

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM: PRACTICES, RISKS AND CHALLENGES FACED BY CARIBBEAN FIRMS¹

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable Tourism Development has increasingly been the subject of study for over a decade. Even though governments and NGOs in developed and less developed countries are devising policies to stimulate sustained tourism activities as an income-generating sector, actions are still slow, mostly unknown and not well enforced. Traditionally establishing and promoting sustainable tourism has surged from initiatives from the private sector and interested citizens groups. Entrepreneurs, on the other hand, have mostly shown interests in building hotels, promoting activities involved in tourism development and reaping short-term benefits. There is a need for systematic planning and for establishing sustainable strategies across countries that provide long-term benefits to communities, countries, and the population as a whole.

This paper focuses on the impact sustainable tourism has on the economy, the level of awareness of the concept, the problems related to this lack of understanding, and the evaluation of the potential long-term benefits of adhering to the concept. Success stories across countries are analyzed and existent programs within the Caribbean perspective are examined. Anecdotal evidence is revised as well as historical, social and economical contexts within which sustainable tourism exists in any economy with its pros and cons. Empirical analysis focuses on a survey sent to hotel owners in Puerto Rico, on interviews and reports from tourism groups and hotel owners in the Dominican Republic, and in-depth interviews to tourism experts. Findings indicate that small firms face the challenges of a tourism economy roughly; they do not implement their businesses considering sustainability concerns. Most hotel owners and agents do not understand the concept of sustainability even though many pronounce adherence to eco-tourism. The paper concludes with directions for future policymaking and this study can contribute to research in entrepreneurship.

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Key words: Sustainability, environmental conservation and protection, community-based tourism, Ecotourism, ecological footprints

INTRODUCTION

Tourism activities have become one of the worlds most rapidly growing and competitive industry. Statistics provided by the World Tourism Organization (WTO), the UNESCO, as well as those of particular governments and organizations reinforce opinions on tourism being a major income generating activity, a contributor to economic growth, in terms of the employment provided, and a source of foreign exchange both for developing (Centro America and the Caribbean) and developed countries (Spain, China and the United States). Even though the activity has proved to be relevant, the lack of control and laws enforcing resource usage, and the unwillingness of entrepreneurs to pass on opportunities, have often brought on problems that have gone beyond the control of the interested sectors, i.e. the countries, communities and the society and culture where the activities take place. Eagles, Haynes and McCool (2003) effectively indicate that the link between tourism and protecting the environment is as old as history, even though relatively complex and antagonist. Nonetheless, with education the juxtaposition as well as the multi sector support and long-term benefits will out weight short-term gains and anxieties.

From the standpoint of small, medium size (SMEs) as well as large organizations, tourism related activities have become a source of opportunities that have gone from local to global investment (the case of international firms investing in the Caribbean and multinational managing locally constructed infrastructure, i.e., the Hilton Hotels). Involvements in ST have provided local businesses and people mean to become self-sustainable. Yet, this same entrepreneurial activity has often been exploited so much that degradation of the environment has emerged, cultures have become degraded, negative social problems and cultural transformations have materialized. Problems with energy scarcity, among others, have intensified. Not least, other problems including deterioration of infrastructure including roads damaged from overuse, lower quality of life that often has profoundly affected locals, including rise in construction costs and diminished basic services. Ignoring sustainable tourism (ST)² as well as the opportunities that lie ahead due to applying its concepts could be costly (take the case of depleted mines, quick extraction of oil reserves without naming countries).

Within this framework, an examination of the laws, education, and environmental protection programs created in some countries demonstrate that adherence to sustenance programs. Concerted actions from all sectors will benefit the economy, quality of life, and even political stability on the region, and effect measured by investors and community interests have found in tourism, environmental conservation and its related activities (cultural, entertainment tours, mountain climbing, rafting, sales of arts and crafts, native cuisine, among others) their self-employment and sustenance. Studies have shown that sustainable programs cannot exist either without the support of communities³ (Laitakari 2003, Torres 2004, Canada Jamaica

² ST is synonymous to sustainable tourism.

³ Most studies and agreements of sustainability, including the Sustainable Model for Arctic Tourism (SMART) includes this principle. Proceedings from the Arctic Ecotourism Conference, 2002.

2004, Barnaby & McDonald, 2003) nor without studies that analyze the effect of human consumption of goods and services. It is proved that the environment has limited capacity to supply these inputs, thus it is the community's responsibility to do it. On an entrepreneurial angle, studies by Perez (2001), as well as numerous publications illustrate that because of financial constraints, credit availability and risks factor, tourism is seen as a major investment activity for local entrepreneurs and the young adults.

This paper focuses first on analyzing the economic impact of responsible sustainable tourism, conservation and eco tourism practices have in countries and communities. Likewise, emphasis is placed on evaluating the benefits the linkages between tourism and bio-cultural diversity, emphasizing the roll that a well planned and sustained tourism industry with its inherent activities provide to, firms, countries and communities. Second, the paper revises studies on the pros and cons of sustainable or responsible tourism, and evaluates the tourism practices, including problems, in different countries⁴. Third, the study analyzes results of the survey and interviews implemented in Puerto Rico and Dominican Republic. Fourth, based on the results of the study, the revision of successful cases, and the position of the author, sustainable tourism strategies are recommended with emphasis in the Caribbean context. Lastly, policy recommendations will be delineated based on the constraints and environment within which business operate. The grounds under which these papers are based are:

- A) Countries that adhere to sound practices of sustainability have shown tremendous improvement in economic terms, in quality of life, and the effect appears to be sustained through longer periods in comparison to countries that opt for the opposite actions.
- B) If responsible sectors, including government, community groups and environmental experts can enact and implement protective laws and disseminate their contents, local communities, investors, and visitors will embrace them.
- C) Tourism activities should involve community support, the establishment of support loans, supervised licenses, taxation and entrance fees that encourage locals to invest at lower risks levels. In the long-term, local participation and the income generated by these activities will assist in the replacement of investments in infrastructure as well as the maintenance of sites that will be depleted because of usage.
- D) If local communities and entrepreneurs are educated and laws clearly specified, the margins of errors accepted in the protection of country resources will diminish. Thus, potential erosion of source of income will be avoided.
- E) Likewise, if private foundations are established aside the control of governmental politics, long-term directives from established and proven organizations can be delineated, grants could be sought and alliances conducive to reinforce sustenance can be created.
- F) If studies on environmental impact and assessment are correctly implemented before constructing sites, and ecological footprints studies are done, environmental protection and responsible practices will emerge. With the presentation of these queries, I will proceed to defend my position.

