

Sustainability and Tourism in the Era of Asia Pacific

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For the whole world the source of income, employment, and economic growth has been strongly disrupted by tourism. Today, the context of its membership in the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) plays a fundamental role in achieving a great development; this dissertation analyzes tourism in this block as an economic activity that interacts with the environment, causing not only positive effects such as improving competitiveness, increasing population labor system and an economic increase in the countries that touch it; but also negative consequences, such as tourism overcrowding and poor resource management that can destroy the tourist base on which the sector depends. The theoretical basis of the research rests on the analysis of the proposals for sustainable tourism competitiveness with which this economic block counts, in order to analyze the empirical results of the application of environment and sustainable development indicators with respect to tourism, as well as the perception, on that subject, of national and international by actors and organisms within APEC.

Keywords: sustainable development, tourism, competitiveness, economics, APEC

Introduction

At present, the tourist activity is extended all over the world; its direct influence on the economy of certain regions, including Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), allows us to take advantage of the possibility of returning to take good lessons from this group of countries that have managed to achieve encouraging rates of economic growth and improvement in the quality of life of the population that develops these niches.

Given the above, some economies are working on tourism improvement issues, as in the case of the APEC Tourism Working Group (TWG). Thus, within this mechanism tourism is considered as a key economic engine to promote investment, development and support the growth of the region through travel and tourism. This implies taking effective measures to ensure that, as the United Nations claims, tourism activities are organized in harmony with the peculiarities and traditions of the receiving regions and landscapes, so as to protect the natural heritage of ecosystems, biological diversity and, we must add the cultural.

As in the case of sustainable development, the definition of sustainable tourism is not unequivocal. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) indicates that all forms of tourism (including mass tourism) can be sustainable, to the extent that the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development balance each other to ensure sustainability in the long (UNEP-UNWTO, 2005). A common problem is how to specify the degree or progress in terms of sustainability.

Based on the above, and to check the hypothesis, we also support the methodological approach of tourism sustainability and competitiveness that uses the tourist function, tourist flow profile and good practices, which

are closely linked to Sustainable Development (SD), a model that redefines the concept of welfare by extending it to the satisfaction of the needs of future generations.

Applying this to tourism, it is a matter of making a rational and equitable use of existing resources, to achieve the conservation of the same in which tourism is sustained for the benefit of users and the regions where such activity is carried out, including that for future generations. All this is with the purpose of proposing a series of recommendations for improvement of the Pacific area public policies in that subject.

However, the purpose is not the actual comparison, but rather to put into question the different perceptions of actors in sustainability, tourism, and economy of the countries of Asia Pacific that have recently emerged, which will result in a greater explanatory capacity of the phenomenon studied, bringing together good practices.

Sustainability and Tourism Competitiveness in APEC Countries

Introduction

Tourism is one of the most important economic activities within the bloc of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). As in the rest of the world, this sector generates multiple impacts on the economy, society, and the environment, although there are difficulties in measuring these impacts. However, for APEC and the countries belonging to it, it is necessary to transform the parameters of tourism growth. In this context, the term development in sustainability is relevant to preserve the environment to which the visitation is applied and to increase the tourist competitiveness.

The estimates for APEC reflect substantial growth in tourism activities and development. From the years 2014-2018, the APEC economies experienced a growth in tourism revenues of 28%, surpassing global trends. By 2017 the level of tourism competitiveness represented by the economies of this economic bloc ranged from position 6 to 82 globally, and only 53% of the 19 APEC economies that were evaluated by the World Economic Forum (WEF) improved their level of competitiveness. That is why some countries have implemented improvements in the way tourism is developed.

Following is the table of the World Economic Forum where the APEC economies are positioned according to their indicators in tourist sustainability under the period 2017-2018.

Table 1

Indicators of Tourism Sustainability in APEC Economies

Country/economy	Rank*	ICG 2017-2018		Setting social sustainability ICG		Environmental sustainability adjustment ICG	
		Value	Direction	Value	Direction	Value	Direction
New Zealand	4	5.93	↗	5.94	↗	6.04	↑
Singapore	5	5.87	↑	6.23	↑	6.38	↑
Malaysia	7	5.76	↗	5.59	↗	4.86	↘
Hong-Kong	27	5.04	↗	5.86	↗	5.76	↗
Australia	29	5.02	↗	5.8	↗	5.54	↗
United States	34	5.00	↗	5.97	↗	5.24	↘
Canada	37	4.94	↗	5.95	↗	5.51	↗
Japan	41	4.91	↗	6.29	↗	5.83	↗
Peru	49	4.82	↘	3.99	↘	4.02	↘
Taiwan, China	53	4.74	⇒	4.55	⇒	4.48	⇒
Philippines	56	4.71	⇒	4.26	⇒	4.25	⇒

Table 1 to be continued

Indonesia	57	4.67	4.31	↘	4.26	↘
China	58	4.63	4.96	⇒	4.28	↘
Mexico	60	4.60	4.2	⇒	3.98	↘
Thailand	61	4.56	4.63	⇒	4.38	↘
Chile	83	4.24	4.68	⇒	4.78	⇒
Rep. Korea	99	3.96	5.25	↗	4.85	⇒
Russian Federation	102	3.87	4.46	⇒	4.19	⇒
Vietnam	105	3.83	4.11	⇒	3.67	↘
New Guinea	134	3.14	2.61	↘	2.6	↘
Brunei Darussalam	138	3.01	3.61	↘	3.19	↘

Source: Own elaboration based on the World Economic Forum (2018).

Due to such impacts and magnitude, not only for APEC but for the whole world, the concept of sustainable tourism seeks to designate that model of tourism according to the general principles that detail sustainable development. But, like the latter, the concept of sustainable tourism does not allow a definition in precise terms and leaves a very wide margin for all kinds of interpretations. The prevailing vision is that of “sustainable tourism development”, an approach that promotes the economic growth of the tourism industry for APEC, but emphasizes the need to promote certain aspects of the environment to ensure the viability of tourism in the long term.

