Article

Sustainable Tourism in Sensitive Environments: A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing?

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Abstract: Sustainable tourism has become a widely adopted term that has allowed many tourism developments to take place under its rubric that are less than sustainable and have been located in sensitive areas that have not all been suitable for such development. The paper reviews the origin and shortcomings of the concept and some of the implications of the resulting problems. It argues for a more critical review of so-called sustainable forms of tourism and for a focus to shift towards increasing the resilience of destinations, particularly those in sensitive areas, in order to shield them from the effects of inappropriate or excessive tourism development.

Keywords: sustainable tourism; resilience; tourism effects; sensitive environments

1. Introduction

Almost two decades ago this writer commented on another form of tourism which was being promoted as having great potential to resolve some of the problems of mass tourism [1]. This was "alternative tourism", the name indicating that this form of tourism was different (and an alternative) to mass tourism, and represented a greener and less harmful set of activities than the most popular form of tourism [2]. Such a term is rarely heard today and what was implied by that term has generally been replaced by sustainable tourism. It is perhaps appropriate to consider if this current popular term is likely to follow the same path as its predecessor, particularly in the context of tourism in sensitive environments. (In this context, the term sensitive environments refers to environments/ecosystems that have a high degree of vulnerability to change, particularly irreversible change, which may be reflected in permanent loss of elements of biodiversity because of the varying impacts of tourism). The continuous growth and dispersion of tourism into even the remotest parts of the earth have resulted in many expressions of concern about the multiple and varied effects of tourism on its destinations, particularly those locations that are highly vulnerable to impact and change. It is appropriate, therefore, to discuss the potential role and effect of what is termed sustainable tourism in such locations, as it is clear that not everything that is described as "sustainable" is really that, and that in the case of tourism, the supposedly sustainable form may not be as benign or appropriate as may initially seem to be the case.

This paper is not intended as a polemic against tourism in general (or any particular form of tourism) to remote or sensitive areas, whether it be in jungles or on ice caps, but it is meant to sound a warning that often under the guise of sustainability, tourism has been able to access and impact on even the most sensitive of environments, not always in the desired or intended manner It is often the fault of reliance on a misunderstood and ill-defined term that has allowed this situation to develop and much greater scrutiny of what passes as sustainable tourism needs to be undertaken before it is automatically given *carte blanche* to have free passage to any destination by virtue of its label.

2. Sustainability and Similar Concepts in the Context of Tourism

The concept of sustainability has a long history, it can be traced back to the historic game parks and reserves of medieval times, whereby land and wildlife resources were reserved to maintain stock, albeit for the privileged few. The New Forest in England, which dates back to the 11th century was established as a royal hunting ground, over which the fauna was zealously and viciously protected. In the current era, such a method of resource protection and preservation would not be acceptable, but the basic principle, managing the stock and only harvesting a certain amount that would ensure the maintenance of the resource, still underpins what we know today as sustainable yield. The concept of sustainable development as defined some three decades ago by the Brundtland Commission [3] is little different in goals from ideas presented over several centuries, and all are aimed at answering the question of "how much can be taken today to ensure a supply for tomorrow". The abbreviated enunciation of sustainable development, "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." ([3] p. 43) is now well known and widely accepted at many levels, both public and private. It is unfortunate that this definition, while it has proved capable of gaining widespread support and endorsement, is generally impossible to fully implement, as its basic illogicality allows for a wide range of interests to support it, while allowing as many to ignore or fudge its practical implementation.

In the context of tourism, the basic problems with the concept emerge very clearly, perhaps partly stemming from the well-known (at least to tourism scholars) omission of any mention of tourism in the WCED report [4]. The desire to make many forms of economic activity meet the key characteristics of sustainable development led almost inevitably to the establishment of sustainable tourism. Like the parent concept, sustainable tourism has received wide support and equally wide failure in implementation. Its short comings have been discussed over a number of years [5–7], including the lack of an accurate definition of the key terms, the conflicting views on goals, and the failure to measure outcomes and ensure appropriate controls on development. First, tourism itself is rarely defined in most writings on tourism; the UNWTO definition [8] includes many elements of travel that are generally not considered by academics (who normally consider tourism to be people on holiday only) when discussing and researching tourism. The word sustainable, of course, already had a well-established meaning long before 1987, namely, an ability to hold up or withstand, or to maintain or prolong ([9] p. 1189), and if applied to tourism would suggest a form of tourism which is capable of withstanding problems and being able to continue. This is not what is generally implied by the term sustainable tourism. The UNWTO definition of the term is "*Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities*" [10].

