

# **SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

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**ABSTRACT:** International Organizations such as the United Nations have always had the growth of less developed nations as one of their main missions. Tourism is one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world; it contributes strongly to the development of poor countries. This is why international organizations find in tourism a tool for reducing poverty especially in countries that do not have enough resources to develop industrial economies. The aspect of Sustainable Development is un-separable from the action of such organizations since their goal is to improve the quality of life of human beings nowadays but without affecting the quality of life of future populations. In 2002, the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg directly addressed sustainable tourism in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. In this Plan, Sustainable Tourism was referred to as a tool to increase the benefits from tourism resources for the population in host communities while maintaining the cultural and environmental integrity of the host communities and enhancing the protection of ecologically sensitive areas and natural heritages. In our paper we are going to analyze the role of international organizations in spreading consciousness about the importance of sustainable tourism and in initiating sustainable tourism strategies in poor countries. **Keywords:** Tourism, Sustainability, United Nations, Poverty Reduction, Development.

**RESUMEN:** Las organizaciones internacionales como las Naciones Unidas asumieron siempre como una de sus principales misiones el crecimiento económico de los países menos desarrollados. El turismo es uno de los sectores de más rápido crecimiento a nivel mundial; y contribuye fuertemente para el desarrollo de los países pobres. Es por esta razón que las organizaciones internacionales ven en el turismo un instrumento para la reducción de la pobreza especialmente en los países que no disponen de recursos suficientes para que se desarrollen economías industriales. La cuestión del Desarrollo Sostenible es inseparable de la acción de tales organizaciones, una vez que su objetivo es mejorar la calidad de vida de los seres humanos actuales, sin afectar la calidad de vida de las generaciones futuras. En 2002, la Cumbre Mundial para el Desarrollo Sostenible de Joanesburgo incluyó explícitamente el turismo sostenible en su Plan de Implementación. En ese Plan, el Turismo Sostenible es considerado un instrumento que permite poner los recursos turísticos en beneficio de la población en las comunidades receptoras, manteniendo la integridad ambiental y cultural de esas comunidades

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y aumentando la protección de las áreas ecológicamente sensibles y del patrimonio natural. En este artículo, analizamos el rol de las organizaciones internacionales en la difusión de la consciencia sobre la importancia del turismo sostenible y en el lanzamiento de estrategias de turismo sostenible en los países pobres. **Palabras clave:** Turismo, Sustentabilidad, Naciones Unidas, Reducción de la Pobreza, Desarrollo.

**RESUMO:** As organizações internacionais como as Nações Unidas assumiram sempre como uma das suas principais missões o crescimento económico dos países menos desenvolvidos. O turismo é um dos sectores de mais rápido crescimento a nível mundial; e contribui fortemente para o desenvolvimento dos países pobres. É por esta razão que as organizações internacionais vêem no turismo um instrumento para a redução a pobreza especialmente nos países que não dispõem de recursos suficientes para desenvolverem economias industriais. A questão do Desenvolvimento Sustentável é inseparável da ação de tais organizações, uma vez que o seu objetivo é melhorar a qualidade de vida dos seres humanos atuais, sem afetar a qualidade de vida das gerações futuras. Em 2002, a Cimeira Mundial sobre Desenvolvimento Sustentável de Joanesburgo incluiu explicitamente o turismo sustentável no seu Plano de Implementação. Nesse Plano, o Turismo Sustentável é considerado um instrumento que permite colocar os recursos turísticos em benefício da população nas comunidades recetoras, mantendo a integridade ambiental e cultural dessas comunidades e aumentando a proteção das áreas ecológicamente sensíveis e do património natural. Neste artigo, analisamos o papel das organizações internacionais na difusão da consciencialização sobre a importância do turismo sustentável e no lançamento de estratégias de turismo sustentável nos países pobres. **Palavras chave:** Turismo, Sustentabilidade, Nações Unidas, Redução da Pobreza, Desenvolvimento.

## INTRODUCTION

In 1963, the United Nations Conference on Tourism has identified the tourist as a temporary visitor staying at least twenty-four hours in the country visited, regardless of the reasons for his stay. In 1994, the United Nations has extended the definition of tourism so that it includes all the activities of people during their journeys to and staying in places outside their usual environment for a consecutive period of no more than one year, for purposes of leisure, business and other purposes not related to an activity remunerated from within the place visited.