⁴ Success stories are extracted from <http://www.sidsnet.org/successstories/12html>, a publication from UNESCO.

SCOPE

Definitions are presented initially to establish a common ground. This section is followed by arguments and analysis seeking to defend the authors' position. The paper contains three major sections: Section one presents the introduction, including objectives and the premises underlying the study. Section two and main body of the report, embraces background, definitions of the terms used, related literature review, economic impact of tourism and the search for sustainability, impact of poorly implementing laws and education, existent supporting programs, laws and organizations protecting the environment, and a description of the supporting programs protecting the environment and organizations to which Caribbean hotels and inns belong to. Section three illustrates the sustainability benefits, and countries' best practices including the entrepreneurial and firm perspective. Most importantly, results from local and regional study findings are presented as well as the methodology underlying this study, its results, analysis, conclusions and recommendations.

BODY OF THE REPORT

Part two.

What is sustainable tourism and how it contrasts with ecotourism or plain tourism?

Sustainable tourism consists and depends on the existence and efficient management and conservation of quality natural environments which themselves (Koeman, 2003, Neto 2003, Henna & Wells 2004) depend on human environments, resources and cultures. The World Tourism Organization (WTO, 2002)⁵ defines it as the development that meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future. In addition, WTO, experts generally recognize that sustainable tourism leads the management of resources towards economic, social and aesthetic needs that necessitate to be fulfilled while preserving cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems. Thus, sustainability aims to improve standards and quality of life, safeguard culture and resources while satisfying the ever-increasing demand for tourism services. Even though the concept is often equated to eco-tourism, it means more. It involves thoughtfulness of and to host people, to communities, cultures, customs, lifestyles, and social and economic systems.

For clarification purposes, the public perceives a common interchangeability between the terms; often what is known is ecotourism and tourism. Thus, tourism is understood as the practice of travel for pleasure (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2000)⁶ while eco-tourism (Srinivas, 2003) is a nature-based type of tourism that involves responsible travel to natural areas where flora, fauna and cultural heritage are the main attraction, while sustaining the well being of local persons (Srinivas, 1999, 2003). Moreover, the sustainability

⁵ The definitions provided are now under revision according to the 2004 accord publication.

⁶ Definition was extracted from www.yourdictionary.com.

concept is based on optimization and non-degradation of resources and embraces all segments of the industry as well as on implementing directives and criterion that aims at reducing negative environmental impacts, particularly the use of non-renewable resources.

Summing up, sustainable tourism (ST) is not plain tourism nor eco tourism; it embraces numerous facets and studies: McElroy & Albuquerque, 1998) saw results in terms of economic impact (contribution to GDP and employment), social impact (visitors per host population), or on environmental pressure and impacts of any decision (hotel rooms per unit of land area). Ultimately, any sustainable philosophy has to include analyzing how to improve local economic and sustainable development, use the lowest possible consumption of non-renewable resources, while sustaining the well being of local people, and stimulating local ownership. Thus, ST should enhance the material life of local communities, without causing a loss of traditional employment systems, acculturation (Koeman, 2003) or social disruption (Eagles, 2003). For the benefit of sustainability, countries and entrepreneurs, as well as policy makers should understand the difference between eco-tourism and sustainable tourism and pursue it. In theory, governments seek growth and prosperity for their countries including employment creation and entrepreneurs aim at achieving personal goals of wealth or self-sustenance. Taking advantages of opportunities created in the tourism industry, understanding and implementing sustainable tourism strategies will be the means to their ends. Sustainability in essence calls for economic and development opportunities as well as the impact of tourism growth on sustainable development, transportation, cultural and environmental, social and economic aspects.

Sustainable tourism embraces all segments of the industry, establishes guidelines and criteria while reducing environmental impacts, specially the use of non-renewable resources, establishing benchmarks. Studies by the WTO (2002:17) reported on of good practices in sustainable development of ecotourism based on 55 case studies from 39 countries. Other guidelines are offered in the 1995 agenda 21 for sustainable practices in tourism (WT forum on economic development, 1999; United Nations, 1992). These practices published by WTO, CAST, UN can be used as guidelines for creating equilibrium between nature and long-term gains and as theoretical and practical guide (Frangialli, 1998) for manage developers and governments. Likewise, an ethic code on tourism was also published in 1999, an excellent guide for all. Among the most relevant agreements, practices and publications, the most common suggestions are:

- Tourism offers considerable employment opportunities for unskilled labor, rural to urban migrants and lower-income women.
- There are considerable linkages with the informal sector, which could generate positive multiplier effects to poorer groups that rely on that sector for their livelihoods.
- Tourism tends to be heavily based upon the preservation of natural capital such as, wildlife and scenery and cultural heritage, which are often assets that some of the poor have, even if they have no financial resources.

- Economic footprint⁷ studies have to be implemented if the world's people want to continue with quality living conditions (Wackernagel, Mathis & Rees, 2003). Ensure that nature's productivity isn't used more quickly than it can be renewed, and that waste isn't discharged more quickly than nature can absorb it.
- For any sustainable program to work the local community should be involved (Quebec,2002) to diminish the risks of any investment, to promote and preserve local cultures, lifestyles and values while ensuring quality and safety in all business operations.

