Abstract: The aim of this paper is to promote knowledge about tourism phenomena while studying its evolution and convergence towards sustainability taking into account its role and capacities in achieving global and sustainable development. Sustainable tourism development concept pursues to reconcile resources conservation and tourism profits ensuring both environmental integrity and economic growth in the long term run. Notwithstanding evidence has demonstrated hitherto the close relation between tourism development and resources gradual degradation. Thus, sustainable tourism development comes forth nowadays as the renewed paradigm of an old outlook, that is, the wise use of resources in order to guarantee the development process success in tourist destinations. Sustainable tourism development should be able therefore to not harm the environment avoiding tourist economic activity decline related to resources gradual degradation. As experience has showed in most destinations areas, where tourism has developed mainly by the mass model, spatial congestion and depletion has bring both frequentation and economic recession. Thus, many established tourism destinations have been forced to assume restructuring plans to keep competing in an increasingly broad and demanding market, (e.g. Calvià, in the Balearic Islands, where the establishment of Local Agenda 21 in the municipality implied a successful example of sustainable tourism development implementation), leading further tourism development through innovation towards more balanced and planned requirements. As one of the many economic activities developing in a territory tourism needs to be managed within an integrated framework addressed at the level of the whole area. Despite the attractiveness and necessity of the holistic approach for the achievement of STD implementation proves to be extremely difficult due the complex nature of tourism phenomenon and its multiple stakeholders. The purpose of this paper is to present an analysis of the limits and extent of STD outcomes in regard to the environment and a series of proposals for ensuring its goals for the benefit of tourist destinations.

1. Sustainable Tourism Development and the Environment

1.1. The limits to growth and the arise of the concept of sustainable development

Environmental concern was internationally brought up by Dennis Meadows and his colleagues in their report to the Club of Rome. The limits to growth report (Meadows et al. 1972) implied the start of a renewed consciousness focused in the long-term viability of the physical and social environments which mankind lives and operates in. Following the fundamental principles established in the report a series of international efforts culminated in subsequent conferences which set the pace to develop its ideas. Since the report's publication of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987, Our Common Future, commonly referred to as the Brundtland Report and the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro,
the concept of sustainable development has entered into the popular lexicon providing an essential challenge to all nations.

The Rio Summit clearly meant a turning point in the level of awareness regarding sustainable practices in tourism among governments and major groups. Likewise Sustainable development established itself as the basic strategy for a balanced co-existence of culture and tourism, which encompasses cultural tourism, progressively limits the negative impact of mass tourism on the natural and cultural environment, Agenda 21, International Charter of Sustainable Tourism (1995). In accordance with this concept of development the Agenda 21 for Travel and Tourism advocates a global effort dedicated to conservation, protection and restoration of the Earth's ecosystem through the power of tourism (WTTC et al., 1995). Despite the undoubted power of tourism the OECD General Report (1980) about The impact of Tourism on the Environment warned already about the negative consequences of tourism development and the need to improve its relationship with the environment. As it stands today we are faced with the challenge to reconcile tourism development and the conservation of its environment.

In the last two decades the evermore acute and increasing concern to achieve "a happy medium between "tourist growth" and "environmental conservation" has turned into an international research effort lead by governmental planners and the tourist industry. At the same time the tourist demand has become more and more aware and sensitive about the cost of tourism development and its impacts on the environment. The calling addressed for necessary planning and suitable management of the environmental tourist resources looking for careful choices that will not be detrimental to one nor the other. This seems to be the needed path to promote the tourist industry development from a qualitative as well as from a sustainable standpoint.

1.2. Persistent weaknesses for implementing sustainable tourism development

Nonetheless private interest still prevail in many tourist development processes compromising the value of resources and limiting the capability of further and sustainable economic growth at tourist destinations. To achieve the balance between development and the environment two conflicting parties have to come to terms with each other: one seeking short-term private advantage, the other upholding the long-term public interest. Moreover there is a need for an integrative and sensitive approach to tourism phenomenon and its impacts on the environment in a evermore accessible and global world, as Travis asserts, "there must be a "fit" or safeguard for a comparable quality of life for resident-populations versus that of visitors-populations, if tourism is to have the off-given "neo-colonial" and "inequitable" tags removed from it, particularly where relatively poor developing countries act as host to visitors from rich lands. Direct economic feedback to local and regional economies are critical requirements" Travis (1980).

