

SUSTAINABILITY AND TOURISM: FROM INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTATION TO PLANNING IN SPAIN «HORIZON 2020»

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I. WITH REGARD TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF SUSTAINABILITY

Following the publication of the World Commission on the Environment and Development (WCED)'s *Brundtland Report* (1987), which defined the concept of «sustainable development» as «development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs» (WCED, 1988: 10), environmental questions took on unprecedented importance and it became imperative to seek a fresh development model which respected the environment. The *United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development (Rio, 1992)* was responsible in the first place for consolidating the theoretical arguments about sustainability, mainly through the *Rio Declaration*, the 27 principles of which contained the need to apply new parameters to understanding development. Today, the sustainability paradigm applies to all economic activities and the world's way of life; this represents a change in the way in which we relate to the planet based on a philosophy which can be understood as conditioning future actions; this however is not rigid, but rather represents a «dynamic process and a structural change» (Jiménez, 2010). This relates to social processes and therefore takes on the character of a «social virtue» involving moderation in the behaviour of individuals in their use and enjoyment of natural resources (Panadero, 2010: 80-81). Perhaps in this way we are approaching the longed-for new model of development in which production and consumption do not conflict with the environment whilst enabling us to satisfy our basic needs, something which still remains somewhat utopian today.

II. SUSTAINABILITY AND TOURISM: SOME NECESSARY REFLECTIONS

Tourism is one of the most profitable economic activities in some countries and regions. This is the case in Spain, where it contributes 11% of GDP and provides over two and a half

million jobs (Valdés, Del Valle and Pulido; 2010). Taking into account all of the activities in which people are involved during their trips and stays in places other than their usual homes for consecutive periods of less than one year, whether for business, leisure or other purposes, tourism is no longer a marginal activity but can now be regarded as a «general and structural» activity (Vera, 1997: 20).

These activities have a multitude of positive and negative consequences for the areas which receive the visitors (the destinations) which have been analysed exhaustively (UNWTO, 1999; Fullana and Ayuso, 2002; Pardellas and Padín, 2004). The advantages include experiences of other places and ways of life, personal enrichment, cultural exchange and economic gains, mainly through job creation and increased revenues. Some of the disadvantages are related to effects on the environment and land use which in turn has further effects on the landscape (collection of rocks, fires, etc), plant life (collection of plants, cutting down of trees, etc), water quality (pollution of rivers and beaches, etc) and air quality (air and noise pollution). In addition to these, there are further repercussions on the rural and urban environment, such as concentration and over-development in some areas, the loss of landscape quality, excessive burdens on electricity and water infrastructure and the generation of waste; these are particularly serious issues in some parts of the world. These factors justify the need to apply a «philosophy of sustainability» to such activities in which a number parties are involved (tourists, companies, institutions, etc.); this question started being addressed in the last third of the 20th century.

The combination of the terms sustainability and tourism gives rise to the concept of *sustainable tourism*, which can be understood as being that which satisfies the present needs of tourists and host regions whilst protecting and improving opportunities for the future. It is also conceived as a way of managing resources which can meet economic, social and aesthetic needs, whilst at the same time respecting cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biodiversity and the systems which support life, according to the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO, 1999: 22; Various Authors., 2003). In 2004, UNWTO reviewed this definition and placed further emphasis on the balance between environmental, social and economic aspects of tourism, and the need to apply sustainability principles in all sectors of tourism. The concept of sustainable tourism is still little used, perhaps because it is not a form of tourism, but rather the principle that all forms of tourism should be sustainable and should therefore rather be «understood as a paradigm which can be adapted to the specific circumstances of each location» (Fullana and Ayuso, 2002: 30) as «guidelines for the development of sustainable tourism and sustainable management practices apply to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, including mass tourism and all tourism segments» (UNWTO, 2004).

There is a degree of complexity in evaluating the situation and the degree to which this concept has been implemented in a specific context, with sustainability indicators being the most widely used for this, as their purpose is to determine whether practices are in fact authentically «sustainable». Many studies have been published on Spain (Vera, 2001; MMA, 2003; etc.), its regions, for example the Balearic Islands (CITTIB, 2000; Blázquez, Murria and Garau: 2002), and local (Juárez, 2004) and municipal (Vera and Ivars, 2003b; Pardellas and Padín, 2004) parts of the country. Some of those published recently include the proposals for the Synthetic Sustainability Index for Tourism (ST INDEX), which considers

a number of weighted factors (Sánchez and Pulido, 2008: 81 onwards); calculation of the «ecological footprint» of the Balearic Islands (Murray, Rullán and Maciá: 2005); and a study of municipal districts in Catalonia which established differentiated indicators related to socio-cultural factors (development of the population, the origins of tourists, basic services and cultural equipment, etc.); the economic dimension (inventory of tourist resources and attractions, accommodation, seasonality of supply, etc.); and finally environment issues (the effects of tourists on the environment, energy consumption, waste generated, etc.) (Torres, 2010: 485 onwards).