That is why, since 2002, the economic bloc APEC founded the International Center for Sustainable Study and, within it, the Tourism Working Group (TWG) that seeks to provide information and assistance to APEC economies and destinations to improve tourism sustainability throughout the region. At the same time, a tourism management infrastructure called Total Tourism Management (TTM) recognizes the economic, environmental, social, and cultural benefits and opportunities of APEC tourism activities on the basis of to certain tourism-sustainable objectives.

Development in Tourism Sustainability Within the APEC Framework

Due to the size of the tourism industry and the impacts generated, there is a concern to find a balance between the growth of tourism development and environmental preservation. As mentioned earlier, the concept of “sustainable tourism” was born in the 1980s as an opposition to mass tourism coupled with the establishment of APEC. In such a way the negative environmental and social impacts experienced in the destinations of the block were attributed totally to mass tourism. In those years small-scale “sustainable” tourism was proposed as a solution, but these solutions did not have the capacity to cope with the growing demand for tourist travel or to bring the economic benefits of mass tourism. In this sense, this first approach to sustainable tourism can be considered a “micro-solution” to a “macro-problem” (Clarke, 1997).

However, like the parallel concept of sustainable development, the term sustainable tourism has not been precise and leaves a wide margin for all kinds of interpretations. Following the definition of sustainable development of the Brundtland Report, the World Tourism Organization states that:

... Sustainable development addresses the needs of current and incoming tourists and at the same time protects and fosters opportunities for the future. It is conceived as a way to manage all resources so that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be met, while respecting the integrity of culture, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and systems that sustain life. (OMT, 2014)

The relationship between tourism and the environment is increasingly problematic. Hall (2013) believes that the continued growth in emissions and contribution to the loss of tourism-related biodiversity has occurred

despite the reference to the concept of sustainability within academic and political circles. Similarly, Elliot (2014) states that while environmental and socio-cultural sustainability seeks to ensure that non-renewable physical and cultural resources are not consumed in the process of tourism, economic sustainability will represent a degree of autonomy at the local level; community structures, employment, and human resources must be maintained.

Since its inception in 1989, APEC has focused on voluntary liberalization of trade and services. In this context, tourism has had a large opportunity, although achieving a differentiated behavior among members, while promoting sustainable tourism by the interest it means in terms of profit.

For this, APEC has designed mechanisms that:

- They seek to stabilize the institutional standards that favor the idea of certification.
- Proposed measures to reduce impediments to the development of tourism.
- Security mechanisms for sustainable development have been promoted.
- Countries are expected to coordinate their macroeconomic policies so that the problems arising from crises do not significantly impact the growth of the tourism sector.

Motivated by this and other international events that influence the behavior of their economies, the leaders of the Asia-Pacific region formed a specialized working group to help align the interests and objectives of the 21 countries that comprise it, with a view to promote the development of the region through tourism with a view to sustainability.

APEC Tourism Working Group (TWG)

Since its inception, APEC has recognized the economic importance of sustainable tourism because of its capacity to generate jobs, promote investment, and promote sustainable development. Interested in the phenomenon of sustainable tourism, the Tourism Working Group (TWG) was formed in 1991, whose work was based on the APEC Tourism Document, which was approved by the First Ministerial Tourism Meeting in South Korea by the year 2000. This document recognizes the important contribution of tourism to the improvement of the economic, cultural, and social environment of the member economies of APEC, set four key objectives, and establish each process of work led by a member economy:

- Objective 1: Eliminate impediments to business and investment related to tourism (Leading Economy: Thailand).
- Objective 2: Increase the mobility of visitors, as well as the demand for goods and services linked to tourism (Leading Economy: Indonesia).
- Objective 3: Achieve sustainable management of the effects of tourism (Leading Economy: New Zealand).
- Objective 4: Promote the understanding of tourism as a vehicle for the development and social inclusion (Leading Economy: Australia).

The work of the APEC TWG has positioned it as the most important technical input for a successful agenda of the Tourism Ministerial Meetings (TMM). They have approved important initiatives that reaffirm in an absolute way the importance of tourism as a priority economic activity in the Asia-Pacific region.

International Center for Sustainable Tourism at APEC

The APEC International Center for Sustainable Tourism (AICST) was founded in mid-2002 by the Tourism Working Group and the Ministers of Tourism of the 21 APEC economies. The role of AICST is to

provide information and assistance to APEC economies and destinations to improve the sustainability of tourism throughout the region. Its objectives are stated immediately:

General objectives:

- Contribute to better planning and management of tourism.
- Attend to better policy development by governments.
- Increase skills and abilities.
- Foster better education and training in tourism.
- Promote international understanding of different races, cultures, and beliefs.

Specific objectives:

• Facilitate collaborative research projects of regional and national importance that expand knowledge and develop skills and sustainability; facilitate and encourage the application of research results by government and industry.

• Coordinate the provision of services within the APEC region to improve the sustainability of tourist destinations.

- Improve the presentation and dissemination of travel and tourism information.
- Emphasize education and training possibilities in the area of tourism and travel.

Investigation. The AICST can identify and investigate issues that could impact tourism in the Asia-Pacific region over the next 10 to 15 years. These problems include climate change, transport and aviation; the development of infrastructure; planning and design; communication and information technology; environmental, economic, social, cultural impacts and tourism management. The aim of the AICST is to complement the work that other organizations or economies of APEC are carrying out.

Management of tourism in destinations. The AICST has access to the skills, knowledge, and experience necessary to provide competition and services to destinations in order to improve sustainability and the way tourism is managed. A tourism management infrastructure called Total Tourism Management (TTM), which recognizes the economic, environmental, social, and cultural benefits and opportunities of tourism activities, has been developed. TTM includes best practices in planning and management systems, and allows local government teams, industry, and academic representatives to improve their management practices.