Inequality is one of the main issues sustainability is dealing with since the concept was formulated. Tourism has proved to be able at the same time to be a precursor adopting this way of development, acting as a propelling element in the implementation of sustainable development assets, playing and contributing in a key and responsible way to the improvement of the economic and social conditions as well as preserving the natural environment as the principal and chief tourist resource in many areas, but simultaneously tourist growth has increased its pressure on resources by pursuing short term benefits and lack of planning in the tourism development process that has lead to an opposite effect in many other venues repeating the unlimited growth development model with the same mistakes that compromise the future of sustainable development implementation. Therefore, in order to meet the challenges requested to implement sustainable tourism development, the environment must be understood as a hole based territory including its natural, socioeconomic and long-term dimensions.
2. Tourism growth in post-modern society

2.1. The impact of international events

Despite the aftermath of September eleven 2001 attacks, the last year’s terrorist attack on Bali, the recent war in Iraq and the current international health alert due the impact of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) tourism is still one of the world's largest industries and one of the fastest growing economic sectors. Thus travel and tourism figures show global increase share in word-wide economy. As Donaire (1995) points out the new internationality of the tourist outlook has transformed anyplace into an appealing and attractive potential destination to the demand and consequently to the further development of the tourist industry. Although tourism is expanding fast all over the world, its positive impact on natural environment conservation and cross-cultural relations is still shallow. Thus, while tourism figures reflect steady annual growth rates that point out an increasing demand all over the world, its sustainability issues and concerns about its impacts on the environment rise in general among society and in particular among tourist international organizations, academic researchers and the tourist industry.

Tourism growth in the past few decades has become undeniably an attribute and a characteristic in post-modern western societies turning it into one of the world's leading industries increasing the ever growing sheer number of people traveling around the world. Therefore the international tourism development expansion has begun to put a huge strain on its natural resources and local communities. This trend due to different components implies a bigger pressure on global environment, since multiple local ones provide the basic resource essential for most forms of tourism.

To mention one of these components I would like to highlight the role tourism demand plays in tourism development introducing a gradual standardization in established tourism destinations from which driven out vacationers create an impelling demand for new, exotic and distant environmental paradises. In this way new destinations appear and develop all the time spreading further tourist activities, infrastructures and facilities in an increasing number of developed and developing countries. Thus, the phenomena of the gradual standardization of popular destinations is contributing to create an increasing demand for new exotic and distant tourist developments, bringing territorial changes and new ways of life in often culturally and economically frail nature areas.

2.2. Tourism in developing countries

In developing countries tourism development is frequently located in well preserved and sensitive ecosystems, such as the dry lands, coastal and mountain areas as well as islands. Often tourism development in those type of environments produces mixed outcomes. The lack of real interest and respect for the local culture and its own economic prosperity results in unsustainable patterns. Although tourism can promote very important economic and social benefits, cross-cultural contacts between tourists and locals or indigenous peoples are not always equally satisfactory. Outsiders bring in wealth that raises locals hopes to unrealistic levels; clothing that they might find shocking; unhealthy habits and intrusive behavior, and even worse, condescension and racism, sexual exploitation, and trash and pollution.

Often well-established destinations in developing countries become victims of their own success as land and properties are bought up by foreign companies and locals are driven out of business. Financial rather than ethical considerations are made then by investors looking for short-term benefits. In other cases tourist development projects are launched without previous host community consultation or support resulting in jealousy and contempt among the inhabitants.
Some are set up without the necessary planning and lack of infrastructure that will seriously damage the natural environment. Lack of human resources to run and manage the developing destination can also compromise the local territorial sustainability and its future economic revenues. Likewise negative socio-economic implications for the host community are generated when developing destinations are commercialized through exclusive resorts that are run without local involvement nor benefit.

2.3. Tourism in popular traditional destinations

On the other hand popular traditional destinations mainly located in developed countries had often experienced a gradual offer standardization, exceeding frequently their building capacity by the demand pressure and consequently bringing harmful impacts on the natural environment along with a quality decline in tourist experience.

Likewise popular traditional destinations don't allow in many cases tourists to interact in a direct and meaningful way with the locals. Generally, tourists are influenced by certain specific images, often “imaginary” that they wish to experience in person, but in fact, traditional local habits in popular tourist destinations tend to be abandoned when locals adopt new technology and a modern way of life. Conflict rises in host communities between those who are in favour of change without discrimination and those who wish to save and preserve their landscape and cultural identity. The scope of these impacts and their repercussions may vary from country to country, territory to territory, depending on the number and kind of tourists that visit and the initial development of tourism in the area.