Economic impact of tourism and the search for sustainability

Studies published by the Convention on Biological Diversity (2003); inform that in terms of economic benefits, tourism constitutes an opportunity for economic development, diversification and growth. In developing countries, according to the same study, the industry constitutes 1.5% of the world GNP while worldwide ST signifies a 6% contribution to GDP, and 11.4% of consumer spending (Info-sheets Ecotourism, 2003). In Puerto Rico, tourism has contributed respectively to 4% of the Gross National Product (Planning Board 2001, 2002 and the Tourism Company 1999-2002) and the sector occupied the 4th position in income generation within the service sector in 2002. The numbers have not grown as expected since the island offers expensive tourism, if compared to other islands. Other countries inform of higher growth. Studies by Henna and Wells (2003) showed an increase in the marine tourism is enormous. Around 100 million tourists visit the Caribbean annually, contributing between 40 to 70 per cent of the GNP of some countries in the region. To understand the impact, take the following example. It is estimated that only divers from the US spend an estimated \$286 million a year in the Caribbean and Hawaii. Statistics show that tourism visitor's expenditures worldwide reached more than US \$400 billions in 2002 and will increase to near US\$2 trillions in 2020 (Cateora et al, 1999). The same source specifies that tourism industry generate close to 212 million jobs either directly or indirectly. Furthermore, the former reports World Trade Forum (WTF) which projects that for 2005 the employment generation will increase to 338 million jobs and will generate US \$7 trillions. United Nations (April, 2003) based on the significance of tourism and the potentiality that local firms desire credit has declared 2005 the year of the micro credit. The Organization of American States (OAS, 1997) indicates that the future of tourism depends on the development of a harmonious way with the environment and culture.

The sector presents a significant potential for obtaining funds and realizing benefits while conserving agro-industry, cultural heritage, biological diversity and sustainable use of its components (Srinivas, 2004), particularly when local communities are directly involved with operators and in many projects. Reports by the World Tourism Organization, illustrate that the tourism industry generates substantial economic benefits to both host countries and tourists' home countries. Tourism represents 31.1 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product of the Caribbean region and provides three million jobs approximately (Caribbean Alliance for Sustainable Tourism, CAST, 2003). Ostensibly, tourism is a source of income, employment and wealth in many countries beyond the Caribbean (Denmark, China, Spain, France, the

⁷ The ecological footprint is an accounting tool for ecological resources. Categories of human consumption are translated into areas of productive land required to provide resources and assimilate waste products. The ecological footprint is a measure of how sustainable our life-styles are. "Ecological Footprints" are a tool for measuring and communicating the environmental impacts of human activity on the environment, and the sustainability of that activity.

United Kingdom, Australia and Africa. As the economy becomes more global, airlines form larger alliances, the trend to increased tourism and ecotourism will prolong with foremost impact on developed, and less developed countries. From the standpoint of investment and entrepreneurship, this is very important. Entrepreneurs need to ensure the balance between the tourism developments and the ecosystem.

Impact of poorly implementing laws on sustainable development and education programs on sustainability: pros and cons: general and entrepreneurial perspective.

Increased travel, will no doubt convey negative impacts to the environment in spite despite the economic significance tourism represents. Developing countries high levels of unemployment, lower income levels, as well as the need to survive, have impelled locals to enter quick tourism programs including building unplanned inns, hotels and “paradores”. Often this implies expanding owners’ home to obtain some income. Similarly, small stores are located anywhere; investors establish souvenirs shops sell effects, including seashells, arts and crafts built from protected species. These actions propelled by a need for self-support, lack of education and access to financing, instills taking advantage of what is available. This imminent situation purports unplanned projects that often abuse the environment.

On the ecological side, contractors remove sand from beaches ludicrously. Licenses are granted to build apartments and hotels too close to the beaches or on the sand, corals are damaged (Weil and Ramirez, 2004)⁸ and, boats and divers extract forbidden materials while animals fall prey of hunters. The deterioration that boats, divers, and catchers do to the reefs is intense. A multiplicity of factors including eutrophication, bleaching, anchoring, and increasing coastal construction increase the need to establish counteracting stress sources. Examples of these problems exist in all the Caribbean islands. Moreover, the population is often inhibited from accessing or visiting their beaches thus making them feel more rejection towards tourism (public access closure, an event that is happening in Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, with hotels and apartments constructed by individuals in political or economic favor).

Dilapidated facilities. In search for richness, large numbers of facilities are built, but when the economy downturns, the same sites are left to disintegrate uncared thus provoking unwanted and damaging effects to the ambiance. Even worse, often because of greed, lack of national pride or plain stupidity actions are taken that damage the environment, like predating protected species, or burying toxics in the land or oceans. A report written by a columnist (Torres, 2004) quoting the supervisor of the Caribbean National Forest precisely attests to the environmental damage caused by garbage and the potential cost of cleaning it.⁹ Specialists have reported ample abuse to protected areas, mangles, corals, protected turtles, including incoming from waste diverted and thrown into waters.

⁸ The author’s conclusions were presented at a conference held in Mayagüez, PR April 13, 2004 and published on the University website and the “El Nuevo Día” newspaper April w4, 2004.

⁹ An article written by Rolando Hugo Pabón, “el Nuevo Día” a reputable newspaper in Puerto Rico. April 21, 2004.

In the socioeconomic side, most countries tax incentives are designed to attract foreign investors with little space for locals, creating an unbalance in investment. Mostly what tend to exist are tax credits and low costs loans for buyers settling in protected areas; this is positive for firms and localism since it encourages turning old and often dilapidated historical homes into bed and breakfast, with unparalleled results. Examples exist in France, United States, Spain, Puerto Rico, and in some other islands in the Caribbean.

From an entrepreneurial angle, while small inns require smaller investment and risks than most enterprises, locals can only finance their businesses either via banks or by privately enabling their participation in the economy. This investment style provides only self-employment and inhibits the capability of growing. On the negative side, structures with or without permits often discharge wastes into the ocean, do not use natural energy system allows tenants to use more energy and water than necessary in detriment of locals needs. Moreover, offer of low salaries to local workers at slave hours with the ensuing negative social effects, including social ills with its ominous consequences. This goes on because of non-existent labor laws and government insufficient sources of employment that force laborers to accept what they can. Not least, outsourcing services often do not embrace locals over foreign under equal circumstances.