Concept. The AICST operates with the support of the APEC economies (Tourism Ministries and other related entities), national tourism organizations, tourism research organizations and universities. It is an on-demand resource for APEC TWG. Thus APEC TWG and AICST identify and prioritize problems and agree on direction and implementation. The research, coordination, and provision of tourism services are carried out on the basis of collaboration using the skills and knowledge of the region, with the financial support of the beneficiary parties. This approach is designed to optimize the sustainable tourism management skills of government officials, industry professionals and academics in developing economies.

Operations. AICST is a non-profit organization. Its operations are carried out in a collaborative manner and to the benefit of APEC economies and individual economies, which obtains funding for research and other projects inside and outside APEC through strategic partnerships with governments, national and international institutions, development agencies and societies.

Global Issues and Tourism Sustainability in APEC

In order to advance solutions to the major problems that arise in tourism and the preservation of its

attractions, organizations like APEC develop a series of global processes such as economic integration, trade facilitation, and sustainable development. From an angle of economic integration we can see that the world is undergoing a series of changes, within which we can observe fundamental transformations under the influence of globalization and urbanization. For APEC such changes have been of such magnitude that they modified the structure and development dynamics in the economic, commercial, and tourist liberalization.

Globalization is a process that reflects the accelerated interdependence of nations, in a world system economically connected through the mass media and modern transportation systems. Globalization has been seen as a result of the conjunction of the development of a series of forces at a global level, among which are the industrial revolution, the formation of economic blocs, and the greater and better relations between the physical and financial world.

It seems that the Asia-Pacific region is moving towards a multilateral model of development, where individual differences are respected, while at the same time emphasizing those complementary aspects and taking into account the comparative advantages of each nation. This is reinforced by the positive results they have achieved in their levels of economic growth.

The global principles guiding APEC clearly reflect that this is the way in which the member economies are to travel. Its rapid success is largely due to the confidence it has in opening up the region. Over the years the existence of this mechanism has been a powerful vote of confidence of its members in the future of a system of tourism, commerce, and international economy. Over time, APEC could evolve towards free-trade agreements throughout the region, encompassing all existing sub regional agreements.

The implementation of this vision of sustainable development was carried out in accordance with a framework approved by the ministers and endorsed by the leaders in their 1997 Declaration. The Plan of Action for the Sustainability of the Marine Environment, the Plan of Action for the Sustainability of Cities, and the Clean Production Strategy,¹ all three are included in the priorities of APEC's Economic and Technical Cooperation Program (Ecotech²).

Within this preamble one can mention sustainable development as a gesture that is synthesized in the alternative solution of great problems for the APEC block from two types of developments and/or problems that occur in the world. On the one hand, the underdevelopment of the so-called poor or underdeveloped countries is reflected in the extreme poverty of some regions of the world, and inadequate development on the other, due to the indiscriminate use and abuse of nature that has been exploited in voracious form by the developed countries.

This poverty of the underdeveloped countries is exacerbated in some countries of Asia and Latin America as chronic poverty, reiterated by the accelerated demographic growth and the excessive and indiscriminate consumption of their wealth by the developed countries. From this perspective, the existence of a responsible business element has been promoted not only in APEC, but at the planetary level, in such a way that they are manifested through industry and sustainable trade, aiming at the ultimate ratio of sustainable human development.

¹ Ministerial meetings on environmental care and sustainable development at APEC, 1994.

² It covers a variety of capacity-building and information-sharing activities to reduce asymmetries among APEC economies for shared and sustainable prosperity in the region. The six priority areas for Ecotech are: human capital development; development of stable, secure, and efficient capital markets; strengthening of economic infrastructure; preparation for future technologies; safeguarding the quality of life with sound economic growth for the environment; and promotion of the development and internationalization of small and medium enterprises.

APEC and Its Tourist Destinations

According to UNWTO (2015), the Asia-Pacific region received 279 million international tourists in 2015. With 15 million more than in 2014, growth was 6%. The region added US \$418 billion for international tourism, with the increase in real terms of 4%. Asia and the Pacific account for 24% of arrivals worldwide and 33% of revenue. By sub-regions, Southeast Asia (+ 8% in arrivals) and Oceania (+ 7%) recorded the highest growth rates.

