

GEOGRAPHY

Assess the environmental, social and economic impact of one economic activity in a global context.

Tourism is the temporary movement of people to destinations outside their normal place of work and residence, together with the activities undertaken during their stay at those destinations and the facilities created to cater for visiting tourists. It is a highly complex productive activity involving the activities and interests of large transport undertakings, owners of tourist sites and attractions, various tourist services at the destination, as well as all levels of government. Being such a large industry, it has a number of economic, social and environmental impacts.

Environmental Impacts

The natural and built environments are major attractions for tourists. This includes, for example, rare fauna and flora and cultural sites. However, tourists put enormous pressure on these sites through overuse, reducing the sites' capacity to deliver tourist satisfaction. That is, reduces the sites carrying capacity.

Tourists put enormous pressure on both natural and cultural sites at a crucial point; this pressure damages sites through overuse and thus reduces its capacity to deliver tourist satisfaction. This point is referred to as a sites carrying capacity. When this is surpassed the area becomes degraded and attracts fewer tourists.

Potential impacts of tourism on the environment:

The natural environment:

- Disruption of breeding habits
- Change in extent and/or nature of vegetation cover through clearance or planting to accommodate tourist facilities
- Compactions of soils causing increased surface runoff
- Damage to geological features such as tors, caves, riverbanks
- Water pollution through discharges of sewage and spillages of oil or petrol
- Air pollutions from vehicle emissions
- Noise pollution from tourist transport and activities
- Depletion of natural resources; ground and surface water supplies, fossil fuels
- Visual impacts such as buildings, chairlifts and car parks; litter

It is in the best interest of all stakeholders in the tourism industry to protect the natural environment that has not yet been destroyed beyond repair. ECOLOGICALLY SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT of tourist sites through ecotourism is seen as the answer:

With proper planning and management tourism can and does have positive impacts on the environment, including the creation of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, research into wild life, protection of native species and natural features.

The built environment:

- Over load of infrastructure, such as roads, railways, car parking, electricity grid, communications systems, waste disposal and water supply
- Provision of new infrastructure
- Changes in residential, retail or industrial land uses

- Emergence of contrasts between urban areas developed for the tourist population and those of the host population.
- Growth in the built-up area
- Visual impacts – tourism related advertising

Preservation and restoration of historical buildings and sites plus the generation of revenue for historical places, heritage projects, museums and galleries indicate that the built environment is also benefiting from tourism.

The challenge in managing tourism is to develop procedures to assess the potential environmental impacts from tourism-related developments. Australia's Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) 's are designed to help in this process, identifying likely consequences for the environment if a development is to occur. Governments now have various legislation that helps conserve source nature and cultural resources.

Internationally the problem has been acknowledged by the WTO and UNEP who have been active limiting uncontrolled development in environmentally fragile areas. The 1990 tourism policy forums 1st international assembly asserted that future developments must be compatible with the environment.

With adequate planning by governments and adherence to environmental codes by tourist operators, the threat that environmental degradation poses to global tourism can be overcome.

Economic Impacts

Tourism is a significant economic sector of the global economy – it is the largest export-earning sector with foreign current receipts from international tourism, an important element of the balance of payments for many countries. It is also a major source of both direct (eg travel services, transport, guides) and indirect (eg marketing, and media) employment. Tourism has a multiplier effect with new money being spent and respent, thus stimulating other sectors as well as increasing tax revenues.

Although tourism generated many jobs, that are often poorly paid with unqualified workers exploited by large TNC's who control much of the industry. Tourism can also destroy jobs in a country by displacing traditional sources of income such as agricultural and fishing. Also the seasonal nature of tourism means that employment and income are not always constant EG ski resorts

Tourism earnings are often "leaked out" of destination countries. Leakages are greatest where the level of tourist capital imported is high. EG hotels are frequently foreign owned with skilled workers imported, meaning profits and wages are repatriated (sent back to the home country).

Tourism is subjected to fluctuations in exchange related because the value of a currency is a strong factor in influencing tourist flows. A decline in the exchange rate of a tourist destination nation makes travel there more affordable. Eg when the \$Australian was low (less than 50c \$US), tourists could buy more Australian currency, thus benefiting our tourist industry. Conversely Australians wishing to go overseas would pay more thus reducing their overseas travel options – this stimulated domestic tourism, as many couldn't afford to go overseas.

Declining tourist numbers in specific areas can have drastic effects. Some countries such as Egypt and Jamaica receive more than 60% of their export income from tourism, so are very vulnerable to currency fluctuations.

The vulnerability of the global economy was highlighted by the Asian economic financial crisis in 1998. Destinations in East Asia and the Pacific were worst affected, experiencing losses in the order of \$us 3 billion, however, it has a rippling affect throughout the world as investors lost confidence in the fragile market.

Social Impacts

Social contact between tourist and residents can be mutually beneficial. The resident population can gain greater understanding of visitor customs and values and enjoy increased demand for traditional entertainment/services, thus preserving parts of the natural heritage; while tourists themselves gain a better appreciation of the host's culture.

Examples of positives for host countries include: New infrastructure – roads, airports sewer and water systems, and the creation of local employment; both promoting higher standards of living.

On the other hand cities of tourism maintain it may promote mutual misunderstanding, hospitality and social tension as residents' lifestyles are affected by the demands of tourists. Tourists bring out different behaviors and lifestyles in hosts, that are often changed to imitate or please tourists EG shorting of traditional dances in Bali to hold the tourists interest. Another is the perception in some Islamic countries that westerners are promiscuous because of the way they dress.

The growth of prostitution, crime and gambling in host populations is also a negative outcome. It is estimated that in Thailand more than 500 000 women and 800 000 children are working in the sex industry.

Critics also argue that tourism widens the gap between rich and poor countries, promoting the "haves" and "have-nots" and alienation of lower classes in developing countries. EG cast class in India who rely in begging from tourist to survive.

Such serious social impacts indicate that social policy and provisions of community services must become an integral part of tourism planning, by both tourism operators and the host government.