Even though investments in tourism provide large profits and attract foreign investors, income is mostly repatriated rather than being reinvested in the community. In the Eastern Caribbean, for instance, it has been estimated that only 18 cents of every tourist dollar remains in the islands. In Dominican Republic, the average monthly salary was RD 3000 pesos per month in 2003 (equivalent to less than \$100.00 dollars down from about \$150 in 2002. In Puerto Rico, minimum salaries are guaranteed yet in other islands; often employers pay low salaries, no retirement benefits nor insurance.

Damage to the ecosystem. On the negative side, the rapid growth of the tourism in the Caribbean substantiates a destructive (Heilprin, 2004) impact to the ecosystem (ex. sandy beaches and blue water), a tremendous threat. Some areas have shown already environmental and socio-cultural impact in many regions. Coral reefs, which are particularly vulnerable to human and machine impact, are damaged or extracted; reefs in more than 50 countries have suffered some form of tourist damage (McElroy, 1999). A counterbalance will be requiring technical feasibility studies. WTO (2003) reports a problem case that turned into an exemplary solution case, the implemented in the island of Barbados. Damages to their ecosystem were so profound that they had to reattach physically damaged corals to their original location with adhesives, a system proven technically and biologically feasible¹⁰. Definitely, although an individual diver or snorkeler may have minimum impact compared to other forms of reef damage, the cumulative effect of divers on a reef could be considerable. McElroy (1999) in his studies defending coral protection found that large-scale beach resorts and marinas could disturb wetland habitats; destabilize beach vegetation and cause coastal erosion. Moreover, he stated, "When reef and sand mining are added, low-lying communities become more vulnerable to storm surges from the sea and to salt water intrusion".

¹⁰ Information is extracted on report from the Ministry of the Environment Energy and Natural Resources of Barbados. University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus.

Neto (2003) reported that there are two main areas of environmental impact of tourism: first, pressure on natural resources and second damage to ecosystem. In coastal areas, such as the Caribbean, tourism development includes hotel, airport, and road construction; however, with the development of these activities their people need to be concern about beach erosion, water pollution, land and social degradation. In the particular case of the Caribbean, studies by the UNESCO have shown that in spite of the economic downturns, the exchange value of the euro and dollar has benefited the region amply. Tourism reached its peak in 2004. Reports and statistics by government and private entities estimate major growth. The negative social impact of increased tourism increases the need to institute more strict laws, disseminate, and educate and alert the population on its implementation of sustainable programs.

Tourism provides Third World and cash-starved developing countries a market for their sandy beaches and coral reefs to sun-seeking visitors, the enormous growth in the volume of tourists have changed people's activities and influenced their culture. Actions like windsurfing, snorkeling, sport fishing, whale-watching, sailing and scuba diving provide locals with potential incomes when building and renting premises, and providing basic services to visiting groups in a small scale. Ultimately, these activities cause strong damage to the environment. Even boats driven on diesel should be substituted by bio-diesel. Erosion and deterioration of infrastructure is intense and irreplaceable. Entrance fees, taxes, and high fees to enter renowned places are inexistent in most emerging countries. Besides, developing countries do not have sufficient fees nor possess the income to restore their historical sites. Emerging nations should following examples from China and Vietnam Tourism Bureau, which have established high cost for their visas as an income alternative.

Commonly no assessment and impact analysis including the benefits of long-term sustainability versus short-term profitability of any project exist. When and uncontrolled industry like tourism growth rapidly occur some kind of damage to ecosystem like pollution by untreated sewage, solid waste, contamination of marine waters and coastal areas, high energy consumption (hotels and transportation), air and noise pollution, damage of the wildlife habitats. One clear state example of it is the tour boat operators in the Caribbean that feed sharks to ensure that they remain in tourist areas. Another example is the whale watching boat crews around the world that pursues whales and dolphins and even encourages petting, which tends to alter the animal's feeding and behavior (Mastny 2001). The ecosystem impact is considerable.

Supporting programs, laws and organizations protecting the environment

On the matter of laws, it is not relevant just to enact laws, but to make sure interested sectors and the population knows and respects them. In the particular case of Puerto Rico, laws exist but not too many. In particular, Law 340 was created in 1998¹¹ to protect and stimulate eco tourism, though it is quite unknown. This law seeks to promote sustainable tourism activities including environmental protection. Power to implement laws is starting now. Similarly, in Dominican Republic laws on the matter exist since 1942¹². Even though law 67 enacted in 1974 is more self-explanatory and complete.

¹¹ In Lex-Juris, Puerto Rico, Law 340 from 1998. See at <http://www.lexjuris.com/LEXLEX/ILEY1998/lex98340.htm>

¹² Translated from "la historia y la biodiversidad bajo amenaza" protecting Del Este Park. At ellistindiario.com, a major Dominican Republic Newspaper.

In general, most Caribbean Islands follow UN (2003) and UNESCO's guidelines in ecotourism principles. The problem lies with governmental implementation and lack of hired trained technicians. There is a broad lack of knowledge of the law, its breath and less how to implement it. Abuses to the environment are common and often from those who are supposed to protect natural resources and its citizenship. The same happens in most islands in the Caribbean. Fortunately, a new wave of young have started to study environmental sciences, have opened their eyes to the damaging effects that old habits have on the environment and even better are returning home to invest cautiously considering culture and resources. If the trend continues, the future looks promising. Organizations like the Environmental Division of the Caribbean Hotel Association (CAST) and other groups exist for the same purpose. Yet, their actions are mostly geared at certification, not much more. No propensity is seen into building environmentally friendly hotels that use less energy, use solar systems, opens up into the environment, recycles water, installs tourist controlled water systems and electricity.