Table 2

Arrivals and Income From Tourism in Asia Pacific, 2012-2018

Destinations	Arrival of international tourists								Income from international tourism					
	(1,000)				Variation (%)			Quota (%)	(millions \$EEUU)				Quota (%)	
	Serie	2012	2015	2016	2017*	13/12	14/13	15*/14	2018*	2012	2015	2016	2018*	2018*
APEC Members		512,823	577,701	375,507	398,087	6.9	5.7	5.8	100	382,477	506,999	586,230	601.295	100
Northeast Asia		99,493	112,047	120,917	126,981	2.9	4.2	3.2	45.49	100,261	132,681	195,058	204,933	49.0
China	TF	55,665	55,686	55,622	56,886	-3.5	-0.1	2.3	20.4	45,814	51,664	105,380	114,109	27.3
Korea Republic	VF	8,798	112,176	14,202	13,232	9.3	16.6	-6.8	4.7	10,328	14,629	17,836	15,285	3.7
Hong Kong (China)	TF	20,085	25,661	27,770	26,686	8.0	8.2	-3.9	9.6	22,200	38,934	38,376	36,150	8.6
Japan	VF	8,611	10,364	13,413	19,737	24.0	29.4	47.1	7.1	13,199	15,131	18,853	24,983	6.0
Taiwan	VF	5,567	8,016	9,910	10,440	9.6	23.6	5.3	3.7	8,721	12,323	14,614	14,406	3.4
Southeast Asia		279,994	310,215	86,454	92,053	65.3	2.3	7.1	32.7	66,899	104,504	103,833	105,151	25.2
Brunei	TF	214	225	201	218	7.6	-10.6	8.5	0.1	45	96	79	2,092	0.7
Philippines	TF	3,520	4,681	4,833	5,361	9.6	3.2	10.9	1.9	2,645	4,690	5,030	5,276	1.3
Indonesia	TF	7,003	8,802	9,435	10,408	9.4	7.2	10.3	3.7	6,958	9,119	10,261	10,761	2.6
Malaysia	TF	24,577	25,715	27,437	25,721	2.7	6.7	-6.3	9.2	18,115	21,496	22,595	17,597	4.2
Singapore	TF	9,161	11,898	11,864	12,052	7.2	-0.3	1.6	4.3	14,177	19,209	19,134	16,743	4.0
Thailand	TF	15,936	26,547	24,810	29,881	18.8	-6.5	20.4	10.7	20,104	41,780	38,423	44,553	10.7
Vietnam	VF	5,050	7,572	7,874	7,944	10.6	4.0	0.9	2.8	4,450	7,250	7,330	7,301	1.7
Oceania		8,365	9,184	9,838	10,886	15.7	17.9	14.2	4	3,712	42,656	43,359	38,532	9.25
Australia	VF	5,790	6,382	6,884	7,444	5.8	7.9	8.1	2.7	28,598	31,261	31,935	29,413	7.0
New Zealand	TF	2,435	2,629	2,772	3,031	6.3	5.4	5.7	1.2	6,522	7,396	8,424	8,910	2.1
Papua New Guinea	TF	140	174	182	132	3.6	4.6	0.4	0.1	2	4	3	21	15
Americas		104,709	117,476	128,045	136,344	4.1	8.1	50.8	70.4	169,366	21,517	231,007	244,214	80.40
Canada	TF	16,219	16,059	16,537	17,970	-1.7	3.0	8.7	9.3	15,829	17,656	17,445	16,229	5.3
United States	TF	60,010	69,995	75,022	77,510	5.0	7.2	3.3	40.3	137,010	177,484	191,325	204,523	67.4
Mexico	TF	23,290	24,151	29,346	32,093	3.2	21.5	9.4	16.7	11,992	13,949	16,208	17,734	5.8
Peru	TF	2,299	3,164	3,215	3,456	11.2	1.6	7.5	1.8	2,008	3,009	3,077	3,320	1.1
Chile	TF	2,801	3,576	3,674	4,478	0.6	2.7	21.9	2.3	1,645	2,181	2,259	2,408	0.8
Europe		20,262	28,356	29,848	31,346	10.2	5.3	5.0	5.2	8,831	11,988	11,759	8,465	1.9
Russia	TF	20,262	28,356	29,848	31,346	10.2	5.3	5.0	5.2	8,831	11,988	11,759	8,465	1.9

Notes. Series of international tourist arrivals: TF: Arrivals of international tourists to the borders; VF: Arrivals of international visitors to borders. *: Provisional data. Source: Own elaboration based on UNWTO report (2018).

The main destination of Southeast Asia, Thailand (+ 20%), experienced a strong recovery in 2018, with five million more international tourists. In Myanmar (+ 52%) arrivals also soared last year, although they started from a modest figure. Laos (+ 12%), Philippines (+ 11%), and Indonesia (+ 10%) also enjoyed double-digit growth rates. Cambodia received 6% more arrivals, while Singapore (+ 2%) and Vietnam (+ 1%) achieved more modest results.

Oceania had a solid arrival growth of 7% in 2015, driven by the main destinations in the subregion: New Zealand (+ 10%) and Australia (+ 8%). Among Pacific island destinations, both Palau (+ 15%) and Samoa (+ 11%), Fiji (+ 9%), New Caledonia (+ 6%), Guam (+ 5%), and Northern Mariana Islands (+ 4%) obtained good results.

More uneven were the results of Northeast Asia (+ 4%), where growth was strong in some destinations and in others there were declines. Japan recorded an exceptional growth of 47%, receiving six million more international tourists and reaching the quota of 20 million. Taiwan (province of China) recorded 5% more arrivals in 2015, and the largest Asian destination, China, saw a 2% increase. In contrast, the Chinese special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macao both declined, mainly due to the strength of their currency. Meanwhile, the Republic of Korea was facing the outbreak of Middle Eastern respiratory syndrome (SROM).

The same UNWTO (2017) indicates that after the good results of 2016, international arrivals in the Americas grew by 11 million in 2015, 6% more, reaching 193 million (16% of world arrivals). Revenues from international tourism increased by 8% in real terms, to US \$304 billion (24% of world income).

Many destinations benefited from the appreciation of the US dollar, which boosted demand in the United States, with the Caribbean and Central America (both + 7%) leading the growth. North America, which accounts for two-thirds of total arrivals in the Americas, received a 6% increase in international arrivals. Mexico and Canada (both + 9%) enjoyed significant growth, driven by US demand. Growth was more modest in the United States (+ 3%) due to a stronger dollar, this destination being more expensive for almost all of its markets.

According to the World Economic Forum (2018), regional tourism in Asia Pacific (both revenue at destination and passenger transport) accounts for 38% of service exports. UNWTO indicates that the share of tourism in total exports of goods and services increased from 6% to 7% in 2018, the fourth consecutive year in which tourism growth for the APEC economic bloc exceeds that of merchandise trade. In this period, trade in goods grew between 2% and 3% per year, according to the World Trade Organization (2015).

As a global export category, tourism ranks third, behind fuels and chemicals, ahead of food and automotive. In many countries of the Pacific Rim, tourism is even first placed as an export category, such as New Zealand. This is increasingly a key element of export diversification, both for emerging economies and for advanced APEC members.

APEC and the Influence of Tourism Sustainability

Within the APEC scheme, tourism has become important because of the magnitude of the spill that it generates in most of the 21 economies that compose it. APEC has integrated the notion of sustainable development into its agreements and encourages its members to consider the sustainability element in tourism practice. With the aim of promoting Economic Cooperation for Sustainable Tourism, in 2002 the International Center for Sustainable Tourism of APEC (AICST) was created. This helped substantially to understand the phenomenon of tourism and resource management, a cornerstone in understanding the development of sustainable tourism with an emphasis on development trends within the Asia-Pacific region.

