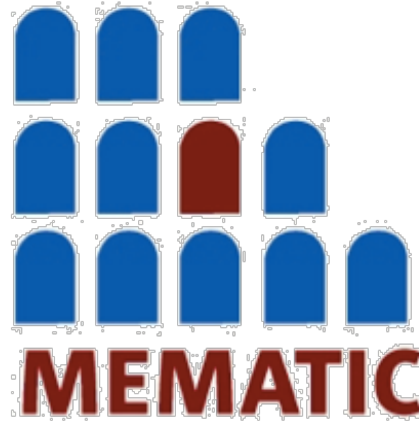




**TOR VERGATA**  
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI ROMA



**MASTER  
IN ECONOMIA  
E MANAGEMENT  
DELLE ATTIVITÀ  
TURISTICHE  
E CULTURALI**

## **“Introducing Sustainable Tourism”**

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# Introduction

This lesson offers a few introductory notes on **sustainable tourism**, its definition at a global scale and the key concepts upon which it is built.

The most **relevant dimensions** of tourism sustainability are also presented in a synthetic way, to invite reflection.

They are the prerequisites for developing practical tools for measuring and assessing **tourism sustainability** by means of indicators (not covered in the present lesson).

Special attention is devoted to the role of **tourism in the Sustainable Development Goals**.

The **learning outcome** of this lesson is getting acquainted with the **conceptual building block on sustainable tourism**.

# The concept of Sustainable Tourism at a glance/1

In the terms proposed by the UNWTO, **Sustainable tourism** is any form of **tourist development or activity** which:

- **respects the environment,**
- **ensures long-term conservation of natural and cultural resources, and**
- **is socially and economically acceptable and equitable.**

# The concept of Sustainable Tourism at a glance/2

The definition is built upon the traditional Three Pillars of Sustainability:

- Environment,
- Economy,
- Society.

Since the early 2000s, scholars have repeatedly pointed to the need of including a fourth, fundamental Pillar: Culture.

Indeed, tourism has a relevant cultural dimension and a potential – sometimes disruptive – cultural impact.

# The concept of Sustainable Tourism: key aspects

- The United Nations World Tourism Organisation defines **sustainable tourism as tourism that meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future.**
- Rather than being a type of product, it is an ethos that underpins all tourism activities. As such, **it is integral to all aspects of tourism development and management** rather than being an add-on component.
- **The objective of sustainable tourism is to retain the economic and social advantages of tourism development while reducing or mitigating any undesirable impacts on the natural, historic, cultural or social environment.** This is achieved by balancing the needs of tourists with those of the destination.

# Four ways of approaching Sustainable Tourism

The concept of **sustainable development in tourism** is multifaceted.

There are at least **four possible meanings for sustainable tourism**:

- The **economic sustainability of tourism**,
- The **ecologically sustainable tourism**,
- **Sustainable tourism development**,
- **Tourism as a part of a strategy for sustainable development**.

(Coccossis 2000)

# 1. The Economic Sustainability of Tourism

According to 10 UNWTO (2004), **economic sustainability** addresses **long-term viability of economic operations, fairness and equity of benefits distribution, employment and income-earning opportunities, and poverty alleviation.**

United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and UNWTO's (2005) definition concerns with **economic prosperity at different levels of society, cost-effectiveness and economic efficiency, and vitality of tourism enterprises.**

# 1. The Economic Sustainability of Tourism: points for reflection

1. What are the characteristics of tourist jobs in your area/in the tourist destination of your choice?
2. What consequences on prices of basic goods and services can you observe in a successful tourist destination?
3. How the enterprise demographics (=birth or death of enterprises) may be affected at the local level by tourism?



## 2. The ecologically sustainable tourism/1

**The ecologically sustainable tourism attempts to minimize its impact on the environment and local culture so that it will be available for future generations, while contributing to generate income, employment, and the conservation of local ecosystems.**

By doing so, **sustainable tourism maximizes the positive contribution of tourism to biodiversity conservation and thus to poverty reduction and the achievement of common goals towards sustainable development.**

**Sustainable tourism provides crucial economic incentives for habitat protection.** Revenues from visitor spending are often channelled back into nature conservation or capacity building programmes for local communities to manage protected areas.

Furthermore, **tourism can be a key vehicle in raising awareness and fostering positive behaviour change for biodiversity conservation** among the millions of people travelling the globe every year.

(WTO)

## 2. The ecologically sustainable tourism/2

**Critical aspects** of the ecologically sustainable tourism are:

1. **Biodiversity:** the conservation of biodiversity, the social welfare and the economic security of the host countries and communities.
2. **Climate change:** Tourism is both highly vulnerable to climate change while at the same time contributing to it. Threats for the sector include direct and indirect impacts (more extreme weather events, increasing insurance costs and safety concerns, water shortages, biodiversity loss and damage to assets and attractions at destinations, etc.).
3. **Plastic pollution:** changes need to take place across the whole tourism value chain.
4. **Consumption and depletion of resources** (e.g. freshwater) vs. **resource efficiency.**
5. **Energy consumption.**
6. Solid and liquid **waste generation.**
7. **Pollution due to transportation.**

## 2. The ecologically sustainable tourism/2

### Points for reflection

Tourism may contribute to protecting the natural environment. Consider the following:

1. Tourism may help raising awareness about the need of protecting the natural environment also at home.
2. Tourism may increase destinations' resources to protect the environment
3. Properly regulated, the tourists' pressure on local resources and their waste footprint may be curbed.
4. Destinations may regulate and restrict tourist behaviours with the highest negative impact (e.g. use of motor vehicles or boats, trampling on fragile soils, picking flowers and plants, buildings bonfires, etc).

# 3. Sustainable Tourism Development

**Sustainable tourism** should:

- **Make optimal use of environmental resources** that constitute a key element in tourism development, **maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.**
- **Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities**, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.
- **Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed**, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation.

**Sustainable tourism development** requires the **informed participation** of all relevant **stakeholders**, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a **continuous process** and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary.

Sustainable tourism should also maintain a **high level of tourist satisfaction** and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them.

<https://www.unwto.org/sustainable-development>

## 4. Tourism as a part of a strategy for Sustainable Development

- When responsibly planned and managed, tourism has demonstrated its capacity to support job creation, promote inclusive social integration, protect natural and cultural heritage, conserve biodiversity, generate sustainable livelihoods and improve human wellbeing.
- When planning and management are poor, tourism may generate undesirable impacts on the environment, economy, society and culture.
- Tourism plays a relevant role in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals set up in the UN 2030 Agenda

# Tourism and the SDGs



Tourism has the potential to contribute, directly or indirectly to all of the goals (see figure).

In particular, it has been included as targets in Goals 8, 12 and 14 on inclusive and sustainable economic growth, sustainable consumption and production (SCP) and the sustainable use of oceans and marine resources.

<https://www.unwto.org/tourism4sdgs>

# Exercises



1. Select up to 5 SDGs and discuss how tourism in your region/city may contribute to attain them.
2. Select up to 5 SDGs and collect data about them in your country/region/or city.
3. Select up to 3 SDGs and identify the most relevant beneficiaries, as well as actors and stakeholders for their attainment, at the national, regional or local level.

<https://www.unwto.org/tourism4sdgs>

# References and further readings

- Coccossis, H. (1996) 'Tourism and Sustainability: Perspectives and Implications' in Priestley, G. et al. (eds), *Sustainable Tourism? European Experiences*, U.K., Cab International.
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