3. The need for a change

3.1. Sustainable tourism development versus tourism development: opportunity or necessity?

The necessity to encourage alternative perspectives to promote tourism development were discussed and approved by the European Commission directives during the European Year of Tourism 1990. Among those adopted were the strengthening of other forms of tourism, such as agro-tourism, ecological-naturalist tourism and cultural tourism, focusing on minimizing the negative consequences of mass tourism and encouraging positive new forms of tourism development. In this context a considerable number of depressed rural areas within the European Union had benefited from the funds of different projects launched since then by the European Commission. For instance Leader programs were based in many occasions on the strengths of tourism development as an economic catalyst for the recovery of rural areas.

Likewise the European Commission had published a series of reports related to the environment and its relationship to tourism development. Taking Account of Environment in Tourism Development (COM, 1993) aims to define the pattern of relationships between environment and tourism competitiveness through the analysis of tourism resort case histories, their type and position on the life cycle, Butler (1980). The study establishes a model of the interaction among tourism development-environment actors, namely supply and demand, government, host population and cultural, natural and urban environment with the goal to develop a tourist industry which not only appears compatible with the environment but which actually promotes it. The proposed model implies an important tool for the implementation of sustainable development major precepts and the identification and recognition of the different stakeholders involved in tourist production and consumption processes.

The effectiveness of methodological proposals and policies developed by the EU and other international organizations and agencies since 1990 looking for more suitable forms of tourism development in accordance with the principles of sustainability is still limited.
The growing and diversifying phenomena of tourist offer and demand both geographically and qualitatively are increasing the overall impact of tourism on the environment. In any case and despite the insufficiency of available tools and the number of policies implemented, sustainable tourism development has become through the last fifteen years an ever more internationally accepted paradigm to achieve. Thus along with the time the concept of sustainable tourism development has evolve from being seen as an opportunity and a strategy in the tourism development process to be consider an ever more pressing and unavoidable prioritized need.

4. Towards sustainability

4.1. International conferences briefing: leading proposals and purposes

The World Ecotourism Summit celebrated last year after a long process of previous smaller encounters looking for general consensus culminated with its declaration aiming to implement sustainable tourism principles in this sector of the tourism industry.

The Québec declaration on ecotourism signed on the 22 May 2002 in Canada is the result of a consultative process to incorporate the input of the large variety of stakeholders, involving over 3000 representatives from national and local governments, including the tourism, environment and other administrations, private ecotourism businesses and their trade associations, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and consultants, intergovernmental organizations, and indigenous and local communities from all over the world. The document resulting from the multistakeholder dialogue held during the Québec Summit, although it is not a negotiated document, has as a main purpose to give a set of recommendations for the development of ecotourism activities in the context of sustainable development.

In this sense, we should remember the participants recommendation at the World Ecotourism Summit hosted in Québec City, Canada, which says as follows: "The participants at the Summit acknowledge the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) that will take place in Johannesburg, August/September 2002, as the ground-setting event for international policy in the next 10 years, and emphasize that, as a leading industry, the sustainability of tourism should be a priority at WSSD due to its potential contribution to poverty alleviation and environmental protection in endangered ecosystems".

Differing from 10 years before at Rio, tourism was directly considered at Johannesburg summit as an redoubtable and strategic asset to achieve sustainable development. The world summit on sustainable development celebrated in South Africa last year reaffirmed sustainable tourism development as a central element of the international agenda and gave new impetus to global action to fight poverty and protect the environment. To achieve these goals the plan of implementation included in the WSSD final report a specific paragraph concerning tourism, (Nº 43), World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002).

The final report stresses the need to promote sustainable tourism development through international cooperation, providing among others, technical assistance to developing countries, safeguarding heritage preservation and assisting host communities in managing visits to their tourism attractions. Making it clear that enhancing foreign direct investment and partnerships with both private and public sectors at all levels is a basic requirement. Further references to tourism can be found in the Plan Implementation related to energy and biodiversity conservation, Small Island Developing states and African issues. The plan recognizes the power of tourism to achieve its goals and urges to promote the ongoing work under the Convention on Biological Diversity, including sustainable tourism, as a across-cutting issue relevant to different ecosystems, sectors and thematic areas.
Djerba Declaration reflects the links between tourism and climate change. The First International Conference on Climate Change and Tourism, held in Tunisia in April 2003 final declaration recognizes the key role of the Kyoto Protocol as a first step in the control of greenhouse emissions in line with the concerns, pursuits and activities of the United Nations system in the field of climate change, and more generally, in that of sustainable development.