With respect to tourism and its role in improving development, the United Nations General Assembly considers that tourism is a practical tool for reducing poverty and improving the quality of life for all people. It has a strong contribution to economic and social development, especially in the countries of the 'South', it is also essential for international understanding, as well as for peace and prosperity.

Sustainable tourism is more tailored to the objectives and goals of international organizations since it fulfills the development needs of poor countries while conserving their natural and so-

cio-cultural resources. In this paper we will talk about how tourism can be a sector highly harmonic with development goals of less developed or poor countries, about the negative effects that tourism can produce, mainly the abolition of natural and cultural resources of touristic regions. We will present sustainable tourism as a probable solution to this problem, and then we will talk about the efforts of the United Nations and its subsidiary bodies in the field of sustainability; mainly sustainable tourism.

## TOURISM

Tourism is considered to be the world's leading economic sector, contributing to over 10% of the world GDP. Tourism is an economic sector that doesn't only have an important role in the economic sphere for creating wealth and improving the quality of life for populations of touristic destinations, it also helps in bringing individuals and human communities into contact, and through them cultures and civilizations (Bouchenaki, 2006). Thus it can be said that tourism is a means of individual and collective fulfillment in the sense that it promotes understanding and respect between people and between societies. Travel for reasons of religion, health, education and cultural or linguistic exchanges are particularly beneficial forms of tourism that should be encouraged, in addition to other forms such as ecotourism. (Morena, 2004)

The World tourism Organization (WTO) considers that tourism is a powerful tool to directly address problems of poverty in developing countries and less developed countries (LDCs), according to a perspective-like "trade, not aid". International tourism would be a pathway to an overall sustainable development: "For a large majority of LDCs, the development of tourism can be a way to increase participation in the global economy, reduce poverty and lead to socio- economic development" (UNWTO, 2001). The argument is organized around five points (UNWTO, 2002):

- Tourism is partly based on cultural and natural resources, which are often the only active resources in poor countries. In other words, these endowments specifically oriented "naturally", turns the specialization of these countries into the tourism sector in the absence

of other options. In addition, tourism is the least protected sector in rich countries, unlike agriculture or textiles. Finally, with regard to the combination of factors of production, tourism is a labor intensive sector, it has no need for highly skilled labor, which overcomes the lack of training labor and capital advanced technique.

- This view of tourism, however, seems a little misplaced since the success of tourism depends not only on natural resources (climate, scenic beauty, history of the country), but the development and combination of these assets is a matter of professionalism, or else there would be a risk of destroying those “only assets”. Also as an activity of contact with customers, tourism needs a workforce that has received basic training and has some specific knowledge (languages, know-how).
- Tourism is based on the entry and movement, within touristic regions, of consumers with high purchasing power (compared to the premises). It is a unique opportunity to contact customers with small local producers. The sales of local products or services contribute to the birth and support of micro-projects of artisans and traders and to the development of entrepreneurial capacity. Thus the poor can become exporters.
- Tourism is an activity where economies of scale have no importance, which permits regions and countries to become competitive even on a small scale.
- “Leakage” of income to the abroad is lower in tourism than in other tertiary and secondary sectors, in some cases it is even lower than in the agriculture.
- Tourism can contribute to reducing gender inequalities, as there is in general (outside of Muslim countries) a high proportion of female employees (but they are often poorly paid);
- In addition to material benefits, tourism is also a source of “cultural pride, peace and understanding of others, sense of ownership and control,” and it foregrounds environmental concerns. However, it does not minimize the potential for copying western standards and breakdown of community solidarity. (Caire & Rouillet-Caire, 2003)

The vision of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) on the tourism sector covers the following key areas:

- Induce governments to accept tourism and travel as a strategic priority for economic development and employment;

- Referral to open and competitive markets by supporting the implementation of the GATS (general agreement on trade in services);
- Removing barriers to tourism growth, which implies the expansion and improvement of tourism related infrastructure - such as increased airport capacity, construction and modernization of airports, roads and tourist facilities.

