
Situated Sustainable Tourism: an Alternative for Emerging Countries

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Abstract

This article is an attempt to apply the main results of the theory of symbolic sites¹ of belonging in the field of tourism. As any new approach presupposes empirical verifications in order to consolidate its theoretical achievements, and this is exactly what this contribution in a new field such as “situated tourism” answers. This theory can be traced to the economics of development where in it can be considered a “good laboratory” of studies for the failures of economic conceptions that doesn’t consider the complexity, diversity and contingencies of the development and the complex actions of economic agents.

the aim of the article or study is to decipher the motivations and needs of the agents involved in the many types of tourism such as heritage, green, rural and cultural tourism. The complexity and diverse factors that comes into play in these markets underpins the need and the use of an interdisciplinary and intercultural approach to social practices, even if they are considered economic practices. only under this condition can we highlight the “symbolic engines”, and their role in the irruption of these figures of tourism.

To accomplish this endeavor, we will start first by decrypting the new dynamics of tourism. The first step will be to isolate on the one hand the causes of the decline of mass tourism and on the other hand, the reasons for the emerging demand for new tourism models and products.

the second stage of this contribution will be to try to better specify the contributions of this situated approach to tourism. The goal of the progress of our demonstration is to widen the debate on the theory of situated tourism associating nature, culture and an economy respectful of the diversity of our world.

1. The New Dynamics of Tourism

1.1 The Decline of Mass Tourism

Trends in global tourism demand suggests that mass tourism is no longer fully in line with the changing needs of the market. Tourism demand has become more exigent, varied and variable. It tends to focus more and more on quality and expressing needs based on culture and the environment.

In concrete terms, customers are searching for sites combining the authenticity and depth of intercultural exchange on the one hand, and the harmony with nature the site historical value on the other hand.

Such demands thus seem in total contradiction with the normal offer of mass tourism which favors immediate profit and large-scale actions, thus destroying whatever touristic quality these sites may have. As Florence Deprest shows in a survey of mass tourism, that this sort of large-scale tourism has lost its appeal to both its clientele and to specialists, sociologists or economists. This phenomenon of repulsion can also be observed on the so-called elite tourism, since it does not escape the crisis of management that standardizes tourism activities.

Empirical observations clearly show that demand is increasingly turning its back on mass-tourism.

¹ The theory of symbolic sites is an approach that supports the idea of the relativity and mobility of economic phenomena. The professor behind this theory is Professor Hassan Zaoual.

The decline of the image of the seaside tourism of the “Distant Tropics” is one of those examples (the decline of the model of the 3 S: Sea, Sex and Sun), in fact negative values are increasingly associated with it, such as a cultural inactivity and a superficial contact with the host environment, nutritional risks and pollution, and above all, a new found awareness of the perverse effects of such a uniform product. Spain gives us a sad example with the “concreting” of the Costa Del Sol as well as many other sites on the planet.

A victim of its own success, “mega tourism⁴” seems to meet the theory of the product life cycle.

After the start-up phase and the expansion (years 60-70), sites that have been the subject of mass tourism are gradually losing their appeal. The offer is unable to maintain its cruising pace and is thus forced to innovate to meet the new needs.

Obviously, the degradation of tourist sites is also to be considered from the perspective of the depletion of ecosystems. The maximum load capacity of a site, a concept borrowed from global ecology, is therefore not without limit and this limit seems to express the law of decreasing returns, a law that is so very dear to Malthus and Ricardo. The model of the stationary state is also likely to be applied to the saturation of which the economic system of mass tourism is being subjected to. The quality of a touristic site is in fact based on its natural and cultural endowments, and an exploitation without limit and without respect for them will inevitably lead to their exhaustion and therefore a decrease in demand, and as a result, a further decrease in investments. The search for maximum profitability destroys the very bases of this same profitability in the long term. In his own way, Karl Marx would say: “Capital is his own gravedigger and its greatest obstacle”.

1.2 The Exhaustion of the Dominant Model:

Fundamentally, it is in diversity that the new touristic demand draws its profound motivations. In a world plagued by perpetual change, the need for belonging, as well as that of an intercultural exchange express the desire for a search for meaning from the actors involved. This is well apparent the changes that are taking place in the field of tourism. Tourists want to be actors, more responsible and engaged in their exchanges with other environments.

Similarly, local actors in touristic-developed sites seek to engage in its economy without abandoning the monopoly of the process, otherwise it will lead to the perverse effects observed in the experiences of mass tourism. (economic marginalization of the local actors, cultural destruction of their identity and exhaustion of the ecological quality of the sites concerned etc.).

