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# Abstract

Tourism embodies several stakeholders. Bearing in mind the interest of multiple stakeholders and their priorities, this essay aims to discuss the responsibility tourists share for unsustainable destinations. First, mass tourism impact on water scarcity in small islands is examined. Second, the gap between tourists’ attitudes and behaviors on holidays is discussed. Third, the other stakeholder’s responsibility is investigated. Data from secondary sources were examined to review existing literature on the topic. Data collected were then compared to answer the research questions. This study demonstrates that tourists share the responsibility for unsustainable destinations and their contribution is directly inter-related to other stakeholders’ participation in creating unsustainable benchmarks of tourism development. The study has confirmed that mass tourism has a huge impact on water overexploitation and unequal water supply, causing environmental detriment and social impoverishment and harm. The lack of awareness of the effects of their actions when on holidays makes tourists responsible for tourism’s negative effects. In addition, the findings demonstrate that unsustainable destinations are a shared responsibility with other stakeholders. On this basis, it is recommended that Sustainable Tourism requests stakeholders’ involvement into tourism planning and acknowledgment of their impacts on local economy, social well-being and environment.

# Essay

Tourism embodies several stakeholders (UNWTO, 2005) including “any individuals or groups involved, interested in, or affected (positively or negatively) by tourism” (Aas et al., 2005) thus public and private organizations, NGOs, locals and tourists. Considering the interest of multiple stakeholders and their priorities, this essay aims to discuss and outline the responsibility tourists share for unsustainable destinations. To date, there is little consensus about what unsustainable destination means, and the term remains poorly defined as the research to date have focused on sustainable destinations rather than determine its contrary. This because over the last years Sustainable Tourism has been subject to increasing attention by academics. Widely varying definitions of Sustainable Tourism have emerged highlighting the need for tourism to meet the needs of future generations (Swarbrooke, 1999). The definition has evolved over the years clarifying how Sustainable Tourism considers its current and future environmental, economic and socio-cultural impacts being key to meet the needs of all stakeholders (UNWTO, 2005). Within the three pillars of sustainable development in tourism, Sustainable Tourism requests stakeholders’ involvement into tourism planning and acknowledgment of their impacts on local economy, social well-being and environment (Byrd, 2007). The Cape Town Declaration (2002) further added a more comprehensive definition of Responsible Tourism as tourism that minimise social, economic and environmental impacts and contribute to social well-being, economic benefits and environmental conservation in the host countries. According to these definitions, every tourism stakeholder that has a negative impact on the economy, social well-being or the environment of a destination or neglect to acknowledge these impacts can be described as irresponsible tourist. In addition, any tourist destination that sustain inequality and is not able to meet the needs of all stakeholders can be described as unsustainable destination. Bearing in mind these considerations, this essay focuses on the responsibility tourists share for unsustainable destinations at small islands, in particular in Small Islands Developing States. On these premises the essay is built on three sections. First, mass tourism impact on water scarcity in small islands is examined. Second, the gap between tourists’ attitudes and behaviours on holidays is outlined. Third, the other stakeholder’s responsibility for the lack of awareness and the increasing discrepancy between tourists’ beliefs and actions, long-term societal well-being and short term individual interests.