Research on tourism grew mainly after World War II with the advent of mass tourism (Britton, 1982). Documents on tourism can be traced back to the 1930s and earlier, but the bulk of the literature on tourism has evolved from the 1960s (Pearce, 1982). Tourism Research initially worked as a development tool with most of the research conducted by planners and economists who worked for organizations like the United Nations, the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (Graburn & Jafari, 1991). During the 1960s, tourism was equated with development. There was a belief that tourism creates increases in exchange rates and employment and tourism expenditures generate a significant multiplier effect, which has the power to stimulate local economies (Peppelenbosch & Templeman 1973; Graburn & Jafari, 1991). However, over time, authors began to question the benefits of tourism (Bryden, 1973), indicating that low multiplier effects and high levels of leakage were closer to reality. Later on, the negative effects of tourism in developing countries have begun to be documented more in disciplines such as anthropology and sociology (Graburn & Jafari, 1991). In the 1980s and 1990s, tourism studies were focused on international markets and the competitiveness of exports since tourism was considered as an invisible export industry. More recently, research in tourism has adopted the concept of sustainability, part of the paradigm of alternative development. (Sharpley & Telfer, 2002)

From the economic point of view, tourism is the economic sector that produces the highest revenue, in the shortest period of time and with the least amount of investments. (Bensahel & Donsimoni, 1999) Given the fact that there are lots of poor coun-



tries and regions in the world that do not have enough resources to develop industrial economies, tourism becomes a possible solution for enhancing development and reducing poverty in such countries. Tourism can represent a factor that supports economic development through the creation of direct and indirect jobs in hotels, travel agencies, transportation companies and restaurants, for the guides in the world of entertainment, in monuments, in parks and other related sectors such as insurance, health, construction, and education and training of human resources. Tourism projects may have a particular interest in coastal areas and island territories and to vulnerable rural or mountain regions where tourism is one of the few development opportunities because of the decline of their traditional economic activities. Tourism does not only help in creating jobs but also contributes to the distribution of wealth between regions at different income levels. It reduces the period of funding new infrastructure and support the conservation of monuments (Neto, 2002).

#### NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF TOURISM ON DEVELOPMENT

The first economic studies of tourism have focused on the positive aspects of tourism. Later, these studies have begun to question the value of this sector. Tourism, however, has been promoted as a tool for regional development and as a form of distributive justice (Pearce, 1989). Governments seeking to create a balanced development of different regions through their countries found in tourism a very effective tool in this context. Oppermann (1992) explored the use of international tourism as a tool for regional development in Malaysia. The results of his investigation showed that active tourists (those who had stayed in at least four different locations in Malaysia) contributed greatly to regional development, whereas the travel habits of less active tourists tend to reinforce spatial disparities. Thus, tourism does not necessarily always have a positive effect on the living standards of the plurality of people in touristic areas. This is mainly due to the

leakage effect because, generally, a very small percentage of leisure spending stays in the visited region (Dilys & Ashley, 1998).

Dependence was one of the dominant development theories used in tourism research, particularly with regard to the negative impacts of tourism. The basis of this argument lies in the dependence of the organization of the tourism industry and the structure of third world economies where tourism development may exhibit the symptoms of dependency theory when it results in the enrichment of developed metropolitan areas at the expense of poorer, underdeveloped regions. International examples often cited tend to be small island states in close proximity to large industrialized economies (such as Caribbean tourism destinations). Big international companies have become the force of control and integration in international tourism. It is those companies that control the airlines, tour operators and large hotel chains. These companies are able to create, coordinate and promote the components of the industry to develop tourism as a product. (Sharpley & Telfer, 2007)

A study conducted by Haralambopoulos and Pizam (1996) on the perception of people in Pythagorion, an established tourism destination in the Greek island of Samos has shown that people not only supported the current magnitude of the tourism industry, but they favored its expansion. Despite this, respondents identified several negative effects of tourism, which they believe had an impact on the village. These impacts include but are not limited to inflation, drugs, vandalism, drunken brawls, sexual advances and crime. However, this study reconfirmed that the people who were economically dependent on tourism have a more favorable attitude towards the industry than those who do not depend upon it.