The tourism industry paradoxically castrates the desire for mutual discovery which is, ironically, at the root of what motivates the in-depth behavior of the actors in this field.

As long as this intermediation is commoditized, the authenticity of the exchange relationship disappears and gives way to a factitious artificiality that demand flees progressively.

The journey becomes a “cage” and gives the impression that spatial mobility is culturally immobile to the extent that everything is organized in such a way that an encounter with the other is akin to a sham.

There is therefore no coincidence that touristic demand is now re-taking other paths and expressing itself with other needs. This reveals that economical occurrences can only be understood in their depths by being embedded in changes in values. In other words, the symbolic representations of the actors are part of their economic behaviors, one of the basic principles of this paradigm.

This requirement which alters the autonomy of the economy forces it to incorporate other dimensions has, moreover, led to a proliferation of new designs in the particular area of tourism: solidarity Tourism, Intercultural tourism, nature tourism, ecotourism, sustainable tourism, proximity tourism, memory and history tourism, value tourism. This last notion is advanced by Roger Nifle².

² The coherence of a system of varied tourist offers implies a minimum level of partnership between all the actors concerned (populations, local authorities, civil society, professionals, etc.). The setting up of tourism network strategies is necessary. It is necessarily the joint definition of objectives (partnership), of a better understanding of the expectations of tourists, of production strategies, of promotion and of marketing.

2. Sustainable Tourism, Principles and Realities

Sustainable tourism is a touristic development that combines both the life-term and the sustainability of natural resources (water, air, soil, biological diversity) and social and human structures. The objective of sustainable development is thus to adjust and make, the improvement of the conditions and living standards that result from development, and the maintenance of the development capacities of future generations compatible.

Sustainable tourism development is part of the creation of a planning which, from the touristic point of view, aims to avoid attacks that can challenge the very foundations of development, such as:

- the Degradation of Ecosystems;
- the challenge of cultural heritage;
- the upheavals of traditions and lifestyles;
- competition for access to public facilities and infrastructure.

Under these conditions, the goal of sustainable development may be considered particularly essential for the touristic sector of all countries, and especially for the countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean such as Morocco. This notion of sustainable tourism is directly derived from that of sustainable development. It is a form of touristic development that must be able to meet the needs of tourists while preserving all chances for future generations.

2.1 Fundamental Principles

The first general principle of sustainable development is the idea that responses to current needs should not compromise the ability of future generations to respond to their own. The Rio conference has led to the establishment of Agenda 21, which includes the fundamental principles of sustainable development:

Table 1. Fundamental principles of sustainable tourism

Environmental principles	Sociocultural principles	Economic principles
Respect of landscapes	Protection of local cultures	Investment control
Protection of flora and fauna	Integration of locals	Impact assessments
Qualitative water management	Joint management of the territory	Budget planning
Pollution management	Mastery of use.	Periodic checks.

All the main principles require a method of application, more or less defined according to a close partnership between the private sector and the public sector. For tourism companies, taking into account of all these principles is far from obvious, while for local authorities, training men or counsellors capable of guiding strategic and operational choices is entirely other problem.

2.2 What Realities?

From the tourist's motivation to the practical realization of his dream, one must review a long chain of intermediate steps until the establishment of a touristic strategy within an emerging country like Morocco:

- the adequacy between the demand and the offer is the first reality that can make any sustainable tourism strategy precarious in the event of a mismatch.
- Accessibility is the key to any touristic policy on which a destination like Morocco cannot pass.
- The capacity to accommodate, on the level of accommodation and catering, must be able to meet both the basic needs and the purchasing power of the tourists.
- An upgrade of health and medical infrastructure in cities is increasingly essential in an era where insecurity and disease are immediately publicized.
- The quality of the animations and the entertainment facilities cannot endure for a long time poorly lived performances by the visitors.

- The commercial and information distribution networks must respond quickly and clearly to the various online or on-site requests.
- Finally, and this is not the least of the realities, the proposed price levels must generally respect the elasticity scale based on basic activities or global packages.

All these necessities are based on a professional chain both vertical and horizontal. No other activity uses such a broad and complementary set of trades.

2.3 The Stakes and the Limits of Sustainable Tourism

The relationship between tourism and the environment is ambiguous and contradictory, tourism can be analyzed, in turn, as a factor in the “degradation” of the environment and as a source of preservation.

Therefore, in our societies there is a need of nature which, at least in part, is fueled by the touristic system (reports on remarkable places and possibly “threatened” by tourism practices themselves).

Thus, for scientists, to attract the attention of public opinion to mobilize for the protection of a threatened space, it is also ultimately, to give the idea to others to imagine a new touristic product.