This section uses water consumption and usage levels as a lens to outline the tourists’ involvement in mass tourism impact at destinations such as the Bali and Zanzibar. For many small islands tourism represents the first source of income and produces more than 30% of the total GDP for countries such as Bahamas, Seychelles and Barbados (UNDESA, 2010). On the other hand, tourism is going to be one of the biggest pressure in the future on water resources (JICA, 2006), especially in small islands and SIDS where mass tourism has produced a growing increase in water consumption and a vicious circle of water equity issues (Page, Essex and Causevic, 2014). In the tourism context, water equity refers to the UN’s right to water and is described by Tourism Concern (2012) as development that does not have priority on local communities’ right to water for essential needs. As argued by Gössling et al. (2012) in a global review on the nexus between tourism and water, the tourism industry is often able to create recurring benchmarks of unsustainable water usage. The pressure applied by mass tourism, especially in small islands highly dependent on it, is directly connected to overexploitation (Tortella & Tirado, 2011), pollution and contamination of resources (Gössling et al., 2012), inequality in water consumption (Charara et al., 2010) and distribution (Becken, 2014), and water conflicts and marginalization (Cole, 2012). Numerous studies demonstrated that water consumption benchmarks are higher where tourism has developed for niche markets than mass tourism, (Hof and Schmitt (2011); Tortella & Tirado, 2011; Rico-Amoros, Olcina-Cantos, & Sauri, 2009). However, these results were based upon data from Europe and especially Mediterranean destinations and it is unclear if the same outcomes would emerge from applying the same methodology in small islands and SIDS. In addition, European destinations are generally characterized by more efficient water use (LaVanchy and Taylor, 2015). On the other hand, several recent researches demonstrated a higher water usage level by mass tourism related to locals in developing countries such as Honduras (Stonich, 1998 cited in Charara et al., 2011), Zanzibar (Gössling, 2001) and Bali (Cole, 2012; 2014), where tourists’ water consumption is between six and sixteen times higher than locals. Moreover, tourism water consumption is often underestimated by academic research which mostly focused on direct use of water rather then consider also the indirect water consumption of tourist’s activities and attractions (pools, irrigation, supply chain, food production). This is evident in the case of Zanzibar where uncontrolled tourism development and the exponential increase in mass tourism have translated into water overexploitation and increasing water scarcity. A detailed examination by Gössling (2001) on the direct and indirect water use by tourism related activities in Zanzibar concluded that in the island there is a substantial overconsumption by mass tourism. Considering both direct and indirect water consumption, Gössling et al. (2012) offered an adequate explanation of the essential necessity for water management to consider both direct and indirect water use levels to achieve a more equal water distribution. As tourism demand is the precondition of tourism development, it can be argued that mass tourism demand has been a precondition of unsustainable tourism development in Zanzibar. Investigating the correlation between social, economic and environmental factors and water distribution in Bali, Cole (2012) further demonstrated how local communities suffer water shortages and difficult access to drinking water even if Bali is an island that does not suffer absolute water scarcity. High population growth and tourism development are translating water supply in a critical issue and water consumption is expected to rise by 70% before 2025. In addition, the non-observance of the right to water access has increased health issues as illustrated by national statistics in Indonesia (BPS, 2009; 2010). It can be argued that water issues in Bali are the sum of water supply development factors, political and regulatory factors, social and cultural factors and awareness factors. The lack of knowledge bureaucracy and poor law implementation and enforcement are ascribed to the government. Not surprisingly, the study highlighted the scarce knowledge by tourists on the relationship between tourism and water. This lack in awareness lay behind not only government and tourism businesses but is a shared responsibility of tourists through their choices and behaviours. Taken together, these findings suggest that being involved in mass tourism in destinations affected by water issues and not understanding the repercussions of mass tourism on water distribution exacerbates the negative impacts of tourism. Tourists do not recognise that water management is a shared responsibility and they contribute significantly to water inequity as tourism development is fuelled by tourism demand.

Awareness of social and environmental issues related to water distribution and consumption is key for destinations to formulate water management strategies to minimise tourism impacts. The following section moves on to outline the discrepancy between tourists’ attitude and behaviour on holidays related to water consumption, to measure the responsibility they share for unsustainable destinations. Research on the subject argued that there is a substantial tourists’ awareness on environmental and social tourism impacts (Budeanu, 2007) and a positive connection between environmental interest and predisposition to convert this attitude into investing in sustainable alternatives (Hedlund, 2011). Although these positive outcomes, other studies revealed that 90% of tourists does not convert their beliefs in choosing responsible and sustainable tourism products (Yan et al., 2006). In addition, tourists are not aware of water consumption levels and the impact of their behaviours on water scarcity and shortages (Miller et al., 2010; Arubes et al., 2003). Expanding Miller et al. (2010) argument, Cole (2012) observed that tourists lack of awareness on water management issues is related to emerging environmental issues in several destinations, including small islands and SIDS. Furthermore, other studies revealed that tourist’s consumption on holidays is higher than in everyday life and they tend to act less responsibly when going on vacation (Page, Essex & Causevic, 2014; Juvan et al., 2016). This is evident in countries such as Gambia, Zanzibar and Dominican Republic where research suggests that the behaviour of tourists consolidate and reinforce the vicious circle of water inequity. Despite a clear majority of ecologically friendly tourists and almost 50% of the total tourists acknowledge their overconsumption on holidays, there is still little perception of the tourism demand in term of water, especially in countries already affected by water scarcity and impoverishment. This is also emphasised by the uncomplicated accessibility to water in their home countries. It is not yet clear what are the causes of this divergence, even if Juvan & Dolnicar (2014) in the attempt to establish the reasons for this dissonance, outlined people predisposition to react to the stress created by this discrepancy trying to change their attitudes instead of modifying and adjust behaviours. Research further demonstrated that Tourists justify their behavioural change in four keys categories including denial of consequences, denial of responsibilities, denial of control and exception handling (Juven et al., 2016). All these categories of justifications for failure to be responsible support the idea that tourists are reluctant to behave in a sustainable way helping to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Considering all these evidence and arguments, tourists are responsible for unsustainable development for their choices in term of destinations, for the limited awareness of environmental issues that affect places they visit, and because of their behaviours. The substantial difference between what they sustain and what they do in the reality, and the priority they give to individual and provisional interests rather than considering the enduring human prosperity, make tourists’ behaviours a central element of the unsustainable development in tourist destinations.