As a result of this, in the case of tourism, institutions such as the World Tourism Organization, the World Tourism and Travel Council, and APEC, point to the benefit of private inclusion in efforts to achieve sustainability. The private interest in the idea of sustainability clearly manifests a transformation in the attitude of firms towards the social, environmental, and political environment, as well as the willingness of governments to cooperate with companies in areas such as conservation, where perceive mutual benefits. This is exemplified by the mechanism itself.

At APEC, these are not just traditional destinations and starting points for much of the international flow of tourists and tourism revenues, such as the United States, Japan, and Mexico, but also others that have been highly dynamic in recent years, such as China and Russia (WTTC, 2008). In that sense, by country, the majority of the members of the mechanism are within the first 20 places in the world ranking of tourist economies (out of a total of 176). By subregions, for North America (United States, Canada, and Mexico) travel and tourism represent 10% of gross national product. The northeastern sub-region of Asia (China, Chinese Taipei, Hong Kong, Japan, Republic of Korea, and Macao) ranks third. In view of the growing importance of sustainable tourism, it seems that in the future this will continue to grow, as it has come to be regarded as a structural, economic, social, and political phenomenon in productive sectors in Asia-Pacific.

Tourism Competitiveness in APEC

In the current world economy there are deep transformations, so it is necessary to have tools that guarantee better conditions of competitiveness. Some studies have emphasized that the competitiveness of the tourist destination can be increased through management based on environmental quality and the development of sustainable tourism, understanding as such that the capacity of a company, industry, country, or region needs this thematic to surpass its competitors.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the concept of competitiveness has been at the center of discussions on the development of countries, regions, or companies. Advances in competitiveness appear as objectives of all types of organizations, including APEC. This region seeks to typify the way tourism is developed, resulting in an improvement in economic income and the cooperation of its members. Therefore, the improvement of competitiveness appears, therefore, as one of the main objectives of the current tourist policy of APEC tourist destinations. Aware of this, several authors have addressed the issue of tourism competitiveness and have alluded to the need to adapt the concept to the specific characteristics of the sector.

Understand the competitiveness of a tourism destination as “the destination’s ability to create and integrate value-added products that support its resources”, while maintaining its advantage over competitors. Other authors define this competitiveness as the capacity of a destination to maintain its position in the market and to share and/or improve it over time. In this context, the interest in knowing the determinants of the competitiveness of tourist destinations and, especially, the insertion of the sustainability variable as a strategic condition has led to the existence of different conceptual models that typify development.

Until a few years ago, tourism statistics that measured the degree of success of the countries focused on variables and hard data directly related to tourism (tourist arrivals, tourism receipts, generated jobs, % of national GDP, among others). From the beginning of the XXI century and given the need to really assess the impact of the activity not only in the economic aspect, but also in environmental and social aspects, competitiveness has become the unit of measurement of the success of tourism in countries and destinations.

Following the general structure of the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index, below is the position of the most and least competitive APEC region within the 14 pillars and 136 economies used by the WEF to evaluate the level of tourism competitiveness, where Mexico stands out as the country richest in natural resources and New Zealand as the best bidder on sustainability and sustainability of the tourism resource.

Table 3

Position of APEC Organisms

Pillar	Most competitive country APEC	Less competitive country APEC
Natural resources	Mexico (2)	South Korea (114)
Cultural resources & business travel	China (1)	Philippines (60)
Infrastructure and construction	Singapore (2)	Vietnam (101)
Aerial infrastructure	Canada (1)	Peru (73)
Tourist services infrastructure	United States (3)	Vietnam (113)
International openness	Singapore (1)	Russia (115)
Price competitiveness	Malaysia (3)	Australia (128)
Land and port infrastructure	Hong Kong (1)	Peru (109)
Human resources and labor market	Singapore (5)	Mexico (70)
Information technology and communications preparation	Hong Kong (1)	Indonesia (91)
Health & hygiene	Russia (5)	Indonesia (108)
Business environment	Hong Kong (1)	Russia (105)
Security	Hong Kong (5)	Philippines (126)
Sustainability	New Zealand (19)	China (132)

Source: Own elaboration based on the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report, WEF, 2017.

Sustainability as a Strategic Factor of Tourist Competitiveness

Competitiveness is ephemeral without sustainability, and more in the long run (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003, p. 49). Increasing global environmental awareness highlights a shift in consumer attitudes towards environmentally friendly products (Holden, 2000, cited by Hu & Wall, 2005). The destinations that achieve higher growth rates are those that establish strategies oriented to the environmental sustainability of tourism (Hassan, 2000, p. 240). But the social and cultural aspects are also contained in the broader definition of the environment.

Consequently, although the environment and natural resources are essential elements of sustainability, sustainability goes beyond the natural function, for a sustainable tourism destination to achieve a balance in terms of social equity, economic efficiency, and environmental conservation. In this sense, Ritchie and Crouch (2003) argued that a competitive destination is one that promotes the maximum well-being for its inhabitants in a sustainable way. In addition, these authors consider that, in order to be truly competitive, tourism destinations must be sustainable not only economically but also ecologically, socially, culturally, and politically (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). This coincides with Valls, who states that:

... for a tourism destination to be competitive, it must generate long-term benefits above the average of competition in three areas: economic benefits (for businesses in the area or region so as to attract the best investors, entrepreneurs, suppliers, experts, etc.), social benefits (in terms of quality of life, quality jobs, innovation, etc.), and environmental benefits (so that tourism use fully finances the regeneration rate and there is no recourse to exceptions). (Valls, 2004, p. 56)

Therefore, competitiveness for APEC and its tourist destinations means achieving economic, sociocultural, and ecological sustainability. Failure to do so in some of these areas makes it impossible to obtain it at the

regional level, taking into account that the competitive growth sought must be in coordination with all member economies, in order to achieve an improvement in the tourist competitiveness of the whole.