It is therefore a question, of mobilizing all the means capable of considering both the economic and social needs of the populations concerned, and the preservation of the areas judged to be remarkable.

Schematically, three main types of solutions exist for emerging countries: the first two are primarily technical (strongly differentiate the spaces to protect and the spaces to promote: zoning³ and regulating the attendance of sensitive spaces: quotas⁴), the third is more complex and more political: it is “sustainable tourism”, which pursues the ambition of development and protection.

2.4 The Challenges of Sustainable Tourism

“Sustainable” tourism is today the indispensable formula for any argument on tourism, whether it is the political argument or the argument of scientists. It is a policy that aims to reconcile the ecological, the economic and the social. Sustainable tourism must combine the notions of duration and sustainability of natural resources (water, air, soil, biological diversity) and social and human structures. It could not be reduced to an environmental policy. The objective of sustainable development is to make compatible the improvement of the conditions and standards of living that result from the development and maintenance of the development capacities of future generations.

The issue of sustainable tourism has become essential as a result of the realization of increasing inequalities in touristic development worldwide. Thus, while international tourism around the world is growing, the gap between countries tends to increase. The nuisance of tourism is particularly important and serious on the natural environment and especially from the social and human point of view. Under these conditions, the concept of sustainable tourism is not only concerned with traditional touristic regions which must fight the deterioration of their natural environment resulting from infrastructure development projects, but also the regions of the world that were, so far, away from the expansion of the world’s major tourist trends.

In short, the sustainable development applied to tourism is what makes it possible to achieve a balance between the economic, the social and the human, as well as the use of resources.

³ Zoning: This is the most used policy, to manage the confrontation tourism/environment. It consists of delineating spaces deemed to be remarkable so as to protect them from any intervention or, in some cases, from any attendance. The creation of natural reserves and national parks is the main manifestation of this type of policy. (Yellowstone, the world’s first national Park created in 1872 in the American West).

⁴ Quotas: is another way of dealing with problems that may result from tourist attendance at a sensitive site. These measures consist of regulating the flow. In some extreme cases (certain nature reserves, in particular), any attendance is prohibited. But between situations where attendance is prohibited and those where it is not limited, intermediate situations exist. From a certain threshold, they consist of stopping the flow of inputs. This type of measure implies at least two conditions: the determination of a quantitative threshold beyond which attendance is considered excessive for the preservation of the “resource” and the existence of an enclosed space with a small number of accesses. An example of a flow limitation is the National Park Ordesa (Spanish Pyrenees). See M. Stock *et al.*, *Tourism: Actors, places and Stakes*, Belin, 2003, pp. 230-238.

- At the economic level, sustainable tourism implies the improvement of the competitiveness of companies, this concerns directly the organizers of travel and stays, the travel agencies, the hotel and the catering industry, the companies managing the Touristic attractions. It also concerns transportation companies, the shops and the reception, information and assistance services enjoyed by tourists.
- At the social level, sustainable tourism must meet the needs and meet the expectations of three categories of people: tourists, people employed in tourism and local populations residing in touristic destinations. Sustainable tourism is supposed to provide an appropriate response to all categories of potential tourists, especially young people, the elderly, people with disabilities. Another social aspiration to satisfy is the improvement of the working conditions of the people employed in the touristic sector. The third major social concern concerns the forms of tourism that do not respect the culture and the local way of life, and which do not significantly improve the well-being of the local people, neither in terms of income nor quality of life. They inevitably provoke a phenomenon of rejection. Sustainable tourism must take that into account.
- At the environmental level, sustainable tourism must highlight the full potential of a territory without being too much space-consuming⁵. In particular, it requires a rational management of water resources, pollution prevention and appropriate treatment of wastewater prior to their release into the natural environment. It implies good waste management and needs to increase energy efficiency and the use of renewable energies. As such, it must also lead to rational management of visitor flows, promote forms of transport that do not cause traffic congestion, and encourage proximity tourism.

By reconciling these economic, social and environmental concerns, tourism can make a decisive contribution to sustainable development. It can improve the situation of businesses and the well-being of people, promote responsible behavior of tourists while meeting their expectations, and facilitate the management of natural and cultural heritage.

Sustainable tourism is becoming a key objective in order to maintain a balance between “the holders of three values: economic progress, the preservation of resources and the lives of local people”⁶, a utopia aimed at establishing a new form of governance.

2.5 The Limits of Sustainable Tourism Development

Should tourism in emerging countries be “sustainable”? Can it be? We can make the observation in a socio-economic context, where the massification of tourism and its industrialization show their limitations, but are choices in favor of different holidays, more concerned with ecological or sociocultural balances, real safe values or are they simply limited products that can add significantly additional costs? which raises a question, is this trend in favor of a more balanced and a more environmentally friendly consumption going to continue?