That statement is so imprecise and open to varying interpretations that it is virtually meaningless. This failure to produce a precise and applicable definition of sustainable tourism that would be used by all stakeholders has meant that each party has been free to put their own interpretation on the term. This explains, in part, the widespread appeal of the term and has resulted in continued development, the assumption being that such development will not affect future human needs nor cause problems for natural processes if it is sustainable. Such assumptions in the present world are not only incorrect but dangerous, as they allow people to believe a state of sustainability is achievable.

Thus, there are various understandings of what can be meant by sustainable tourism. Is it "Tourism which is in a form which can maintain its viability in an area for an indefinite period of time." [11], which would be an appropriate definition it we take the traditional use of the term sustainable, and one that would probably find strong support from the tourism industry and those pursuing economic development? Barkemeyer et al. [12] note the movement away from the original concept that is revealed in business guidelines with respect to sustainable development since 1987 and a lack of clarity because of multiple definitions of the concept.

An alternative definition of sustainable tourism could be:

"Tourism which is developed and maintained in an area (community, environment) in such a manner and at such a scale that it remains viable over an indefinite period and does not degrade or alter the environment (human and physical) in which it exists to such a degree that it prohibits the successful development and wellbeing of other activities and processes" ([11] p. 29).

In terms of the UNWTO definition cited earlier, this second phrasing is probably closer to what is implied by the term, namely a form of tourism that is compatible with the destination environment in which it is located and that does not threaten that environment or its residents. In the context of sensitive environments, the focus of this collection of papers, this is of crucial importance, as appropriately, the focus is placed on the destination environments rather than on tourism itself. This means that those in charge of such areas should be concerned primarily with outcomes rather than the form of tourism or its dimensions *per se.* In reality, this is extremely difficult, as the form and dimensions of tourism all too often determine what the outcomes, in terms of the destination environment, will be.

The application of sustainable development principles to tourism, while highly desirable in principal, becomes impossibly complex in application. There is little real knowledge or understanding of what future generations of the population at large will be like in terms of their numbers, their location, or their characteristics. To then write of their "needs" is pointless, even more so when it is clear that there is no universal agreement on what the "needs" of the present are with respect to tourism, if we should even talk of needs in the context of tourism. Statistics on tourism are frequently generalized and inaccurate, and while we have at best only general estimates on what the world population might be like in the future, we have even less reliable forecasts of the dimension, the nature and the location of global tourism in the future. Thus, if we cannot realistically talk of the 'needs' of the present, let alone the future, in the context of tourism, we are even less able to talk about the effects future tourism may have on its destinations. In such a situation, therefore, we need to consider very carefully if the concept of sustainable tourism is a viable and meaningful one. Moisey and McCool ([13] p. 343) note, in the context of the "larger social uncertainty about the meanings attached to the concept of sustainable tourism", that "without shared meanings, sustainability does indeed become nothing more than a 'guiding fiction', leaving the participants with a moving target of an idealized end state, yet paralyzed when it comes to taking action" ([13] p. 347). Such concerns have been discussed further by several other authors in the volume by Hughes et al. [14] that deals with the inherent paradoxes in the concept. While some forms of tourism, such as nature tourism or eco-tourism may be seen as more sustainable than for example, mass tourism, in reality such is not automatically the case if the overall effects of the activities are examined. On a per capital basis, for example, a mass tourist may have less overall impact on the global environment than an ecotourist, by virtue of travelling less distance to the destination, utilizing facilities geared to mass use and rarely moving out of an intensely managed development, thus having little if any impact on surrounding environments. Such tourism, however, is rarely thought of as being sustainable, while ecotourists, travelling great distances, venturing into rarely visited environments and sometimes creating incipient demand for more intensive tourism are often regarded as the ideal. There needs to be much more attention paid to the evaluation of global impacts on resources and holistic effects of all types of tourism in different settings, rather than simple labelling of forms of tourism as sustainable or not.