Integrated Model of Tourist Destination Competitiveness

One of the models considered more complete in the competitiveness of the destination is the one of Dwyer and Kim (2003), who proposed a model of competitiveness denominated “Integrated Model”, who with reference to the model of Crouch and Ritchie, expose in theirs (Dwyer & Kim, 2002, p. 4). In this paper, we present the results of the study of the tourism industry and its impact on tourism. The model, in addition to resources, is composed of situational conditions, destination management and demand. All these factors and their interrelation lead to the competitiveness of tourist destinations, whose ultimate goal is to improve the living and well-being of the residents (Dwyer & Kim, 2002; 2003).

The main limitation of this model is the problematic in its practical application, since “to collect through indicators or surveys the situation in each destination of each of the elements would be very useful, but would be very expensive and sometimes impossible by the lack of comparable data available between destinations” (Garau, 2006, p. 4). It should be noted that the authors establish a series of indicators to quantify such competitiveness, although they recognize that they are not the only ones that could have formed the basis of the survey. In addition, according to Dwyer and Kim (2003), it would be interesting to weigh the indicators according to their degree of importance for tourism. But such action would be complicated, as it would require a very disaggregated examination of the travel motives of the visitors of each destination and continuous monitoring of changes in their preferences.

For APEC, tourism competitiveness becomes a necessity because the economic bloc is in a constant process of change. Many factors, including resources and the environment, include the way in which the competitiveness of a destination is developed. The objective of each member of the economic bloc is to take advantage of resources, conditions, and own management, triangulating this in the use and conservation of its tourism resource. Failure to do so could result in depreciation of the tourist value slowing the development of the same. For APEC members this is a complicated task due to the marked differentiation of some members versus others in terms of developed.

The task of working together is not easy, but models and indicators of competitiveness aimed at sustainable tourism development could allow the bloc to benefit the 21 members, taking advantage of their geography, but above all sharing new ways to develop regional tourism and improve their economies under conservation measures and use of tourism resources in the region.

APEC Tourist Projections by 2030

UNWTO and IMF (2009) estimate that the number of international tourist arrivals in Asia-Pacific will be the highest regionally speaking and will grow by an average of 4.1% per year between 2010 and 2030. Over time, the growth rate for APEC members will decline gradually from 3.4% in 2012 to 2.8% in 2030. In absolute terms, the IMF (2015) states that tourist arrivals in the economic bloc will increase by 19 million a year, compared to an average increase of 11 million annually in the period from 1995 to 2010. According to the expected growth rate, international tourist arrivals to APEC will exceed 331 million in 2020 and 535 million in 2030 (+ 4.9% per year).

Thus, international tourism will continue to grow in the period 2010-2030, but at a more moderate pace than in past decades due to the government’s problems and the economic slowdown that afflicts the planet.

However, it is expected that the number of international tourist arrivals in the world will increase, at an average rate of 3.3% per year. That means that every year, on average, 43 new millions of international tourists will enter the tourist market.