The first obstacle to the establishment of this sustainable tourism comes from a vision of the future very blurred for the decision-maker, who is often a public community. Sustainable tourism needs a long-term vision and it must project itself over a period of no less than twenty years and more. The question is: how do we achieve this, under the daily pressure of the short term, of rapid return on investment requirements, and even the short mandate terms for officials that usually last five to six years?

This is difficult, the reason is because to date, very little foresight work exists in the field of tourism. The public or private actor, by adopting a passive attitude towards change, will have a lot of

⁵ UNESCO, as part of its global report on heritage at risk, has referenced thirty sites that are seriously threatened in the world by the misuse, even destructive, of tourism. United States, Guatemala, Argentina, Canada, Germany, Austria, France, Italy, Lebanon, Bosnia, Yugoslavia, Jordan, Turkey, Syria, Egypt, Yemen, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Cambodia, China, New Zealand, South Africa are all “pinned” to The abandonment of their historical heritage.

⁶ MIOSETT p., “sustainable tourism, an operational concept”, Cahiers spaces, n° 67, November 2000, p. 200.

difficulties in opting for sustainable tourism⁷. A second obstacle to the development of sustainable tourism can also be raised. Indeed, the concept of sustainable tourism has so far mainly given rise to applications in the field of tourism development policies. This is how this concept is widely applied in the context of tourism planning, especially from the regional point of view. On the other hand, its application to the tourism business sector, with the evaluation of small-scale tourism development projects usually carried out by individual private operators or in the context of small and medium-sized Enterprises, is seldom implemented. This is due to the lack of tools for applying the concept of sustainable development to micro-economic projects.

A third limit to the development of the concept of sustainable tourism concerns the risks associated with financing. In fact, the disposition for a different tourism, which can only be incentives, may change the cost of capital. Any additional costs or charges may, for example, increase the final costs for transport or accommodation. Due to the degree of exposure of sustainable tourism to competition and the risk of market value degradation, sustainable tourism in emerging countries, is not likely to be reserved for some privileged areas (natural parks...) at some "Happy-few" consumers, or to a few operators undertaking a strategy of strong differentiation.

Today, tourism projects that are part of sustainable development are still too few. Due to both socio-political burdens and the need to change the traditional problems of touristic project management. Thinking about the long term requires an effort, it is a discipline, a rule, that must be set by the decision-maker concerned with sustainable development. It is a priority choice, which poses four types of problems: the weakness of the public decision, the need for an active technological intelligence, that of the socio-economic arbitrations, and that of strategic choices for the future.

2.6 Rethinking Development: towards a True Diversity Tourism

The diversity tourism discussed here indicates the extreme relativity of the notion of resource in economics. An appropriate reconfiguration of the local potential of a site can, in fact, bring out the ignored resources. In other words, tourism or other resources are invented, and thus depend on the systems of representation of the actors of the site and the situation in which they are⁸. And, this situation cannot be properly identified without considering the historical and cultural trajectory of the sites in question, and their readjusting in the present. It is at this level that the self-identification capabilities of the actors in a given territory come into being. Innovation begins with a "change in the Look". The latter can only be achieved with an effort of theoretical and practical interpretation of the common sense and potential that the new common beliefs of the site can inspire and consolidate in the form of economic activities. It is only at this price that a "non-resource" becomes a resource.

At this level, all bifurcations are possible.

The exploration of the potential local innovations of the site (the P.L.I. of the site) must therefore take into account all the data of the local context (beliefs, common knowledge, diversity, historical memory etc.). What the technocrats and development economists do not do, which, often, are simply dropping projects on sites that they do not know the depths of. The failures of such procedures are commonplace both in the industrialized countries in bad restructuring and in the emerging countries notably Morocco.

As we have already pointed out, post-industrial touristic trends are a "good laboratory" for alternatives that combine the beliefs, motivations and practices of actors. In fact, through these new figures of tourism, the actors are keen to engage in an economic and social renewal that does not deny their traditions, their roots and their beliefs.

By this choice, the actors clearly demonstrate the impasse of the "disembodied economy" of old industrial capitalism, an economy based on the accumulation of capital, the consumption of material goods and the destruction of nature without limits. People today are seeking services of quality, relationships and meaning. Here, the rationality of all-out profit gives way to the relationship and to the cultural and intercultural communication.

⁷ BERGERY L., overall quality and tourism, *Economica*, 2002, p. 131.

⁸ CF. H. Zaoual, *Management located and local development*. Collection Horizon plural, 2006, (213 pages), Rabat, Morocco.