In the business field, there are a number of awards which identify practices which combine sustainability and tourism. These include the ITS (*Integrated Tourism Sustainability*) standard, which brings together a number of different marks. This was created to promote development actions and programmes by companies and tourism facilities, and to verify that such measures have achieved sustainability; the *Biosphere Hotels* environmental quality mark recognises environmental factors in hotel management: saving energy and water; use of clean energy sources; minimisation of pollution; ecological promotion and preservation of the environment among other requirements. The *European Eco-label* is the only environmental quality mark certified by an independent body and recognised throughout Europe; it can be requested by any tourism operator –from the largest chains to small farms offering working holidays; the *Blue Flags* are widely recognised and aim to raise public awareness and encourage official action on the quality of Europe's beaches and ports, and in particular the quality of bathing water as required by the Community Directive (http://archivo.ecodes.org/pages/especial/turismo_sostenible/index.asp).

III. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DOCUMENTATION

The documentation analysed includes some of the main references for understanding sustainability and tourism at present. These start from the most general, referring to international texts and then examine the European context. We should first highlight the *Charter For Sustainable Tourism (1995)*, an essential reference point which sets our 18 principles as the basis for creating a «world tourism strategy based on sustainable development», definitively accepting the links between sustainability, the conservation of resources and the important role that tourism can play in developing areas, particularly those in less developed countries with a rich variety of flora, fauna, landscapes and cultural attractions (VV.AA., 2003). *Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry (1996, revised in 2001)* establishes a series of limits with which sustainable tourism should comply by way of a code of behaviour which underlines the need for cooperation between governments, companies and non-governmental organisations, analysing the strategic importance of tourism and demonstrating the benefits of developing it into a sustainable activity (Sánchez and Pulido, 2008: 25). The purpose of *The Berlin Declaration (1997)* was to adapt the Biological Diversity Agreement signed in Rio in 1992 which recognises tourism as a source of wealth and promotes its growth and that regions which have not been much affected are being chosen as destinations. The 10 articles of *The World Tourism Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (1999)* highlight the «right to tourism and the freedom of tourist movement» and the «desire to promote fair, responsible and sustainable global tourism to the mutual benefit

of all parts of society within an open and liberalised international economy» (<http://www.turismo-sostenible.org/docs.php?did=3>).

The European Union's *Agenda for Sustainable and Competitive European Tourism* (2007) established a number of general objectives, such as economic prosperity, fairness and social cohesion, environment protection and culture. It faces up to the need to «find an adequate balance between the autonomous development of destinations and the protection of their environment on the one hand, and the development of competitive economic activity on the other» (EC, 2007: 2). *The Declaration of Madrid «Towards a socially responsible tourism model»* (2010) expresses the desire to be involved in the implementation of a new consolidated framework for tourism policy based on the Lisbon Treaty; to promote ethical and responsible tourism and, in particular, the social, environmental, cultural and economic sustainability of tourism; to promote knowledge and innovation and the use of new technology and the exchange of best practices; and to support measures and initiatives which encourage the lengthening of the main tourist season, contributing to the struggle against seasonality and maintaining employment in the low season. Finally the European Commission Communication «*Europe, the top tourist destination in the world: a new political framework for European tourism*» (2010), which draws on the former seeks to define a new framework for action linked to the Europe 2020 strategy for intelligent, sustainable and integrated growth «to reinforce competitiveness and the capacity for sustainable growth» (EC, 2010: 2).

IV. PLANNING FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN SPAIN

Having analysed the most important documentation relating to understanding the relationship between sustainability and tourism, we will now examine how this has been incorporated into planning in Spain, leading to a new focus on tourism which meets the demands of a more sustainable development model. We should start by referring to the *European Sustainable Development Strategy* which was approved in 2001 and subsequently revised in 2005 as part of the *6th Environmental Action Programme of the European Community* «Environment 2010: holding the future in our hands», where tourism and personal travel are considered as part of one of the four categories linked to consumption. This document set the stage for the subsequent publication of the *Strategic Sustainable Development Strategy for Spain* (2007) and the «*Horizon 2020*» *Spanish Tourism Plan*.

The *Strategic Sustainable Development Strategy for Spain* approved in 2007 aimed to guarantee economic prosperity and protection of the environment whilst avoiding damage to natural capital, promoting greater social cohesion and contributing to the development of less-favoured nations in terms of global sustainability. It was divided into three sections: I. Production and Consumption; II. Climate Change; and III. Conservation and Management of Natural Resources and Use of Territory. Tourism is included in the first of these as one of the main drivers of growth in the Spanish economy, being highly dependent on the quality of the natural and cultural environment in a country which is the world's second largest power in this field.