This is not to say that the concept of sustainable tourism should be rejected. If nothing else, it has raised consciousness about the nature and effect of tourism, the problems which can result from inappropriate or over-development and encouraged praiseworthy efforts to make the industry less harmful to destination environments and communities, while still retaining the positive benefits it can bring to an area. Such an ideal is always something worth striving towards, even if the "moving target" noted above is never achieved in finality. Given the dynamic nature of tourism, however, it is almost certain that this will be the case, for tourism has been growing constantly since figures were first collected and equally, has been changing in form, intensity and effects. We should bear in mind that tourism

is developed precisely to achieve impacts, economic at the very least, and perhaps socio-cultural and environmental also, for without impacts, there is no point in its establishment. The key question in the areas under consideration here is not so much the success or failure of tourism or sustainable tourism, but the overall effects which it may have on those destinations and their residents. There is no doubt that tourism can have positive effects in all three of the areas normally discussed under the rubric of sustainable development; economic, socio-cultural and environmental. The economic benefits have been discussed and evaluated over many decades, with a focus shifting to environmental effects from the 1960s, and on to socio-cultural effects around the time of the Brundtland Commission, with warnings about negative effects having been sounded well before 1987 [15–18].

3. Preservation, Conservation and Sustainability

The medieval concepts of maintaining stocks of resources was continued in various forms over subsequent centuries and it was not until the nineteenth century that significant new developments occurred, which have led to the current focus on sustainability. The discussion over the relative merits of development or protection of resources in the context of recreation and tourist use of sensitive and wild environments found expression in the late nineteenth century with the establishment of the first hall in North America and New Zealand [19]. While in many ways copying the example of the earlier parks and reserves noted above, national parks came into being with a more noble and inspiring purpose, to protect areas of wild lands for a nation rather than for a privileged few, and at the same time, encouraging access to those areas by all those who could travel there. Sometimes overtly and sometimes implicitly however, such reserves were also intended to produce economic benefits as well as environmental and spiritual ones [20,21]. The establishment of the Canadian national parks made this clear with the statement in the National Parks Act of 1930 stating "The Parks are hereby dedicated to the people of Canada for their benefit, education and enjoyment . . . and such parks shall be maintained and made use of so as to leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations" (cited in [22] p. 8), a sentiment very close to the original definition of sustainable development. The inherent paradox contained in the above statement, namely between use and development and protection was ignored and continues to present problems to the present day. Such sentiments were expressed in the rationales given for establishing national parks in many other countries, the idea that such wild areas (often "useless" lands as Hall [23] has pointed out) could be protected while yielding economic benefits from tourism which would otherwise be lost.

Thus, tourism, regardless of whether it is termed sustainable or not, can be seen to have both benefits and costs to wild and sensitive areas. By being designated as important and worthy of protection, such areas inevitably attract visitors and thus development. To allow, let alone encourage, visitation to such areas means the unavoidable provision of access, accommodation and a range of services, which in turn tends to generate more demand for visitation and for further services, leading, without appropriate care and management, to what is now termed "overtourism" [24].

The acceptance of varying definitions, or even worse, the absence of clear definitions, in the context of tourism or other segments of human activity has allowed many supporters of the concept to ignore a critical issue, namely, that the term sustainability is a holistic one and should not be applied to separate and distinct elements or activities. Tourism does not take place separately from other activities, not does it occur in a vacuum. It is part and parcel of human life and occurs in real world environments with links and relationships to many natural elements and processes. It is inconsistent to consider sustainable tourism or sustainable agriculture or sustainable fishing as distinct and in isolation from each other and from the world as a whole. Thus, when we consider so-called sustainable tourism development in sensitive environments, we should in fact be considering tourism as one part of overall development, not as a separate element. As UNWTO has rather belatedly come to realize, it is important to focus on how tourism can contribute to overall sustainability rather than whether it is sustainable itself. This can be seen for example in the recent UNWTO publication "Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals: Good Practices in the Americas" [25], where attention is drawn to how tourism may contribute