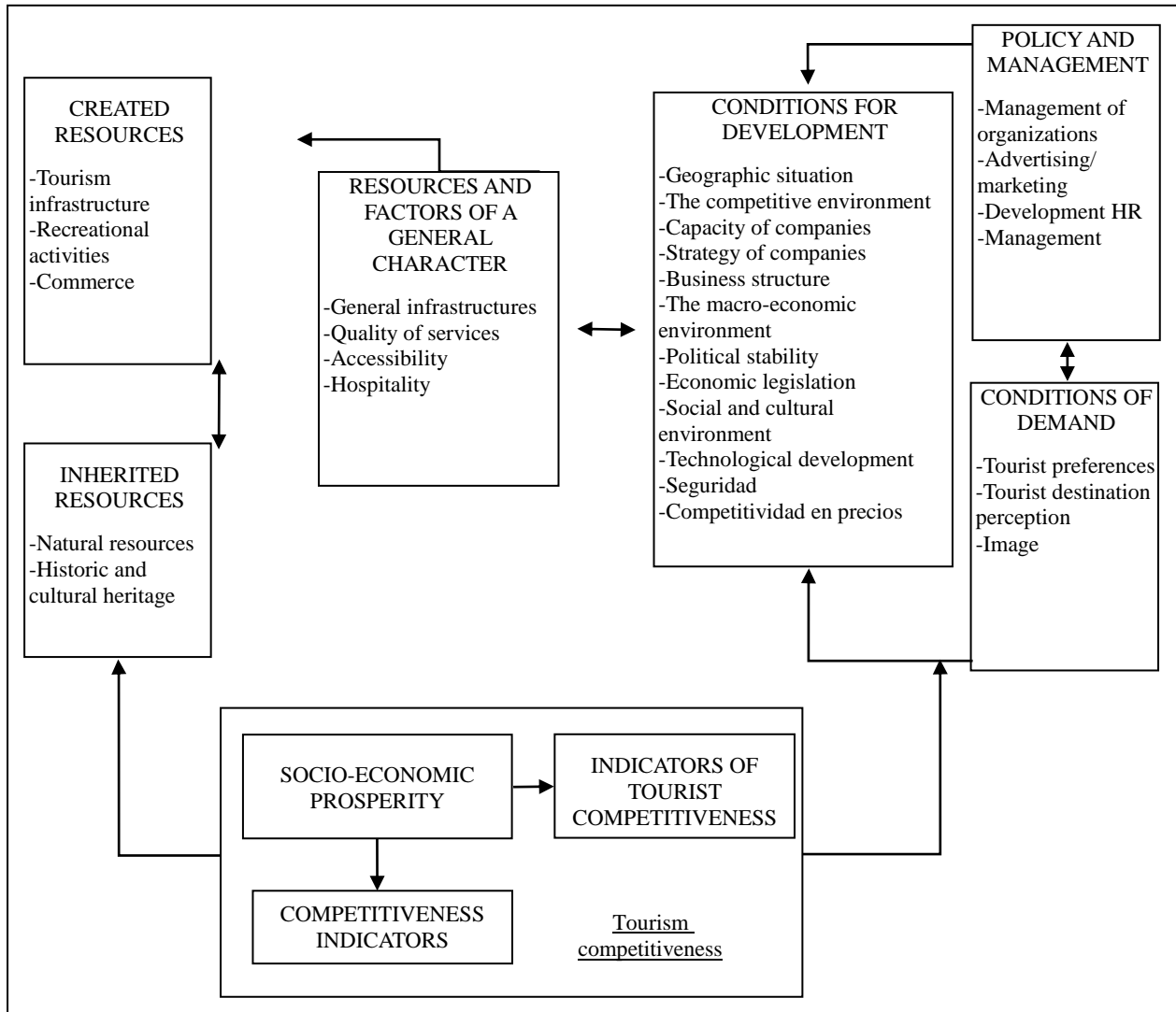


Figure 1. Integrated model of the competitiveness of a tourist destination.

According to UNWTO, a large part of tourist arrivals in the next two decades will come from Asian and Pacific countries, which will grow at a rate of 5% a year and generate an average of 17 million additional international arrivals each year. These data help to assess the importance of diversifying the tourism sector as a priority for the economic bloc of APEC which, according to some agencies, will follow a substantial growth line that will allow greater competitiveness and support among members. A sustainable approach will help to preserve the tourism niche and ensure its conservation; which will have positive repercussions in the not too distant future in which to offer more sustainable services will become a preferential element for the visitors.

For the economic bloc APEC, a numerical improvement is not easy because the region has 21 member economies that handle different development parameters. Positive growth projections for APEC tourism visitation and trends towards more sustainable tourism offer an encouraging picture. A breakdown of

projections for the development of the APEC tourism niche is then broken down by 2030. The increases are perceived as imminent due to the successes in some aspects of regional competitiveness and in the continuous improvement of the 21 member economies.

Table 4

APEC Tourist Projections to 2030

Arrival of international tourists (millions)					
Data recorded			Projections		
1980	1995	2010	2020	2030	1980-1995
277	528	940	1,360	1,809	4.4
194	334	498	643	772	3.7
83	193	442	717	1,037	5.8
n/a	236	382	504	717	n/a

Source: Own elaboration based on UNWTO Report (2015) and statistical annex of the IMF World Economic Outlook of 2012, p. 177.

As for the global projections, since 2011, UNWTO has established three possible scenarios, considering the post-crisis economic recovery, as well as the evolution of transport costs:

- Scenario 1 (pessimistic): recovery slower than expected from the 2008-2009 crisis in the short term, and slower global GDP growth in the medium term.
- Scenario 2 (conservative): transport costs increase at a faster pace than those estimated in the central projection.
- Scenario 3 (optimistic): transportation costs continue unabated, a rate similar to that recorded in the last 20 years.

Based on these options, APEC members establish a central scenario where international tourist arrivals are expected to grow at an average annual rate of 3.3% and reach 1,800 million by 2030, way to increase tourism, but in turn find areas that project a care to this resource, because a part of the problem lies in the conservation of it.

Final Considerations

Most APEC countries have taken steps in the last decade to improve environmental management and reduce ecological costs brought about by the rapid growth of tourism; yet at the regional level, joint environmental discussion and action competitiveness are in their infancy. For this reason, the environmental agenda is only at the development stage and the political will to discuss environmental issues has been left out. Since its inception, APEC has recognized the economic importance of tourism for its job-creating capacity, investment promotion, and sustainable development. In that bloc, members must cooperate to create conditions that encourage the sustainable use of resources and ecosystems. In this way, trade and environmental policies can be mutually reinforcing and the substantial competitive development sought.

The growth of the tourism sector, increased competitiveness and its possibilities encouraged the organization of the APEC Tourism Working Group, so that employment standards in the tourism sector of the member economies were agreed, development impediments were identified, and proposals were made measures to reduce and eliminate such obstacles. The role of successful experiences of management initiatives and security practices (terrorism, epidemics, natural disasters) for the sustainable development of tourism has also been included as a priority. APEC is an organization that works together with UNWTO. The year 2017 will be for them the

International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. There should be changes in policies, business practices, and consumer behavior, with the aim of achieving a competitively more sustainable tourism sector.

For non-WTO APEC countries such as New Zealand, the definition of tourism has always posed a sustainable challenge for industry and an effective search for development. Sustainability is underpinned by New Zealand tourism policy and measures taken to develop and revise national aspirations for tourism development become its priority. This represents a clear improvement in tourism planning as a watershed for its economy, thus highlighting the importance of New Zealand raising its voice within this economic bloc by showing its success in terms of sustainable tourism competitiveness. Thus, while for Mexico tourism is primarily a private sector industry, in countries such as New Zealand the public sector—with a greater education in sustainability—it is presented as the guardian of development through economic-tourism, based on a tourism development strategy.

Conclusions

The objective was to promote a positive change in tourism practice, where sustainability is becoming imminent, and in metric terms of economy, more than a billion arrivals were registered in international tourism in 2018, with the tourist contribution to the GDP of 2.6 trillion dollars in that year, generating an employment rate to 108 million people, data that support the importance of tourism in the world and the need for asset preservation.

For such data, the academic development theme of tourism sustainability has increased and has been strongly supported by the World Economic Forum, WTO, WTTC, and the Asia Pacific Tourism Association, seeking to improve the present sets of sustainability indicators in the tourism industry to help preserve the assets and ideologies that have been well taken by some countries. Therefore, this paper seeks to link the processes of APEC economies and homologate it, valuing good practices that achieve a greater competitive competitiveness both sustainable and economic.