The main environmental impacts of tourism are (a) pressure on natural resources, (b) pollution and waste generation and (c) damage to ecosystems. Furthermore, it is now widely recognized that not only uncontrolled tourism expansion is likely to lead to

environmental degradation, but also that environmental degradation, in turn, poses a serious threat to tourism. (Neto, 2002)

Thus we can say that although tourism is one of the most dynamic sectors of the global economy and although developing countries are trying more and more to capitalize on this growing industry in an attempt to stimulate foreign investment and financial reserves. However, the uncontrolled growth of this industry can lead to serious environmental and social problems. The United Nations argues that these negative effects can be controlled and reduced throughout making tourism a more sustainable sector.

### NOTION OF SUSTAINABILITY

Since the publication of the Brundtland Report in 1987, passing through the Earth Summit in Rio and, more recently, the Johannesburg Summit, the concept of “sustainable development” is on many lips. A growing number of scientists work today on this paradigm and attempt to better understand how to reconcile the socio-economic development and environmental protection. Despite the few years it has behind it, the notion of sustainable development is still not unanimous for both general populations as well as among scientists (Revéret and Gendron, 2002).

By sustainable we mean development which meets our needs today without compromising the ability of people in the future to meet their needs. It is thus about taking a longer term perspective than is usual in human decision-making and implies a need for intervention and planning (Gagnon, 1995). Sustainable development is both human-centered, in that it aims to improve the quality of human life and nature-based, in that it derives from the need to respect the ability of the nature of providing resources and services that improve life. From this perspective, sustainable development means improving the quality of human life while taking into account the limits of ecosystems (Reed, 1996). It also encloses several other complementary approaches such as the planning, technological and organizational approaches (Gag-



non, 1995). Or it is associated with other sectors or disciplines, such as urban development (Gariépy, Domon, & Jacobs, 1990) or local viable development (Gagnon, 1994) or viable communities.

According to Reed (1996), the definition of sustainable development is a normative concept involving a number of models of thinking that must be observed when human communities seek to meet their needs for survival and well-being. The definition of sustainable development includes thus three essential components (economic, social, and environmental). These three elements are interdependent, thus any efforts to promote sustainable development must support a triadic configuration.

The economic component of sustainable development requires the corporation to preferred channels of economic growth capable of generating a real income growth for short-term policies that lead to a long-term impoverishment. The social dimension of sustainable development implicates the achievement of the basic needs of human beings as well as equal opportunities. For a growth path to be sustainable; wealth, resources and opportunities must be shared so that everyone can access the minimum standards of safety, rights and benefits (food, health, education, housing, opportunities for self-development). The environmental dimension of sustainable development is based on the need to preserve the integrity and hence the productivity of the environmental infrastructure involved in perpetuating the cycle of life. In environmental terms, sustainable development requires that goods and services of the natural environment be used so as not to dent the complex system of highly interdependent functions of nature and not to diminish the contribution of goods and services to many of the natural environment-being.

Taken together, these three components of sustainable development should converge in order to generate a continuous stream of income, ensuring social equality, to achieve socially acceptable living standards for populations, to preserve human and natural reserves (Reed, 1996).

## SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

According to statistics from the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2001), international arrivals are expected to reach nearly 1.6 billion by the year 2020. Given such predictions of an increased role of tourism industries in the world economy, the environmental aspects and the impacts generated by tourism activities should be accurately considered and assessed.

Most tourism activities, indeed, are closely related to the environment, since, on the one hand, the natural environment itself may be considered as a major input resource to the processes of tourism industries, and, on the other hand, the development of tourism as a mass industry may severely increase the overall impact on the environment (Raggi & Petti, 2006).

Since the early 1970s, tourism is the fastest growing industry in the world (Boo, 1990). With the emergence of new social and environmental concerns, it is increasingly confronted with the question of its compatibility with the local community development and environmental protection (McCool, 1995). A form of tourism argued to be more harmonic with environmental causes is the Ecotourism. Ecotourism is so often seen as a solution capable of reconciling economic development, environmental protection and well-being of communities. "Around the world, ecotourism has been hailed as a panacea: a way to fund conservation and scientific research, protect fragile ecosystems, bring benefits to rural communities, promote development in poor countries, strengthen ecological and cultural sensitivity, instill a social and environmental awareness in the tourism industry to meet and educate tourists and even, according to some, to build world peace" (Honey, 1999).

