as a major factor in the achievement of many Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved. SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) highlights the significance of sustainable tourism practices that reduce resource consumption and environmental degradation, while SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) highlights the role of tourism in generating jobs and promoting local culture and products (United Nations, 2015). Additionally, SDGs 14 (Life Below Water) and 15 (Life on Land) emphasise the importance of protecting terrestrial and marine ecosystems, which are frequently harmed by tourism. According to the UNWTO, well run tourism is an essential instrument for sustainable development since it can promote international cooperation, boost economies, and safeguard the environment (United Nations, 2015; UNWTO, 2024). All these commitments show how dedicated the sector is to make sure development is sustainable. Thus, ensure that it maintains the destination's economic growth while also improving the well-being of communities.

The environmental impact of tourism must be minimised to ensure long-term ecological sustainability. Sustainable tourism, from an ecological perspective, focuses on conserving biodiversity, reducing waste, and promoting energy efficiency. The need for such measures arises from the growing pressures tourism places on natural and cultural heritage sites, which, if unmanaged, can lead to habitat destruction, resource depletion, and loss of biodiversity. Recognising these risks, UNESCO's World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme (UNWTO, 2024) emphasises the importance of responsible tourism management to support conservation rather than harm it. This is particularly crucial in protected areas such as uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park in South Africa, where sustainable tourism practices not only aid in preserving the region's natural heritage but also involve local communities in conservation efforts. This approach ensures that tourism contributes to environmental protection while fostering socio-economic benefits for surrounding communities. Sustainable tourism also emphasises the sociocultural dimension by protecting local traditions and ensuring community involvement in conservation efforts. Many indigenous communities, like those around uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park, have deep cultural ties to heritage sites, making their participation essential. Initiatives such as community-led heritage interpretation and responsible visitor engagement help preserve cultural heritage while providing economic benefits. By integrating environmental and cultural sustainability, tourism supports both conservation and the empowerment of local communities. These initiatives are in line with international agreements such as the Paris Agreement, which outline global obligations to address biodiversity loss and climate change (UNESCO, 2021). The significance of the surrounding environments utilised by the tourism industry is emphasised by this. Preserving the environment is crucial for the sustained success of the tourism sector. The preservation of the tangible and intangible cultural resources of host communities is emphasised by the sociocultural component of sustainable tourism. When properly handled, tourism can promote cross-cultural dialogue and understanding. Through its Cultural and Natural Heritage agreements, UNESCO emphasises the role that tourism plays in preserving cultural variety and endangered cultural traditions. Scholars warn about the dangers of cultural commodification, though, in which customs are changed or watered down to suit the tastes of tourists (Lo Piccolo et al., 2012). To preserve traditional narratives

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