This assessment brings up the complex relationships between tourism and climate change, particularly the impacts that the latter is producing upon different types of tourism destinations, while not ignoring that transport often used for tourist movements and other components of the tourism industry contribute in return to climate change. The international community acknowledgement that tourism is now fully integrated in the consumption patterns of many countries makes it necessary to encourage the tourism industry, including transport companies, hoteliers, tour operators, travel agents and tourist guides, to adjust their activities, using more energy-efficient and cleaner technologies and logistics, in order to minimize as much as possible their contribution to climate change.

In this sense we must stress the effort made by WSSD organizers in order to mitigate the effects on the carbon emissions produced by the summit celebrated in Johannesburg, with over 60,000 people jetting from around the world the emissions generated were estimated around 500,000 tonnes of CO2. This attitude set an international precedent and entails the start of carbon neutral and zero waste conferences.

In general terms, the need for a systematic planning approach in tourism has become a widely accepted procedure. Tourism policies and strategies recommended by international organizations, and then formulated by national, regional and local government authorities have been increasingly addressing environmental and sustainability issues. The difficulty still remains in most cases in integrating environmental policies, laws and related regulations taking into account the needs of, and the potential offered by the tourism sector.

On the other hand critical reports rise constantly from the voluntary and academic sectors being much less optimistic about the real progress made towards sustainability, questioning governmental priorities, their will to increase tourist flow and earnings over other considerations, and accusing them of just caring about the benefits of the multinationals, particularly World Travel and Tourism Council companies, which control the flow of tourists around the world. Thus Civil society and Indigenous People organizations widely considered geo-politics and lifestyle aspects as the main responsible actors that create unsustainable tourism. They insist on promoting tourism emphasizing its capacities as an instrument for poverty eradication, self-rule and decision-making process on a participative basis.

5. The sustainability of tourism

5.1. Tourism evolution and the convergence of sustainable tourism development

Jafari’s four tourism platforms provide a good basis to understand the general attitude towards the evolution of tourism development in the last decades. In the 1950s and 1960s tourism was perceived as the ideal smokeless industry “advocacy platform” on the contrary in the 1970s many academics viewed tourism as a dangerous predator capable of ruining the environmental, economic and socio-cultural integrity of destinations “cautionary platform”. The third step “adaptancy platform” was formulated during the 1980s along with the rising opposition between alternative tourism and mass tourism. Finally the “knowledge-based platform” emerged in the 1990s gathering the legacy of its predecessors, moving beyond duality opposition and focusing on the effectiveness of the management practices that are applied to the circumstances of each specific destination.
It is in this context that sustainable tourism principles, practices and indicators are starting to promote the global strategy towards sustainability.

Long-term protection of the environment and local involvement in tourist development are necessary in tourist destinations in order to achieve their long-term profitability.

Sustainability can avoid the boom-and-bust cycle that creates over-dependency on tourism which results in over-development that destroys the original destination's resources. Therefore sustainable tourist development, in accordance with its particular physical and geographical space, can help at a local scale improve the natural, economic and social environment, contributing to the balance between human activities and territory on a global long-term scale. Tourism represents a great opportunity that offers the best chance of reducing widespread poverty and high levels of unemployment. It is a major source of investment, job creation, and local economic development. It can help to support cultural diversity that might otherwise disappear, especially as developing countries and regions rush to emulate the industrialized world.

Nevertheless tourism development uses resources and generates waste within the natural environment, bringing with it natural, cultural and social costs and benefits in the process. Like other economic sectors tourism can contribute both to improve or to damage the natural and social environment. The relationship between economic development and the conservation and protection of natural resources is frequently an antagonistic one. Finding its balance is the challenge to achieve sustainable tourism development.

Tourism has the particular strength which is to promote the idea of sustainability since tourism activities in the destinations are crucially related and dependent on the local environment. Indeed tourism as an economic sector has the particularity to transform a space or territory interacting within it, simultaneously through both processes of production and consumption of tourism services and experiences. This fact implies a specially close and fragile relationship between tourism development and its local environment since the destruction or decline of the environmental conditions in a area will unfailingly bring a similar decline in tourists frequency. Therefore tourist destinations have to be very careful if they want to avoid the impacts of an unplanned development.