Among other terms synonymous with the term of sustainable tourism are Responsible Tourism, Soft Tourism, and Minimum Impact Tourism. The debate over the concept of sustainable tourism is a phenomenon of the 1990s. However its origins lie in the wider concept of sustainable development which has been with us for many centuries. In recent years, the concept of sustaina-

ble development has taken centre stage in the tourism world. It has stimulated numerous conferences, textbooks and corporate policy statements.

According to Fragoso Neves (2007), the concept of sustainable tourism is underpinned by a range of underlying principles, including the following:

- Sustainable tourism is not just about protecting the environment; it is also concerned with long-term economic viability and social justice.
- Initiatives designed to achieve sustainable tourism brings benefits to some people and costs to others. It is thus a highly political, rather than just a technocratic field.
- Sustainable tourism cannot be separated from the wider debate about sustainable development in general.

There is a need for more critical evaluation of existing thinking and techniques in the area of sustainable tourism. 'There are too many 'sacred cows' that are not being challenged rigorously enough or often enough. For example, where is the evidence that small-scale tourism is inherently more sustainable than mass tourism, regardless of the nature of the environment in which it takes place? Progress toward more sustainable forms of tourism will depend far more on the activities of the industry and the attitudes of tourists, than on the actions of public sector bodies. (Swarbrooke, 1999)

Tourism is one of the many external forces influencing the direction and options for local development. The question of whether tourism can be sustainable—that is, whether it can contribute to local sustainable development—is rightfully addressed in the context of the Local Agenda 21 process. Agenda 21 is one of the most important outcomes of the Earth Summit in 1992. It highlights the need to think globally and act locally, and encourages local authorities to develop their own Local Agenda 21 (LA21). (Fragoso Neves, 2007)

Although since 1980, a lot of work has been done in terms of formulating indicators and tools of sustainable development, there is still a lot of methodological work to be done so that those

tools would be directly related to the decision-making. As noted by the “Economic and Social Council of the United Nations on Sustainable Tourism” (UNWTO, 2001), despite the presence of a series of indicators, however, until today few tourist destinations use those indicators. Much remains to be done to improve the skills and “methods of definition, adaptation and application of indicators for monitoring social, economic and environmental impacts of tourism”.

Looking for sustainable tourism through a global strategic planning view necessarily induces a reflection, consultation, constant information, a participation in decision making and partnership of all stakeholders, international institutions and national authorities, NGOs, associations, companies (tourism but also agriculture and industry), local authorities, permanent and seasonal workers, tour operators and tourists themselves. So this is another method of governance with the idea that the success of a project is necessarily based on social cohesion to the words of Jean Viard “make rich together.” (Caire & Roullet-Caire, 2003)

## UNITED NATIONS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

For Sur and Combacau (2008), international organizations are groups with permanent purposes, mainly composed of states, and constituted by them. They have their own internal organs and jurisdiction power. According to their compositions, universal organizations are likely to include all states in the international community (UN) while regional organizations include only states existing within a certain region (European Union, European Free Trade Association). Based on their function, general jurisdiction organizations (ex, UN) have general goals (peace, development of relations between states), whereas those with specialized technical competences have jurisdictions limited to their goals (International Labor Organization, World Health Organization...) (Combacau & Sur, 2008)

The United Nation’s main function as an international organization is to preserve international peace and security. To obtain

this goal, the UN has several other subsidiary organizations that operate in different domains such as the International Labor organization, the world Health Organization, and the World Tourism Organization. In the field of sustainable development, the UN's specialized body is the "Division for Sustainable Development" (DSD). The role of this division is to provide leadership and is a source of expertise within the United Nations system on sustainable development.

Three of the decisive stations in the history of sustainable development and its relation with the United Nations are the Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in 1972, later on the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held at Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and most recently the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002.

About forty years ago in Stockholm, the United Nations agreed it was urgent to act in order to address the problem of the deterioration of the environment. Later on; the conference held in Rio de Janeiro resulted in an agreement that protecting the environment accordingly with social and economic development are fundamental to sustainable development, and thus the Rio principles were issued. To achieve this development, the United Nations adopted the global program entitled Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. The Rio Conference thus marked a significant step that resulted in the establishment of a new agenda for sustainable development. Between Rio and Johannesburg, the world's nations gathered at several major conferences under the auspices of the United Nations, including the International Conference on Financing for Development which was held in Doha. These conferences defined for the world a global vision of the future of humanity.

