

# Sustainable Tourism Development in India: An Empirical Examination of Stakeholders' Perceptions

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## ABSTRACT

*The issues surrounding the understanding and practice of sustainability in tourism are becoming increasingly important to both academicians and tourism planners. For more than two decades the attainment of sustainable development and the protection of touristic assets have been at the forefront of central policy issues in global tourism development. Recently, it has been argued that collaborative and associative forms of governance among tourism stakeholders are growing in importance in the drive for sustainable tourism development. Despite the increasing number of debates on the role of stakeholders in tourism, they are not well supported by empirical studies and how such stakeholders can contribute to the sustainable development of tourism. This study investigates various sustainable tourism development dimensions among tourism stakeholders and whether these dimensions depend on the demographic characteristics of stakeholders. By employing factor analysis, the study reveals that there is a set of sustainable tourism development parameters that is most common. The results also indicate that there is a significant difference among the tourism stakeholders in terms of perceived sustainable tourism development dimensions in India.*

*Keywords:* India, Perception, Stakeholder, Sustainability, Tourism, Tourist Destination

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## INTRODUCTION

The complexity and globalisation of today's competitive business environment have made quality one of the most important sources of competitive advantage for the tourism business enterprise/destination (Milne, 1998; Goeldner et al., 2000). Many leading tourism organisations have started to exploit opportunities to face

this situation and recognized the importance to have systematic processes to manage quality to gain and maintain sustainability in their product offerings (Hardy et al., 2002; Brambell & Lane, 1993). Today, management is aware of the fierce competition in every sector and of customers' expectations which have never been greater. It is no longer sufficient just to maintain a business; it is necessary to move forward if a business wants to achieve a sustainable future. Thus, customer care, improvements in

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efficiency, effective marketing, benchmarking, staff training and development and above all sustainable development are vital for survival and competitiveness in a changeable business environment.

Over the past two decades, the concept of sustainable tourism has been widely discussed and explored by scholars such as (Din, 1996; Hardy et al., 2002; Butler, 1993; Coata & Allen, 1999). In fact, sustainable tourism is a concept that has gained increasing attention since the 1980s. Although the concept tends to be discussed with respect to the physical environment, definitions of sustainable tourism also include the social and cultural environment of destinations. Thus, the term "sustainability" has become a hot topic in the tourism industry. Many scholars and organizations have attempted to develop a definition for sustainable tourism (Hardy et al., 2002; Manning, Clifford, Docherty, & Ernst, 1996; Coata & Allen, 1999; House, 1997; Hunter, 1997).

Further, the concept of sustainable tourism, as developed by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) in the context of the United Nations sustainable development process, refers to tourist activities "leading to 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" (UN, 2001a). According to Pearce, Markandya, and Barbier (1991), the concept of sustainability requires that the conditions necessary for equal access to the resource base be met for each generation. Similarly, McIntyre (1993) opines that most successful tourist destinations depends upon clean physical surroundings, protected environment and often the distinctive cultural patterns of local communities. He further states that the destinations that do not offer these attributes are suffering a decline in quality and tourist use. Thus, the concept of sustainability is now widely recognised as a societal goal potentially consistent with conservation and protection natural environment.

In sum, sustainable development for the tourism industry, can be defined in general terms as the industry's challenge to develop tourism capacity and the quality of its products, without adversely affecting the physical and human environment that support them. Moreover, recognizing the interdependency between the long-term viability of economic investment in tourism projects, programs and policies, and the successful management of the natural, build and human resources, sustainable tourism development seeks to maintain the quality of life of the local community and the quality of the tourist experience.

The new era and the coming decades are a crucial time for the relationship among the stakeholders and sustainable development. The need to preserve the world's inherent assets for future generations is becoming an imperative goal not only for tourism stakeholders, but also for all other industries that use the earth's natural resources and may be the part of tourism industry. However, the tourism's contribution to the global economy and its potential for enabling sustainable development are becoming more evident. Thus, the growing interest in development and the demand for sustainable growth resulted in greater concern for, and awareness of, the role stakeholders play in determining the sustainable tourism development (Milne, 1998; Mowforth & Munt, 1998). As a result many tourism researchers consider stakeholders based approaches to tourism development as a tool for successful and sustainable tourism development (Din, 1996; Tosun & Jenkins, 1998; Woodley, 1993).

The tourism industry is the largest and rapidly growing industry in India, employing over 20 million people, accounting for 8.9% of the total workforce, and generating over 4% of GNP. Although there is visible evidence towards growing competitiveness of tourist destinations at global level and India is no exception in this context. However, the Indian tourism industry is confronted with considerable challenges imposed by the turbulent and rapidly changing external environment that it operates in.

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