6. Implementing strategies to achieve sustainable tourism development

6.1. The relevance of the educational answers

To achieve this goal, an international effort must be made by tourism educational institutions to educate their students through their academic programs in the principles of sustainable tourist development. This effort will accelerate and reinforce the process towards sustainability in the tourism industry since the academic background of tourism professionals will reflect the principles of sustainable tourism management. This will bring a stronger coordination and cooperation between tour operators, travel agents, hotels, carriers, tourism associations, local planners and tourism managers. From here on a monitoring and accreditation system on tourist development as well as an evaluation system on the use of codes of conduct in tourism could be set up to ensure tourist territories sustainability performance.

In this sense, academic tourism institutions must be aware of international summits messages to meet the challenges that will be needed to improve the benefits on the natural environment and the performance of the cross-cultural tourism contacts around the world in the future.
Therefore the highest competence and responsibility in the tourism business as well as a deep concern and solidarity with the global community must be always the main objective of any educational tourism system. Thus new educational subjects and multiple initiatives need to be offered each year to the students with the aim to give them the right tools to face with success the ever changing challenges in the tourism industry.

6.2. Foreign languages

First of all it must be stressed that languages are a fundamental skill that all tourism students need to acquire and master in order to develop their professional careers successfully in an ever more international industry. Beyond the communicative strength that languages hold, we need to remember that they represent cultural diversity. Thus language is a very useful tool for understanding the countless cultures and their evolution. Further more languages must act as a vehicle to understand culture and history permitting students not only to improve their foreign language skills, but also to learn more about geography, history, economy and customs of a great variety of territories and societies that will give them a broader knowledge of mankind's history and heritage. Language courses are a valuable educational instrument through which students increase their general background and sensibility towards other ways of life, cultures and customs, as well as a better understanding of their own environment on a global scale and the need to preserve diversity for the next generations.

For this reason it is fundamental to increase this kind of course offering in tourism studies curriculums. By reinforcing the role of foreign languages, academic tourism institutions can make a huge contribution towards increasing cross-cultural relationships and cooperation in the international tourism industry. By doing this tourism industry professionals can contribute to responsible tourist development that strengthens social and cultural exchanges between tourists and locals. Tourism can then play its part to alleviate poverty and protect the environment.

Therefore good foreign language skills combined with an open-minded attitude towards cultural diversity and interpersonal understanding reinforced with effective management practice is the most fundamental way to train the tourism student community as well as to guarantee their professional future. A responsible and successful professional must be aware of the trends that characterize the tourism industry today in order to be able to innovate and offer new opportunities to improve tourist experience both for locals and travelers.

6.3. The need to develop tourism through planning and management assessment

A great effort is needed to adapt existing methodological and technological knowledge to the specific situations prevalent at every region, country and province, down to the very local level WTO (2001). An accurate assessment of the physical characteristics and cultural circumstances of each tourist destination is the secret to achieve the desired long-term environmental conservation and cross-cultural contacts between hosts and visitors. Therefore the tourist development process must adjust to its territory, setting up the suitable infrastructure that will ensure its success and performance in a sustainable way. Adapted infrastructure has to take into account the characteristics of each specific locality in order to avoid harmful impacts on the environment.

Often traditionally popular destinations are better prepared to cope with large number of tourists, whereas exotic destinations without suitable infrastructure and management have suffered from negative environmental impacts such as deforestation, littering and erosion. The lack of design and infrastructure damages not just the natural resources, but the locals way of life and their own future. For this reason tourism industry must run its business and activities focusing in effective practice management.
Professionals must be able to run tourism businesses simultaneously with economic excellency and social concern. Functional management implemented in a sustainable way not only helps to preserve the environment but also benefits both the locals and the tourist industry. At the same time tourist's satisfaction improves due to active participation as a key actor in the process towards sustainability where both tourists and locals are open to each other, interacting with mutual respect and interest.

7. Conclusion

Nowadays tourism faces the challenge to combine “tradition” and “modernity” to transform these contradictions into complementarities, Karpodini-Dimitriadi (1999). Therefore, environmental and cross-cultural challenges in tourism must be based on the reinforcement of its social functions that strengthen the connections among people, generating educational, cultural, economic and social activity in a respected natural environment. The international tourism community must embrace the specific principles which distinguish the concept of sustainable tourism development, WWF/Tourism concern (1994), ensuring the respect for the environment and the host community's active participation in the tourist development process guarantying the economic and social benefits of destinations and their long-term local and regional profitability. Further research, political commitment as well as private involvement in sustainable tourism development are mandatory assets to insure its convergence and contribution to the global process towards sustainability.

José Boyra Amposta, Barcelona 17th March 2004.
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