to the seventeen goals outlined by the UN in 2015 and adopted by UNWTO for the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development (2017). Tourism is specifically mentioned in only 3 of these 17 goals; Decent work and Economic Growth [8], Responsible Consumption and Protection [12] and Life Below Water [14]. Strangely, to this author, it does not feature in No Poverty [1], Good Health and Well-Being [3] or Life on Land [15], and perhaps not so strangely, it also fails to appear in Affordable and Clean energy [7] and Climate Action [13]. While credit should be given for the 2018 report noting briefly how tourism does relate to all the goals ([25] pp. 20–21), there is no clear message exactly how tourism may be made more sustainable to achieve its potential contribution to overall sustainable development.

Part of the reason for this is because, as noted above, tourism cannot exist without the means of access (transport) to destinations, accommodation and other facilities (infrastructure), labor (population growth), utilities (power, water), and other human services (health care, education, media). By focusing on tourism, generally meaning tourists and their specific behavior and impacts, there is a tendency to ignore the many other inseparable elements that accompany tourism and their unsustainable nature and consumption patterns. As Nepal et al. ([26] p. 61) note that it is "not difficult to conceive how even ecotourism (which has a more restricted definition than sustainable tourism) can be deemed a failure when analyzed at the global scale".

By way of example, we may look at birdwatching as a generally accepted sub-form of sustainable tourism (and even ecotourism) and one that would in most cases be considered suitable for a sensitive environment [27]. There are several characteristics of bird watching and bird watchers that would appear to support such a view [28]. There is generally no consumption of the bird population, (the taking only of photographs and not samples), and the individuals involved are likely to be a generally well-educated and relatively high spending tourism segment who spend several days at least in a destination, with a propensity to use local knowledge and possibly guides, and often content to stay in simple rather than exotic accommodations, with the interests of the birds at heart. Such a description sounds like the idea sustainable tourist sought after by many destinations. However, bird watchers in such environments may not be as green or as sustainable as expected [29]. Disturbance of the prey (birds) is common; after all, the birds have to be seen to be counted, and even if deliberate disturbance is not undertaken, the mere presence of humans in the habitat may be a problem. Large groups of visitors attempting to photograph rare birds in particular is becoming increasingly common, and some environmental impact in terms of soil and vegetation compaction is almost inevitable (the footprints that accompany photographs in the "take only photographs and leave only footprints" slogan). Of more significance, perhaps, although less directly visible in the host destination, is the means of access to the destination. This will almost certainly have involved transportation using non-renewable fuels, thus introducing a non-sustainable element into the equation. The same is almost certainly true for the importation of food and beverages, associated infrastructure and utility development, and perhaps movement within the destination area. Now none of these elements individually may be particularly harmful to the environment, but together they rather diminish the aura of sustainability associated with birdwatching, and inevitably, with similar activities, such as whale watching and other wildlife watching in particular [30].

Thus, we need to be careful in the assumption that non-consumptive wildlife forms of tourism are automatically sustainable, perhaps because they have a "nature-loving" image. The more exotic and rarer the species, the greater the cachet in seeing and recording an example. Nowadays recording is almost as important as actually seeing, as, without a photograph, extreme rarities may not be accepted by evaluation bodies, and of course, could not be uploaded to social media thus earning the recorder fame and prestige among their peers, followers and friends. As a species becomes rarer, perhaps threatened by climate change or other factors, so will pressure to see it before it finally disappears, hence the growing appeal of "Last Chance Tourism [31]. Many sensitive environments appear on "bucket lists" because they are rare or disappearing and are thus increasingly promoted as "must visit" sites. While many of these are cultural heritage sites, Machu Picchu, Angkor Wat, and Venice for example, others such as the Galapagos Islands, Polar Bears at Churchill, or Orangutans in Borneo

are examples of natural heritage now promoted as tourist attractions that "need" to be visited before they vanish. A few decades ago, the idea that the Inca Trail would need a limit imposed on numbers of participants to avoid overuse and deterioration, or that Kilimanjaro would become a favorite site for charity raising "expeditions" would have seemed as unlikely as Mount Everest becoming crowded and having limits placed on numbers of permits to climb. Evidence perhaps of the way that even low participation rates in forms of sustainable tourism can grow to levels that pose significant problems to destination areas.