At the Johannesburg Summit, the gathering of a wide variety of people and views in a constructive way to find the best way towards achieving a world that respected and implemented a vision of sustainable development was an important result. The Johannesburg Summit has also confirmed that significant progress had



been made towards a global consensus and partnership among all people of our planet. (United Nations, 2002)

## UNITED NATIONS AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Tourism is one of the largest industries in the world and developing countries; it can be an important source of income. However, if not properly managed, it can also threaten natural resources of a country as a result of the increased demand for water and energy and the waste associated with this increased demand. Tourism can also lead to the degradation of environment of touristic regions and it has a negative impact on local populations. Aware of this fact the United Nations beside its several branched organizations were always very concerned and gave special interest to changing the traditional tourism sector into a more sustainable sector that respects the well being of recipient environments and societies.

On the institutional side of the attention given to sustainable tourism by the United Nations, the first conference regarding this issue was held in 1995 and resulted in a “Charter for Sustainable Tourism”. In 1999, the World Tourism Organization, in turn, took this theme and with the UN they published a Global Code of Ethics for Tourism. In 2002, the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg addressed sustainable tourism in Chapter IV, paragraph 43 of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and in October 2008 a new step was taken with the publication of the World Sustainable Tourism Criteria by a coalition of 27 international organizations including the UN and WTO. The General Assembly of the United Nations in 1998 proclaimed the 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism and as announced at the Johannesburg Summit, the World Tourism Organization, in collaboration with UNCTAD, launched the Sustainable Tourism-Eliminating Poverty initiative to develop sustainable tourism as a force for poverty alleviation.

The “Agenda 21 for the Travel & Tourism Industry” which is an action plan for the XXI Century, adopted by 173 heads of

states at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 has listed ten priority areas of action in the field of sustainable tourism:

- Waste minimization, re-use and recycling
- Energy efficiency, conservation and management
- Management of freshwater resources
- Waste water treatment
- Hazardous substances
- Transport
- Land-use planning and management
- Involving staff, customers and communities in environmental issues
- Design for sustainability
- Partnerships for sustainability

The most recent action on the level of the United Nations and sustainable tourism has been in January 2011, The United Nations and various agencies and governments of France and Norway launched the Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism, an initiative to promote new forms of tourism which are more sustainable. The impetus to sustainable tourism has been boosted by the establishment of the “Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism”. This new partnership brings together all sectors of industry and aims to influence policy makers, to develop projects and provide a global platform for communication.

The partnership focuses on seven thematic areas: 1) policy frameworks, 2) climate change, 3) environment and biodiversity, 4) poverty alleviation, 5) cultural and natural heritage, 6) sustainable tourism practices for the private sector and 7) finance and investments. (Owen, 2011)

We have already defined and talked about sustainable tourism from the point of view of different authors, however, the WTO defines sustainable tourism as a “tourism which leads 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.” In addition they describe the development of sustainable tourism as a process which meets the needs of present tour-

ists and host communities whilst protecting and enhancing needs in the future (World Tourism Organization, 1996)

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is the United Nation's specialized agency of tourism. It is the leading international organization in its field of competence; it acts as a global forum for tourism policy issues and is thus a source of expertise for the world nations in this context.

The WTO plays a central role in the promotion of a sustainable tourism that is accessible to all, with particular attention to the interests of developing countries. The Organization encourages the implementation of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism. In its action concerning sustainable tourism, the UNWTO is committed to ensure the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of the United Nations, designed to reduce poverty and promote sustainable development.

In order to better spread the importance for better sustainable tourism practices, the WTO has established the WTTERC (World Travel and Tourism Research Council) and the Green Globe Program as world-wide environmental management and public awareness programs for tourism companies, including advice on integrating Agenda 21 into business management (WTO, WTTC, & Earth Council, 1995).