In the Caribbean, laws are not enacted adequately and policies are not delineated towards conservation, regardless of the government in power. Since no development foundation tends to exist, laws should be created and provide for their formation; once this is established proceeds should be invested in the communities whereas the actions take place. As such, deterioration to infrastructure and social ills can be prevented through planned systems and education. The Tourism Foundation of the city of New York provides a significant example. The organization commission for tourism has created guidelines for a turnaround that in spite of economical downturns and crisis of Sept 11th, has reestablished the city as the tourism Mecca of the USA. Criminality, citizen's interest, business participations and private and governmental actions brought the city back to life and even increased its attractiveness. Utilization of limited resources in an unsound manner kills the hen that lays the eggs.

Studies by Neto (2003) found that sustainable tourism aims to go beyond the increased community participation goal of ecotourism. Sustainability should include: Improving access to the economic benefits of tourism by expanding employment and business opportunities for the poor and providing adequate training. They should also introducing measures to deal with the social and environmental impact of tourism development, and establish policy reform by enhancing the participation of the poor and locals in planning, development and management of tourism activities pertinent to them.

In the continental USA, this situation was seen with laws oriented at protecting Indian rights. Indians rights were recognized and control of resources was passed on to them. Whichever opinion one might have of the effect of these actions an economic control in their society, their economy and quality of life improved. This appears to be the case of local tribes in Alaska and Canada.

As world resources become scarcer and peoples of diverse cultures and customs scavenge the world, groups and people will become more interested in the environment and with it, many organizations will be created. This natural process will stimulate private citizens to entice governments and countries to establish laws about environmental protection and education programs (Elides, 2003). Organizations have surged around the islands and worldwide with this intent. Caribbean Hotel Association Environmental Committee, The Caribbean Alliance for Sustainable Tourism (CAST), Green Globe 21, International Hotel Environment Initiative (IHEI), United Nations, Caribbean Epidemiology Center, Governing

Council, World Tourism Organization, and United States Agency for International Development and United Nations Environment Program and INSULA, are some of them.

According to studies published by the Caribbean Alliance for Sustainable Tourism (CAST, January 22, 2003), "The Caribbean is the region that holds the highest number of Green Globe certified hotels worldwide". The countries that are certified by Green Globe are Jamaica, Barbados, Aruba, St. Lucia, Dominican Republic, Antigua, Bahamas and Riviera Maya. Locally, even though (CAST) main office of CAST is in Puerto Rico, this city is not certified by any organization. Recently, though, the local government started talking about the issue of sustainability.

In the case of Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Barbados, and Cuba the situation differs. Cuba has created laws and within it, the Tourism Bureau has developed communities whereas well-sustained development exists. In the center of Dominican Republic, environmental laws and credits have promoted building hotels in the area of Jarabacoa , Constanza, Jarabacoa near the Duarte Peak, and in the Samaná Península a few environmentally friendly hotels exist without TV, with controlled water systems and solar light. Jamaica, and Cuba efforts in this direction are starting to show fruit.

Benefits of sustainable tourism.

Sustainability teaching necessarily has to be community based to obtain the respect and participation of the community and the preservation of values and culture, including paying local taxes and buying local goods and services. Quality tourism and eco tourism programs benefits residents since travel business requires employing and training local peoples, buying local supplies, and use local services. In addition, if networks are created among stakeholders & include planning, good host safety issues, and policies, residents will learn how to deal with foreign expectations even if they differ from their own. Moreover, it is important to notice that communities measure tourism success not by sheer numbers of visitors, but by length of stay, money spent, and quality of experience.

Summarizing. From an economic perspective, there are many benefits for sustained tourism. Tourism revenues raise local perceived value of assets because travelers seek out businesses that emphasize the character of the locale in terms of architecture, cuisine, heritage, aesthetics, and ecology. Stakeholders anticipate development pressures and businesses cooperate to sustain natural habitats, heritage sites, scenic appeal, and local culture. In the environmentally sustainable concept, travelers are aware of and favor businesses that minimize pollution, waste, energy consumption, water usage, landscaping chemicals, and unnecessary nighttime lighting (as is the case of Tikal's eco-tourist hotels in Central America). Travelers and foreign visitors learn how to help sustain local character while deepening their own travel experiences. Also, visitors learn about and observe local etiquette, including using at least a few courtesy words in the local language. Satisfied, excited visitors bring new knowledge home and send friends off to experience the same thing - which provides continuing business for the destination.

Section three. Example of good sustainable practices

Costa Rica is an excellent example where sustainable tourism has been implemented for over 15 years. People are very proud of their resources and care for them, government has legislated to protect the environment and has commonly established competitive and approved costs of services. The ambiance and security offered by the country has positioned them in an envious competitive setting when compared to others in the region. Likewise, is the case of Galapagos Islands, in Ecuador, of Machu-Pichu in Peru, Belize, and Cartagena de Indias in Colombia¹³. Since laws were enacted and recognition was provided by worldwide-recognized organizations like the UNESCO, locals, including tour agencies, guides (mostly) and police, have been continuously educated into how to protect their resources and tender optimum service. Additionally, there are programs and instructions for visits to sites, schedules for opening and closing the sites, how to dispose of garbage, etc, with few exceptions, thus control of all aspects is predetermined. Moreover, advertising has been centralized and control of activities has been relegated to associations authorized to implement laws and policies.

In Cuba, considering the internal and external economic constraints, sustainable tourism practices have been promoted effectively attracting large number of visitors and income. Places like Old Havana, Sierra del Rosario, Las terrazas, Viñales Valley and Varadero, have been developed and are sustained with strong consideration to the environment. In Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic as well as in Barbados, even though limited efforts exist, certain areas are promoted and established under sustainable criteria. In the particular case of Puerto Rico, the island is initiating the implementation of running the Blue Flag pilot phase (CAST, 2003), implying that the Caribbean beach criteria are being tested and implemented at selected pilot beaches in the region. Hence, the National park “El Yunque” has built a hotel on sustainability. A community in the center of the island is also developed within sustainable guidelines. Likewise, certain groups including “manatees” protection programs have been in existence for over 10 years with excellent results.