Over time we have become increasingly accustomed to the concept of sustainable yield, the idea that there is a limit to the consumption of or impact on a resource if that resource is to continue to reproduce and remain viable. Thus, in many areas there are hunting and fishing limits imposed and generally accepted in order to maintain the stock involved (the Tragedy of the Commons situation, [32]). Anglers may have to "catch and release" all or some of their take, hunters may be limited to one animal a season or to a low number of days of hunting, because of increasing pressure on resources and stocks, and the realization that such measures are necessary to ensure survival and prevent extinction. In the commercial world the crash of cod stocks in the Northern Atlantic joins the near extinction of the bison and the total extinction of the passenger pigeon and the dodo as examples of human overuse of natural resources. Unfortunately, there has been great reluctance to accept and impose the concept of limits to use to tourism. The potential loss of income and employment, the fear of creating a negative image of a destination towards tourism, and political cost of lower tourist numbers all work against the idea that to reduce the negative effects of tourism it may be necessary to reduce numbers. UNWTO has long argued that it is not the numbers of tourists that is a problem, despite increasing numbers of residents of destinations arguing that it is [24]. It would be the ultimate irony and tragedy if the desire to see and experience species and landscapes in sensitive environments also resulted in damage to or the disappearance of those very features being sought. Thus, true sustainability is a key concept in such potentially threatened tourist destinations. It would be naïve to imagine that natural wild areas and the species they contain are exempt from the pressures of tourism and other economic activities. While the world has, in some cases begrudgingly, become accustomed to, and accepting of, limits on the extraction and consumption of species for commercial purposes, there has been much less acceptance of the need or urgency for such limits to be imposed on non-consumptive uses of species and landscapes. The concept of carrying capacity, which shares many of the same core components as sustainability, has never achieved acceptance within the tourism industry [33], and while there is often mention of capacity limits in the context of impact mitigation, they have rarely been adopted, primarily for economic reasons. While proponents of such forms of tourism sell their wares as sustainable, they seem able to penetrate any and almost all areas, from Amazonia to Antarctica, often with groups of a large size and using very unsustainable forms of transport (cruise liners and airplanes in particular).

4. The Unsustainability of Most Forms of Tourism

Sustainable tourism, as with ecotourism, has been taken to represent a positive form of tourism at least partly because it is not mass tourism. Gössling et al. ([34] p. 3) note that "Sustainable tourism, as such, can be equated with virtually any type of activity, the term at times being cynically employed to gain added ethical standing leading to what is sometimes referred to as 'greenwash'". In reality, supporters of sustainable tourism are, in fact, doing little to support reducing the forces acting on climate change or other environmental problems because even sustainable tourism involves travel. Most examples of sustainable tourism quoted in the tourism literature (see for example the majority of articles in the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*) involve long-haul travel by participants, mostly inevitably, by aircraft. If one accepts the viewpoint that air travel is a significant factor in global warming because of carbon emission generation [34], then supporting any form of long haul travel is contradictory and paradoxical.

Similarly, the majority of finalists for awards such as those of the World Tourism and Travel Council's Sustainability Exchange *Tourism for Tomorrow* [24] are often operations and facilities which require

long-haul travel for the vast majority of their consumers (because such operations are generally too expensive for their domestic market in most cases), an element presumably conveniently "overlooked" by the organizers [24]. Presumably acting on the principal that "my enemy's enemy is my friend", opponents of mass tourism tend to support almost any form of tourism which is not "mass" and in so-doing appear to partially ignore reality, in particular, the reality that on a *per capita* basis, the average mass tourist may be less "harmful" to the planet and its natural processes than the average sustainable tourist or ecotourist. Depressingly few academic researchers have explored in any detail the carbon footprint of different types of tourists and their behavior, and some at least are guilty of hypocrisy by visiting far distant conferences to criticize long haul tourists in the name of sustainability. It is clear that mass tourism is continuing to grow at the global scale, and as Wheeller [7] has asked, how can the desires and needs (?) of mass tourists be met without mass tourism? However, proponents of sustainable tourism often fail to understand that this phenomenon, in reality, represents quite rational behavior in the minds of mass tourism participants. The reality is reluctantly acknowledged by Ram et al. ([35] p. 1017) who note:

> "Current leisure mobility patterns are not sustainable. Because energy efficiency measures appear insufficient to accommodate predicted future volume growth, changes in transportation modes and volume are needed. Short-haul should be the preferred distance, public transportation the preferred mode and length of stay should increase rather than trip frequency. However, tourists are unwilling to adopt these measures" (emphasis placed by this author).