The «*Horizon 2020*» *Spanish Tourism Plan* (<http://www.minetur.gob.es/turismo/es-es/turismo2020/paginas/turismo2020.aspx>) led by the Spanish Tourism Council (Ministry

of Industry, Tourism and Trade) is a response to Spain's international commitment to revaluing the tourist system as a key to sustainability, as defined in the Spanish Sustainable Development Strategy. The objective is for the future development of tourism in Spain to be based on competitiveness and environmental, social and economic sustainability; in other words, once the market has been analysed, Spain's tourism industry should be based on a globally competitive and sustainable model which meets the following medium and longer-term goals (SGT, 2007: 20):

- * To improve planning methodologies and tools and to incorporate these into territorial and urban planning.
- * To adapt tourist products for emerging destinations to new trends in design and marketing.
- * To update the management and marketing systems of companies.
- * To improve Spain's presence in distant markets and other value segments of European markets.
- * To establish a retention and customer loyalty strategy focused on current demand.
- * To smooth out the excessive seasonality of tourist flows.
- * To adapt the human resource management model to improve the capacity to attract talent.
- * To improve the competitive environment.

The *Diagnosis* clearly revealed the need to improve the balance between tourist activity and the environment and also to increase the competitive environment, particularly in relation to employment, training and R&D&I productivity, in addition to adapting management, products and services, marketing and destinations to new business structures (Internet, new types of consumer, etc.). Projections to 2020 (based on nine aggregate indicators) present a rather concerning prospect: flat-lining of the country's revenues at a constant value combined with increasing supply of accommodation and lower occupancy rates for existing tourist facilities, in parallel to increased environmental and climatic loads (Prats, 2008: 32). The principles which should govern this new approach are therefore based on planning with a market-orientated approach; ensuring a balance between the tourism sector and the environment; differentiating destinations; specialising in products in accordance with demand; improving companies; and maintaining ongoing commitment and cooperation between the parties involved. The *08-12 Spanish Tourism Plan* has been designed in this new strategic framework as a lever to promote progress in implementing the 2020 Strategy, developing the commitment of the State Tourist Boards into programmes and areas of action which pay particular attention to quality; this is a significant strategy for enabling Spain to compete with other destinations (Foronda and García, 2009: 92-93). The *operating principles* are: concentration of resources (taking advantage of synergies between actors and programmes), the demonstration effect (models for other activities), cooperation and alliances (seeking mutual benefits and overlaps), efficiency (obtaining more for less) and integration, in addition to Competitiveness Plans for Tourism Products. These plans contain the specific actions to be developed within each of the approaches planned and the associated General Objectives and Programmes.

Table 1
KEY APPROACHES AND OBJECTIVES IN THE «HORIZON 2020» SPANISH TOURISM PLAN

KEY APPROACH	OBJECTIVES
<i>New Tourist Economy</i>	Fully developing differentiated advantages resulting from the new economy in which innovation, knowledge and attracting and developing talent are key strategic assets for customer satisfaction and business success
<i>Customer value</i>	Improving the value offered to the customer through tourist experiences which differentiate and promote the personality and positioning of Spain as a destination, making management of the customer relationship and customer satisfaction into the new paradigm for the development, marketing and management of products
<i>Sustainability of the Model</i>	Improving the sustainability of the Spanish tourism system, optimising profits per unit of sustainable-load capacity and investment, guaranteeing the quality of the natural and cultural environment in each location, together with integration and social welfare and socio-territorial rebalancing
<i>Competitive Environment</i>	Creating the optimum environment for the creation and development of competitive and innovative tourist businesses
<i>Shared Leadership</i>	Promoting a new shared leadership system for Spanish tourism based on principles of efficiency and joint responsibility in developing common actions, helping to increase awareness of the socio-economic benefits of sustainable development of tourist activity for the sector and society

Source: «Horizon 2020» Spanish Tourism Plan. 08-12 Spanish Tourism Plan, Executive Document (p. 31 onwards).

V. CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A TOURISM CULTURE BASED ON SUSTAINABILITY PARAMETERS

We consider it important to conclude by highlighting some important ideas. Firstly, sustainability as applied to any economic activity is a respectful way of understanding our relationship with the environment. Irrespective of the use of this in certain marketing strategies for self-interested purposes, this is an obligation on all of us. The new scale of values which it involves, together with the ethical responsibility it brings with it, represent a cultural revolution which characterises the post-industrial age and will mark the future relationships between society and the environment. We should also consider local sustainability in addition to global sustainability; this involves specific areas with obvious problems, linking these to forms of production and consumption which meet sustainability criteria and can be measured using indicators, in this case within the context of sustainable tourism.

It is also important to have a critical attitude when there is an excess of «green» documents and policies which unfortunately often use the word «sustainable» mistakenly, basing it on criteria of economic profitability. In this regard, we consider that attention should be paid to all the documentation summarised here, and in particular planning policies relating to Spain. These questions justify a commitment to sustainable practices as the only possible solution as we change to a new model of development.