The tourist service is one of the most relational services. The relationship is the exchange and the exchange here, above all, is of a symbolic nature before being monetary. It's this "incalculable" aspect that is at the heart of the economic value of "new tourism services". These characteristics suggest the importance of intercultural trust and depth in trade or non-trading.

From this point of view, the classical market paradigm is unable to read the appropriate signals to the development of quality tourism services. The most insightful economists have already demonstrated the incompleteness of market mechanisms (the economics of conventions). Here we are referring to economists who have a growing interest in the role of institutions in economic processes.

The emergence of sustainable and viable tourism based on new relationships with the culture of the sites and their natural environment is one of the signs of the industrial civilization crisis. This was built on a productivist culture and incentives for the multiplication of often artificial needs. To look at it closely, it's the system of the market economy that needs to achieve the expected profits without which, its organization collapses.

This process is based on a psychology of lack and permanent frustration, a phenomenon well known to psychologists and marketing specialists. This process exploits, without restraint, for the needs of the system, one of the inclinations of human nature, the desire to have it.

As early as the seventeenth century, Pascal described the "natural misfortune of our condition" as follows: "There was once in man a true happiness, of which only its mark remains now and an empty trace, one which he tries unnecessarily to fill with all that surrounds him, (...) because this infinite chasm can only be filled by an infinite and immutable object". This chasm is that of happiness by the quantity of needs created and satisfied by the civilization of mass consumption.

It is this conception of desire and happiness that is today in crisis. The relative decline of mass tourism is one aspect. The demand that is expressed through post-industrial tourism is therefore also a real reversal of the values and representations of society. The new touristic demand is an "existential demand". It is a symptom of needs and activities whose "civilizational" content is not yet decrypted in all its depth, insofar as it is approached by the same paradigm of yesteryear, i.e. that of the economist.

Yet this "silent revolution" reflects new aspirations, the meaning of which escapes the reductionism, hence the usefulness of economic analysis to open up to other human sciences and to the plurality of human cultures. It is only with these new theoretical perspectives that the rise in power of heritage and proximity tourism can be adequately decrypted. The proximity, the depth of the cultural and intercultural exchange, the new perceptions of nature and landscapes etc. express a profound need to be situated in an anonymous world dominated by the technique and economy de-enshrined and alienating.

This need for symbolic landmarks of existence is at the root of alternative tourism. At the same time, it opens the need for a new method of touristic governing that would not only enhance the touristic actors but also the tourists by involving them in an authentic exchange. From this point of view, the situated tourism organizes the intercultural exchange and ensures social and ecological sustainability.⁹

As we have already indicated, these new paradigmatic perspectives, that put at the center of their theoretical devices, the systems of symbolic representation of the actors, can both help us to decipher in depth the meaning of new needs and to devise the precautions to be taken as to how to satisfy them.

The economic and social demand in question reveals the exhaustion of the reign of quantity, and correlatively, the need to give meaning to its needs.

As a result, emerging markets express something deeper than a simple law of supply and demand.

This one, in its evolutions, is only an apparent manifestation. In depth, this is, in fact, a change in the values and representations of the actors. It's this change in the imagination of the actors that is at

⁹ See Delphine Roussel, *Tourism and local development. Experience of the meeting*, doctoral thesis, ULCO, December 2006.

the heart of the new tourist dynamics. It is not possible to separate the meaning that individuals give to their outside world, the needs and economic activities that satisfy them.

In this respect, the theory of the sites teaches us that any “sane and sensible” economy, derives its vitality from the beliefs, therefore, the motivations of the actors. The economic phenomena of supply and demand as well as the social, institutional and technological conditions cannot escape the cultural and historical contingencies of the sites.

The latter are therefore a kind of markers for the economic practices in their conception, their realization and their evaluation. The variety of sites and their evolutions, thus makes the idea of a unique model, applicable at all times and in any place, a chimera.

Conclusion

In the 21st century, it no longer seems possible to consume the natural resources in an unlimited way without any major risk to Mankind. The preservation of the environment is at the center of the ecological and heritage concerns of associations or institutions as diverse as Greenpeace, WWF or UNESCO.

As part of the extension of the concept of sustainable tourism, the late Hassan Zaoual had thought of designing a new concept of “situated tourism”. This is based in its majority of a theory of symbolic sites of belonging, which is the result of the work of the South-North network Culture and development in Brussels and fundamental research of the GREL.

The situated tourism is meant to be plural. Believing strongly in the relativity and mobility of economic, social and environmental phenomena, supporting the concept of a sustainable tourism, open to the experience of local people, environmentally friendly and a generator of added value Economic.

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