We face a great paradox, therefore, because for tourism to be truly sustainable it would have to involve little or no travel, but in turn, such activity by definition, not be tourism. If only truly sustainable tourism, by that reasoning, were to result, the economic and social effects could be disastrous for many parts of the world which would lose the benefits they currently obtain from tourism, particularly employment and income generation for destination host regions. Such a step would also mean the end of long haul travel, and thus severely curtail most of the markets and hence tourism to Australasia, the Central and South Americas, Africa and many parts of Asia. This would also reduce tourism to many sensitive and remote destinations by virtue of their locations, and while this might have positive environmental effects, would not help to meet the needs of both present and future generations in those parts of the world.

The vague definition of sustainable development (and of subsequent variations such as sustainable tourism), has helped the concept gain great support but equally, has allowed many developments to take place under that rubric that are far from sustainable. Eco-lodges in remote locations that require extensive long-haul travel to reach are one example, that while perhaps being sustainable in operation do not result in truly sustainable tourism. Implementation of the principles has generally been ineffective and achieved relatively little compared to the attention given to the concept. This relative failure in implementation may be related to a realization that anything resembling complete sustainability was unlikely to be politically successful, be far more complicated than anticipated and take a long time to achieve. From a political viewpoint, inaction proves better than action [36]. This is the reality of the 'tragedy of the commons' [32], whereby those responsible avoid actions that might sustain resources and environments but by adopting the sustainable concept in principle, appear to be doing so.

5. From Sustainability to Resilience

It is often put forward that sustainability has an underlying triple-bottom-line, economics, environmental and social-cultural concerns, all with equal importance. In reality, there is a fourth factor, that being political [37], because if proposed developments and policies are not politically acceptable as well, then they will not be implemented. Hall [38] has argued that researchers have ignored the political component of tourism and thus failed to understand many aspects of development. If significant

progress towards sustainable principles is to be achieved in the context of tourism, then the political reality has to be challenged. Arguing for a form of pseudo-sustainability and ignoring key elements such as travel and the dynamic nature of tourism will never be successful, and in sensitive areas in particular, the resulting effects can be serious.

The previous rather lengthy and critical comments on sustainable tourism are not intended to claim that the term should be abandoned, nor that most of what passes as sustainable tourism is to be rejected. Rather it is a call for those concerned with the management of sensitive environments of all types to critically review all and any forms of development, whether they claim to be of a sustainable form or not, with a focus on what effects such developments may have on the environments in which they will appear. This represents a shift from a focus just on the form of tourism, i.e. the demand, to a focus on the destinations, the supply, and how these can be conserved and/or preserved in the face of tourism (and other) forms of development. A similar argument is made by Espiner et al. [39] in their recent discussion on developing a conceptual model to link the concepts of sustainability and resilience.

The concept of resilience and its application to tourism has been discussed for several years in the tourism and resource literature, most recently in books on the subject [40–42] and in articles in number of journals [43–45]. Resilience is a term coined by Holling [46] and refers to the ability of a feature (environment, community, ecosystem) to return to its original form after a shock to its system. Most of the initial research on resilience was done in the natural sciences beginning in the 1970s [47] and its application to the social sciences has been acknowledged to be more difficult and hampered by "fuzziness" [48]. Nevertheless, the concept is being cited increasingly in the social science literature, and Hall [49] includes some interesting tables showing the increasing use of the concept in a number of disciplines and subject areas. Publications on the concept in the social sciences make up around 20% of all academic publications on the subject over the last half century. When tourism is linked with the concept, the most common context has been with communities, followed by ecosystems. In the initial application to tourism, consideration was primarily about the ability of destinations to recover from the shock of tourism development, but more recently there have been several studies examining how tourism itself can be an aid to improving the resilience of destinations after other shocks such as natural catastrophes such as tsunamis (for example, [50,51]).