Several other countries are running excellent sustainable programs including Jamaica, Dominican Republic, Barbados, and the Bahamas¹⁴. In Barbados coral reefs (Miller, 2003) protection is a main goal. In the Dominican Republic, hotels in the center of the island already follow WTO directives in a limited manner. Tree planting, reefs and whale protection as well as hotels construction are strictly supervised. The problem of enforcing laws lies with the governments in power and vested interests. In Jamaica, programs have been implemented with limited results (Canada/Jamaica, 2004). However, an effort is underway to integrate all sectors in the aim to sustainability and to seek collaboration between ministries.

In Puerto Rico, successful strategies are seen around the El Yunque Rain Forest there is also a reputable hotel based in sustainability. Likewise, in the center of the island, a few solar homes are operating efficiently. There is hope that these examples can replicate exponentially. Yet, precisely this is what is sought after, sustainability that includes information on history, activities involving cultural programs as well as visits to natural sites.

¹³ The experiences presented are based on the author’s observation and travels as well as on material read in general publications.

¹⁴ Caribbean Blue Flag beach cover 4 major aspects: Water Quality, Environmental Education and Information, Environmental Management, Safety and Services

Examples are not common but some excellent ones exist. In other islands, per example the center of the Dominican Republic

A growing demand exists for sound environmental management from tourist, locals, and even some governments. A leading US diving magazine for example found that the most important criterion for choosing a diving holiday was the quality of the diving which far out- weighed other factors including price. Henna and Wells (2003) reported of a 1991 survey at Bonaire Marine Park in the Netherlands Antilles, one of the top Caribbean reef diving sites, and found that over 90 per cent of visiting divers were willing to pay a park management fee. As a result, a fee of \$10 per visitor was introduced a year later. Calculate the income with about 18,000 divers visiting per year. Results from these strategies have been extraordinary and the demonstrated concern for the area, its image, and reputation has grown tremendously as well as the influx of tourists. These concerted strategies and actions encourage foreign and local investment, to take advantage of opportunities, diminish risks, and increases the probability of funding via ventures, international agencies and banks, while increasing the potentiality of larger and more secure income sources of income.

Section three. Local study findings: methodology, results and analysis

The study was designed first based on a revision of secondary data including renowned organizations reports, existent laws, newspapers articles and peer reviewed publications, among others. Second, a primary search for information was designed focusing on a survey, phone and direct interviews to hotel owners, experts on sustainability and tourism. The study was based on the pre-emptive premise that though hotel activities are implemented in an excellent manner in the Caribbean region, hotels and developers do not understand nor implement the concept of sustainability.

Initial sample selection was at random. Later a judgmental sample was used while the population was selected conveniently. Respondent's owners were chosen based on the premises location and nearness to natural habitats. Results of the study was based mostly on his survey designed and faxed to 25 well-established hotels in Puerto Rico, and in 8 phone interviews in Dominican Republic. Hotels were selected at random based on location and nearness to natural resources. Thirteen firms among hotels and "Paradores" or Inns responded. Questions were clarified by phone while urging hotels to provide prompt and accurate replies. Hotels were located island wide providing a representative sample of the population. Responses were verified and counterchecked by phone.

A) Responses regarding the meaning of sustainable tourism were negative.

Neither of the respondents could explain what the concept meant nor how this could be implemented. However, all owners and administrators responded that they ensured that their customer's wishes were satisfied and, that, in addition, they did practice limited ecotourism. Probe of their achievement is repeated visits from the same clients throughout many years and extensive word of mouth advertising. In addition, knowledge of sustainability was found to be weak at government levels as well; this could be due to government directors being changed frequently with little impact and no follow up activities. This lack of knowledge hamper the dissemination and potential creation of activities oriented towards this aim. Why this lack of interest on such a common subject? Potentially, a reply could rest on the fact that

hotel developer's aim mostly at providing basic services; small investors finance operations privately and that investment in advertising is low. Lately websites are used extensively.

Interviews and visits to hotels in the Dominican Republic showed a general knowledge of the subject but limited implementation. Maybe awareness exists because of the urgent need the population has to generate income and because most hotels owners interviewed are located outside metro areas. As a result and due to limited size of businesses and the investment factor, safe sustainable activities have been formed. To reverse the trend, it is recommended though that educational programs be established to increase the knowledge of sustainability, to motivate locals to care more for its resources.

B) Overall, results show that most "paradores" owners have small premises. On the average 15% had less than 10 employees, 23% between 10-25, 39% between 25-50 employees and 23% more than 50 employees. It appears that other small Inns owners encompass the same demographics. In terms of the profile, most owners tend to be around 36-45 years of age (30%) with 23% being 56 years old and older. Apparently, older entrepreneurs have entered the hotel industry as a second career or to provide employment for their children and relatives. Very few owners (15%) tend to be between the 18-34 ranges. A potential explanation is the lack of capital and proven experience. Investments by a younger age group could be positive. Potentially this sector is prone to acquire more education and to take risks.

In terms of education, the majority of interviewed (39%) had university degree followed by 23% possessing associate degrees. This is consonant to any studies done in the Island (Hamilton, 2003) whereas a generally well-educated entrepreneurial population exists. Contrary to these findings, in other islands in the Caribbean, at "Paradores" and Inns levels education is lower. Higher levels are found at higher investments sectors and in manufacturing. Results indicating high levels of education, could mean that a well develop sustainable program with precise guidelines could be understood.

C) Regarding motivation to initiate their ventures, first (61.5%) started their hotels because of a need for personal accomplishments, and second to be their own boss (38.5%). Economic situation (8%) as well as freedom and independence (23%) brought lower responses. Apparently, there is a different trend elsewhere. Informal studies in DR and other islands in the Caribbean have shown that businesses are formed mostly for economic reasons and independence jointly to personal accomplishments.