The last section examines the other stakeholder responsibility and the inter-relation between their actions and the tourism awareness and behaviours. There is an increasing body of literature that distinguish internal and external barriers that restrict the ability of tourists to make decisions, be aware of the social and environmental effects of their actions, and actin agreement with their attitudes (Mont, 2004). According to Yan et al. (2006), these barriers include purchasing convenience and product availability and individual interests. Bearing in mind these barriers, other stakeholders including tourism businesses and governments have the difficult task to create and implement measure to minimise tourism impacts through awareness generator tools and behavioural change instruments (Budeanu,2007). Indeed, the tourists’ rationale for travelling is substantially different from the economic driven interest of other stakeholders (Strauß, 2011). Traditionally, the role played by public and private organisation have been assessed on the capacity to drive economic development in tourist destination and convert tourist’s attitudes and behaviours in economic growth. On the other hand, there is a growing literature on the need for these stakeholders to provide guidance and support to tourists and create mechanisms capable of changing their behaviours. As Cole (2012) argued, political factors influenced the water supply in Bali due to failure in control, implementation and enforcement of regulatory policy regarding water supply. The mismanagement was also caused by the lack of knowledge by local departments on the water issues. Therefore, this supports the idea that in small islands and SIDS, local governments are required to provide stronger tools able to achieve a considerable shift in tourist’s behaviour to meet the needs of all stakeholders (Budeanu, 2007), because educational instruments demonstrated to be only valuable for accomplish a change tourist attitudes. The same author also suggests an increment in conservation cost for damaging actions and a decrement in conservation cost for positive conduct. However, this argument has been criticised by those who advocate a better use and distribution of resources (Kornevall, 2002). On the dispute on tourism businesses and their relationship with tourist’s awareness and behaviour, several articles showed that tourism businesses have better access to water supply resulting in being irresponsible businesses (Cole, 2012). Notably, Diarta (2015) identified also the misleading successful brand campaign enacted by both government and tourism businesses where the island was portrayed as a well-disposed and water rich destination, overlooking completely the water problems that Bali faces because of mass tourism. Arguably, tourism businesses failed to increase awareness on water issues at destination. The role of the tourism businesses, tour operator specifically, is essential in promote information on the destinations and create a reliable circuit between the business and the customer. In small islands and SIDS, tourism is often the main contributor to the total GDP and tour operators are fundamental because they are the main source of communication with the tourism demand. Moreover, research has demonstrated that they have a massive power to influence the demand (Curtin & Busby, 1999). Further literature demonstrated that tour operators offer an insufficient and often faulty information (Ytterhus, 2000). Thus, they have the absolute possibility to implement and sustain the tourism sustainable development and make a significant change in the tourists’ behaviours by giving support and advice on sustainable principles and action, as advocated by many International organisations and NGOs. Sure enough, the role of providing guidance and stimulating behavioural change is a shared responsibility by both private and public sector and the present section provides further evidence that other stakeholders can act to compensate the gap between tourists’ attitudes and behaviours.

In conclusion, tourists share the responsibility for unsustainable destinations and their contribution is directly inter-related to other stakeholders’ participation in creating unsustainable benchmarks of tourism development. The essay has confirmed, using the lens of the water inequity in small islands and Small Islands Developing States, that mass tourism has a huge impact on water overexploitation and unequal water supply, causing environmental detriment and social impoverishment and harm. The lack of awareness of the effects of their actions and the participation in mass tourism make tourists responsible for the its negative effects. In addition, the findings on the discrepancy between tourists’ attitude towards sustainable practices and their behaviour when on holiday is another responsibility they share with other stakeholders. Indeed, research emphasises this dissonance is typical of governments and tourism businesses. Other stakeholder’s actions are clearly connected with the tourists’ actions, contributing to broaden the gap attitudes-behaviours. Several possible solutions were analysed including education tools, effective resources allocation and mechanism to reward sustainable practices and punish unsustainable conducts. Sustainable Tourism requests stakeholders’ involvement into tourism planning and acknowledgment of their impacts on local economy, social well-being and environment. Considering the close relationship between all stakeholders, collaboration and knowledge sharing is key to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and global benefits for all groups or entities involved in the tourism industry.

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# Appendix one

**Course name:** Responsibility & Ethics in Tourism & Hospitality (M3N822518)

**Original topic:** Tourists share the responsibility for unsustainable destinations. Critically discuss the following statement.

The essay should underpin theories and concepts with illustrations drawn from trade and academic texts. Whilst it is needed to define an ‘unsustainable destination’, bear in mind that a destination can be as narrow or as wide as you wish, from a hotel resort or cruise ship to a country or even continent.