In the context of sensitive areas and the insertion of tourism, it may well be more effective to concentrate on improving the resilience of such areas to tourism development (and other shocks) through such actions as limits on numbers, restrictions on entry, limitations on behavior and where necessary, prohibitions on certain forms of activity, including tourism in total if appropriate. Resilience can be increased by a number of actions, some as above, restrictive, and others through engineering, information dissemination, and user education. None of these steps is new, most of them have been practiced by park managers and others for many years through interpretation, guiding, and ranger activities, but in many cases political and economic forces have prevented effective controls and management actions from being implemented. Even in sophisticated and highly developed urban tourism destinations such as Barcelona and Venice, local residents have protested at tourist numbers and their effects on these cities, calling for restrictions on numbers and size of cruise ships, of properties rented through AirBnB, and of tourist numbers in general [24].

How much more important and appropriate might such restrictions be in the case of sensitive environments where many local communities face few if any alternative economic opportunities to tourism and therefore welcome almost without hesitation the introduction of tourism development. In its initial development stages tourism often has few opponents and many supporters for good reasons, employment and income generation in particular, along with improvements in infrastructure of all types that accompanies such development. Only later, when tourism has reached a level that brings with it issues and problems that were not apparent initially, do local residents express concerns [16]. By such time, it is often difficult if not impossible to impose effective constraints without severe economic disruption. Ensuring destinations in sensitive environments are made more resilient to the effects of all development in the early stages of development is generally much more effective

than attempting the same actions later in the development cycle. The work of Ruiz-Ballesteros [52] in linking social-ecological resilience and community development in Ecuador is particularly relevant in this context, along with the work of Sharifi [53] on the development of specific tools to assess community resilience, and Cheer and Lew [41] include several examples of how the resilience concept has been applied to communities involved with tourism. The limited studies of resilience planning suggest that involving local residents and all stakeholders at the start of development is of critical importance for success, including gaining political support [54]. In examining the case of Whistler (B.C.), Sheppard [55] emphasizes the importance of preparing for and adapting to change if a community is to become more resilient to shocks, and the need to incorporate such adaptation into the governance of the community [44]. Accepting development because it is described as being sustainable does nothing to ensure survival of key processes and elements of a destination, building resilience in preparation for impacts is more likely to be successful.

6. Conclusions

In many sensitive environments the human presence is limited, often centered in small communities, many reliant on fishing, timber, mining or agriculture, some or all of which may be in decline. Tourism is often, justifiably, seen as a worthwhile and potentially successful agent of regeneration. Wall [56] raises an interesting question in this regard: If a fishing community ceases fishing because of a declining resource and instead tries to catch tourists and is successful, is this an example of sustainable development, and if not, why not? Is fishing or farming any more or less sustainable than appropriate tourism? Furthermore, a situation that is apparently sustainable when viewed at one scale may be judged as unsustainable at another. As with many concepts, everything is not necessarily what it seems initially, and thus a focus on protecting the supply rather than relying on gaining an appropriate form of demand is probably a more sensible option.

In many respects tourism and its associated developments have moved encouragingly towards the ideal of sustainability, with individual establishments and organizations reducing their energy and resource consumption, their waste, their pollution and their general disturbance of natural and cultural processes in destination areas. In terms of environmental effects this trend is particularly important and relevant in sensitive areas, and reflects the need to consider sustainability as a truly holistic concept, and to incorporate tourism as one element in the progress towards sustainable development, rather than treat it as an individual component. However, the overall growth of almost all forms of tourism has meant increased pressure on most destinations [24], even from what are often regarded as sustainable forms of tourism. In addition, some of the very basic problems with the concept of sustainable tourism that were noted two decades ago [5] have not been resolved. Short of curtailing and reducing the volume of tourism, something unlikely to happen based on past trends and actions, it would perhaps be best to shift some of the focus from trying to change tourism to trying to improve the resilience and hence survival of sensitive areas that are or will become tourist destinations.

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