In the first World Ecotourism Summit held in Quebec in 2002, the WTO acknowledged that ecotourism embraces the principles of sustainable tourism in terms of impacts on this activity economy, society and the environment and furthermore, it includes the following specific principles which distinguish it from the broader concept of sustainable tourism (WTO, 2002):

- Ecotourism contributes actively to the protection of natural and cultural heritage;
- Ecotourism includes local and indigenous communities in its planning, development and operation and it contributes to well-being of those communities;
- Ecotourism offers visitors an interpretation of natural and cultural heritage;

- Ecotourism is better suited to the practice of individual traveling and organized tours for small groups.

More concisely, Blamey (1997, 2001) argues that an analysis of definitions leads us to consider three dimensions that constitute the essence of the concept of ecotourism:

- A nature-based tourism;
- An educational component;
- A need for sustainability.

Beside the World Tourism Organization, the UNEP (United Nations Environmental program), which is another subsidiary division of the UN has also produced a set of policy guidelines, including the Principles for Implementation of Sustainable Tourism, widely distributed to governments and local authorities and used as input to some of the multi-lateral environmental agreements. The UNEP's principles on the implementation of sustainable tourism (2000) include:

- Legislative Framework: Support the implementation of sustainable tourism through an effective legislative framework that establishes standards for land use in tourism development, tourism facilities, management and investment in tourism;
- Environmental Standards: Protect the environment by setting clear ambient environmental quality standards, along with targets for reducing pollution from all sectors, including tourism, and by preventing development in areas where it would be inappropriate;
- Regional Standards: Ensure that tourism and the environment are mutually supportive at a regional level through the cooperation and coordination between States, to establish common approaches to incentives, environmental policies, and integrated tourism development planning.

An example about the importance of sustainable tourism and the role that the United Nations organizations' are playing in supporting it can be revealed in the case the Calvia Island in Mallorca, Spain. This case shows the importance of the application of the Agenda 21 which was issued by the United Nations in 1992 at the Earth summit in Rio de Janeiro. During the seventies and the eighties of the twentieth century, Calvia has witnessed a massive investment in the touristic sector, which made it one of the

most important touristic regions in the Balearic Islands. With its centers of touristic attraction: Palma Nova, Magalluf, Santa Ponca and Peguera and with a number of about 1.6 million visitors annually (about 25% of all Mallorcan tourists) it became the richest municipality of Spain. (Molz, 2004)

However, this huge investment in tourism and the immense number of tourists that visited the city each year made it suffer from a massive environmental degradation. In order to restore its environment, the city had to put radical changes into application.

The application of the Agenda 21 in Calvia involved 1) the closure of many hotels, 2) the restoration of landscapes, 3) the establishment of new protected areas and 4) imposing an environment tax on hotel rooms. This environmental development coincided with an increase in public awareness and marketing campaigns to improve the image of the city. Applying the agenda 21 basis in this city, lead at the end to an increase in employment opportunities in tourism and it also improved the reputation of the city among its visitors.

## CONCLUSION

Tourism as we explained in this paper is the economic sector the best tailored to solve development problems in poor or less developed countries that do not have enough resources to develop industrial economies, yet they have mainly natural and cultural resources necessary for developing the tourism sector.

Although tourism helps in developing those countries and in improving the living standards of their populations, however, in the long term, it also contributes to the depletion of their natural and cultural resources on which tourism was built in the first place. Thus a non-sustainable and non-responsible tourism would bring benefits into present tourists and host regions without taking into consideration the preservation and enhancement of those benefits for the future.

On the international level, there are lots of organizations concerned with promoting sustainable tourism. Some of those organizations work on regional or continental levels such as the



STNSA: Sustainable Tourism Network Southern Africa or the ECOTRANS: European Network for Sustainable Tourism, while other organizations work on global levels, mainly the United Nations and its subsidiary organizations. Among those, we distinguish the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), the World tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

The United Nations is principally involved in supporting development in order to reduce poverty, which clarifies its large interest in tourism and mainly in sustainable tourism. The UN as well as all its subsidiary organizations is playing a very important role in spreading consciousness about the importance of sustainable tourism whether it is indirectly through the rules and principles that they publish and make available to governments or local authorities, or even through their direct intervention in some cases to help apply the basics of sustainable tourism.

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