D) Findings also show that average initial investment in "Paradores" and Inns were smaller than US\$100,000 (31%) and between US\$100-150,000 (31%). In addition, the average annual billing of the ventures was over US\$1 million. Of course, none of these businesses could not be built today with that amount, it would cost much more. In comparison to other islands, local costs of investment in facilities are terribly high and the income exorbitant in terms of the services provided. Most Inns in the Caribbean are made of a combination of wood and cement, the owner typically resides in-house and income is not stable thus, increasing investment risks. To counterbalance the non-sustainability concepts, in general, local and foreign tourists prefer major hotels with air conditioning and all services. As such, natural ventilation, water controls and hourly controlled energy provisions are difficult to implement.

E) Opinions on entrepreneurs and SMEs perception of risks as well as the problems confronted were also requested. Owners confront mostly environmental risks like hurricanes and floods; though these are preventable, commonly owners report losses to Federal Emergency Agencies (including FEMA) since they obviate insurance because of its high costs. Other problems often confronted include problems with enforced government laws and directives, health issues, personnel costs, licenses and permits and accessing funds (Hamilton, 2002, 2003). A lesser though rather important problem is infrastructure development, finding reliable employees and advertising and promotion costs. Most owners rely on word of mouth and on references for customers to attract clients. Lately, with the advent of the web technology, a large number is using this media. In addition, during the last few years the government initiated advertising campaigns to support the sector.

CONCLUSIONS

Summarizing. The profile of entrepreneurs tied to the tourism industry in Puerto Rico does not differ significantly with those of other Caribbean islands in terms of their profile, knowledge, interests and aims. Differences are minor and could easily be diminished with efforts from local leaders and the entrepreneurs. The business practices, risks and challenges faced by local firms as well as others in the Caribbean do not differ significantly from the existent for SMEs in other islands, except on the size of investment and access to capital. Problems are related to difficulties in hiring reliable personnel and infrastructure costs. The level of awareness of sustainability is low thus requiring varied actions. Examining the Caribbean perspective place Puerto Rico at a disadvantage in terms of adoption and implementation of sustenance. The case of Dominican Republic is less profound. In response to the queries posited in the study, literature on the subject and good practices from other countries, endow answers. Furthermore, government directives, understanding of sustainability and conservation, in the other hand differ substantially across island countries; in Puerto Rico less involvement in the issues is seen. Furthermore, countries involved in sustainable practices have shown improvement in all aspects, a fact that needs to be illustrated even more in the Caribbean context. Data examined suggests that rather than reinvent the wheel, examination of current practices, guidelines, as well as technology delineated by renown organizations should be examined, transferred and adopted by countries as they see fit. Already there are ample recognized practices to be followed. If good practices guidelines are provided and adopted, including Green Code 21, WTO, UNESCO, NGOs, UN, and sustainable practices could be accomplished in the long-term.

Not having well enacted laws (lexjuris, 1998) indicate the need to revise and delineate laws following international and global standards. Moreover, the problems of sustainability existent in Puerto Rico are not profoundly different to those occurring elsewhere in the Caribbean. Recycling policies, coral protection, replanting, and solar applications, are at a low level of implementation; enforcing this directives and requiring studies in environmental impact are initial steps (Lowry, 1998). Even though the aforementioned studies are required in Puerto Rico, they are not well implemented. What to this researcher does not exist is footprint analysis, nor consistent follow up of directives to protect land, air and environment nor credits for firms that enter sustainable programs. Alliances based on competitive honesty should be established to benefit all islands. All around, there is a general agreement that education on

the subject will increase dissemination of culture and augment local pride. Increased desire to inform more about their culture, heritage and environment preservation will protect more their own resources. More information will also allow small owners to recognize how to exercise their rights, access credit and demand the protection due under their constitution.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Limitations for this study mainly rest on the size of the sample, however, the author strongly believes that an increase in sample size would not bring different results. A constraint of economical nature did have an impact in the study; if economical means and time would exist; travel to other destinations would have increased direct observation and an increase on the number of good practice cases presented. Nevertheless, the abundance of secondary sources in the manner of reports provide practical input to the study and shies away theory from practice¹⁵. On sustainability, we recommend that Caribbean islands governments and pro-environment groups follow directives and sustainability guidelines from prominent organizations like UNESCO, World Tourism Organization, Caribbean Tourism organizations, CAST, The World Charter on Sustained Tourism 1995 of Lanzarote in developing sustainable guidelines, global code of ethics and education programs.

2) The profile and high educational background of the island's entrepreneurs/owners suggest implementing some education programs on the subject of sustainability, environmental conservation, as well as guidance on practices of sustainable tourism is not unattainable. Educational programs, should consider directives of the WTO, which suggest that SMEs education should include studies on benefits of good practices on sustainability. In the particular case of other islands, knowledge of nature, compromise, and willpower exist and the educational levels instill capacity for increasing educational programs emphasis long-term benefits versus costs. The same recommendations provided above stand.

3) Since there is a strong perception that the conceptual difference across islands can be due to the type of tourism orientation, then, since some Caribbean islands tourism is oriented to Europeans, (Puerto Rico, is oriented to continentals USA tourists (80%), evidence from countries where sustainable tourism activities are practiced could be implemented because of their potential transferability. Illustrative countries in the Caribbean and elsewhere where good practices exist and have implemented the philosophy of sustainability have shown remarkable success and an increase in quality of life. These include Barbados, Costa Rica, Belize, Peru, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Nordic countries in the EU. Other islands still exhibit limited success.

4) Since there is unawareness of existing laws in general, a revision of the value of existing laws as well as dissemination programs have to be established. Likewise, these laws should include incentive programs oriented not only to attract foreign investments, but also to provide tax credit for local entrepreneurs. Per example, following these directives and to

¹⁵ The author wishes to clarify that most of the example provided of good practices, except for the cases in Cuba surge from direct personal observation acquired through her travels and reinforced with reports

stimulate entrepreneurship, the UN has established 2005 as the year of the Micro credit. Due to the flagrant deterioration of infrastructure and damages that tourism and its related activities create, taxes and dues will need to be levied and transferred to the communities and affected areas. This will encourage locals to evaluate cost versus benefits provided by the sector.

5) Directives should require studies in the form of ecological footprint studies, tourism Penetration Index, and assessment and impact studies, for any project, including highways. This will inhibit granting construction permits and damage to ecosystem. The studies will increase awareness of the economical costs to the environment, of not enforcing laws, or of doing studies¹⁶. Likewise, certifications should be reviewed yearly and implementations required. Not least, clearly delineated policies regarding waste disposal, responsibility for damages caused have to be implemented.

6) Foundations and organizations should be founded outside government directives and implemented with inclusion of community members, environmental leaders, groups and citizens, should be established to delineate long term strategies. These entities could prepare proposals and gather funds, which in turn could be used to provide conferences, seminars, educational programs, and small loans to assist sectors in need. An exemplary example is the one published on Namibia by the UN dept of Economic and Social Affairs NACOBTA (1999), a group to which 40 enterprises directly belong to.

7) Contractual clauses should be included in loans granted to investment groups, including hotels. These clauses should be included in their contracts including requiring collateral for taking care of any damage they might cause to the environment, for the disposal of abandoned premises, and for fund to care of employees, who in accordance to local laws are employed long terms without the benefits due. Likewise, studies on tourism destinations should be adequately used to correct mistakes and provide more differentiated and sought after services.

8) The main source of income in most Caribbean islands come from the ocean, its corals, and fauna, thus guidelines protecting its corals has to be regulated and people educated on how to implement them. Likewise, whale watching and hunting needs specific rules should be regulated so that income needs of most investors can cause a postponement of country to personal needs. In the same direction, responsible labor directives should enforce the provision of lawful salaries and benefits to those locally employed. Following the same guidelines, outsourcing and contracting cannot, under any circumstance, inhibit local participation. Programs should include educating all sectors against the deteriorating state of reefs and the environment, as well as many other factors including, i.e., corals protection, fishery, whale watching, care of caves, closure of public beaches, mangles, using boats in endangered areas, unwanted garbage disposal, et al.

9) To ensure local advantage over other islands, owners should be aware of the need to become more competitive, improve and personalize services and offer competitive prices. Eventually these actions will attract repeat customers and provide success. Increased education and awareness that natural resources are of nonrenewable nature that once taken

¹⁶ Ecological footprints measures studies are recommended strongly since these analyze inputs in terms of land required to sustain and produce these inputs and compared this to the land available within a region or across the world.

care of will provide sustenance in the long run has to be instilled. Moreover, as foreign or locals perceive a larger pride in the provision of services and care for their resources, they will involve themselves more in the culture, will appreciate what they see and respect those they interact with.

Decisively, the trend is to initiate directives from local community groups that are environmentally prone. However, since the health of any responsible tourists is significantly dependent on the health of ecosystems. Thus, locals including dive guides are beginning to see that their prosperity is linked to the careful management of reefs. As studies by Henna and Wells (2003) found, there are organizations¹⁷ oriented at tourism awareness; her studies found that the major difficulty in attaining sustainability consists in waking up national governments to the fact that tourism is a major source of income and employment that cannot be allowed to speed out of control. This author is of the opinion that a balance has to exist between income and impact on nature. Of course, political and vested interests often enlarge the gap between theory and practice.

The existent lack of concerted actions and unawareness of the importance of protecting resources will eventually cause a downward trend in tourism. Thus, Caribbean islands as well as many countries urgently need to examine directives provided by international organizations and certifying agencies. It is common knowledge that as communications across the globe improves, safety in travel is stressed, and competition among industries and countries grow, the world consumers will be more selective in their choices. As such, most will seek more value for their money and, and demand more “natural” destinations. In terms of policy recommendations, this author believes that it is the role of government to incorporate environmental code of ethics and conduct, as well as guidelines on how to preserve their environment based on long-term strategies continuously revised. In view of the fact that SMEs and small venture entrepreneurs typically lack start up capital, alliances should be established and networks systems implemented with local and worldwide universities to which businesses could access for information and training when in doubt, for technical assistance, impact studies, advertising and general support.

Given the economic significance of SMEs, and the self-employment and cultural transmission the sector provides, care should be given to reinforce the sector. In the case of local entrepreneurs, they, like foreign firms, need to become proactive, seek information, demand on receiving services, they can and have a right to obtain. Moreover, worldwide, organizations and researchers on sustainability and entrepreneurial roles have recommended that countries in the process of development and developed countries adhere to sustainable agreements. This accords should emphasize that sustainable tourism development should move beyond environmental protection to protect the countries values, mores, culture, and heritage. Since sustainable tourism should be initiated with the help of broad-based community-inputs, local groups should maintain inner participation an indirect control of tourism development. Borrowing from the United Nations 2003 report, tourism should provide quality employment to its community residents and a linkage between the local businesses.

If a code of practice is established for tourism at all levels, either national, regional, or local, based on internationally accepted standards then all environmental problems including waste

¹⁷ Groups such as *Tourismus mit Einsicht* (Tourism with Insight) in Germany, and Tourism Concern in the UK protect nature.

in waters, damaged ecosystems and menace to endangered species will occur. Even though the responsibility to introduce measures to deal with the social and environmental impact of tourism development rests in all, specially the educated and young, this author believes and strongly recommends that since the increasing growth of tourism is a reality, ceteris paribus, then government, private investor groups, entrepreneurs of any size and citizens need to plan ahead to protect resources and their future. Tourists themselves should not only enjoy growth in world tourism but, more importantly, the activities of ST should maximize economic benefits of the local population and increase the living standards of host communities. Tourism is definitely as a steadfast path to opulence, particularly in small island nations in the Caribbean.

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