In the same way, the different commercial approaches of tourism towards sustainability were mentioned, where conferences and treaties have been launched that seek to regulate and limit the evolution of both climate change and greenhouse gases, evidencing, as well as over time both the conferences and the treaties illuminate the actions, objectives, and behaviors that are sought for a better sustainable development for tourism. Proof of this is the WTO, which has designated this year 2017 as the year of sustainable tourism for development, highlighting the need to modify current tourism practices and the search for preservation.

Lessons

While countries such as China, Singapore, or Japan seek not to fall into the tourist massification, others like Thailand, Malaysia, or Vietnam want it and could take better advantage of its tourist potential. Advantages associated with its geographical location, the potential for connectivity, its extensive tourist inventory, and its ability to generate quality tourism products. However, participation in the world market has been lost due to its overcrowding and its lack of competitiveness in sustainable development trends towards emerging countries in these themes, which are aware of new trends in tourism, where living experiences with the local culture and learning from it is the new tourism.

Recent phenomena such as climate change, the evolution of society, new models of tourism competitiveness, and shared economy, add layers of complexity to tourism in both research and long-term practices. In the development of the thesis, a series of discussions, both historical and recent on tourism and

sustainability, were analyzed, and a current limited capacity was found to find acceptable solutions that achieve a balance between the commercial market and the new sustainability challenges where an extended vision is three-dimensional (economic, environmental, and sociocultural), in which the degradation of some of them can negatively affect the whole system. Likewise, it is identified that the formulation of indicators of sustainable tourism is in its initial stages, being the tourist load capacity and acceptable limits of change the most representative measurement instruments of global tourism at present.

APEC Region

Over time, the globalization and economic cooperation of the APEC bloc has brought with it the possibility of faster and easier access to tourist destinations, as well as allowing the increase of companies that satisfy the diversity of tastes currently demanded by tourists.

Some of the APEC economies have taken steps in the last decade to improve environmental management and reduce the ecological costs of rapid tourism growth, in spite of which, at the regional level the joint environmental discussion and action are in their infancy. Therefore, the environmental agenda is only at the stage of development, and the political will to discuss environmental issues has been left out or in failed data, an example of which is the Kyoto Protocol, which did not achieve its expectations of deceleration, since many countries including the APEC economic bloc abandoned it or did not sign their targets.

Since its inception, APEC has recognized the economic importance of tourism for its job-generating capacity, the promotion of investment, and the competitive development of its destinations. Therefore, in APEC economies must cooperate to create conditions that encourage the sustainable use of resources and ecosystems. In this way, trade and environmental policies can be mutually reinforcing and achieve substantial development and long-sought preservation.

Due to the above, the growth of the tourism sector and its possibilities encouraged the organization of the APEC Tourism Working Group, so that employment standards were agreed in that sector of the member economies, development impediments were identified and measures were proposed To reduce and eliminate those obstacles.

Today tourism is considered an end to development, when in reality it should be considered as a tool or an instrument that, along with others, can use the community to approach an economic improvement without massifying and losing the cultural identity of the site. The most common interpretation of sustainable development is from the environmental dimension. This is the most recurrent configuration in developed countries such as New Zealand and has served as a model for some developing countries that are now considered emerging. For more than a decade, within the Mexican tourism sector has continued the same dynamic of development, in which the creation of hotel rooms has become the most important; Rooms that have lost little by little visitation by the tastes of a new tourism: sustainable tourism.

Recommendations

Considering the tourist potential of Asian Pacific area and at the same time the high vulnerability of assets, we must work on measures that guarantee the conservation of economic activity; therefore it is recommended to implement the following efforts:

- Implement better government policies to promote sustainable development and overcome the obsession for the uncontrolled growth of tourist sites, thus solving the problems that put the limit to the environment and its effects of climate change.

- Integrate a plan where government authorities representing tourism focus in a balanced way on integrated planning as strongly emphasized in their current marketing campaigns.
- Propose the use of specific measures that can include constant monitoring and feedback processes, allowing managing desirable conditions and developing modifications when there is a possibility of tourist excess to the limits already established.
- Reconfigure the National Development Plan and the Tourism Sector Program in maintaining the potential, innovating the tourist offer based on the new trends of global development and, consequently, the sustainable profitability of the sector.
- Implement policies that contribute to innovation and adoption of practices more related to sustainable tourism and their carrying capacity, so that they are a priority in them: environmental care, reduction of climate change, and technological innovation for the environment.
- Prioritize the awareness of the care of existing natural, cultural, and social resources, which pragmatizes in assessing these aspects as a priority in the economic and competitive resource of tourist destinations.
- Provide TWG (Tourism Work Group) with a better design to operate in accordance with conducive approaches of the sustainable tourism sector.
- Demystify the great poles of tourism development, since their large-scale impact significantly destroys the non-renewable resource of tourism, giving an opportunity to a better territorial tourism.
- Better educate consumers to choose their travel options in a more responsible way, where examples such as “all-inclusive” cause capital flight to the local economy and only benefit large consortiums.
- Make people aware that the emission of greenhouse gases is directly related to damage to ecosystems, causing detriment to the communities that depend on tourism and the performance of the economic-tourist sectors.
- Empower local communities to participate more actively in decision-making and have a voice in choosing their future as a tourist destination.
- Focus a better commercial financial system and development bank on tourism financing that achieves the parity between development and conservation of the three dimensions.
- Rethink development paradigms and gradually abandon the ideology of cheap and mass tourism, as it destroys the economic assets on which tourism depends; you should think of the ideology of fewer tourists spending more.
- Engage in increased cooperation with non-governmental organizations as they are essential for reporting abuses in the tourism sector, including land misappropriation, human rights, community opposition and corruption.

Although the recommendations and analysis in this paper do not address all the current challenges, valuable information is provided to achieve a better tourism development for the Asian Pacific area, where there is currently a majority of sustainable incompatibility and where it is evident that some countries from there have built projects with similar patterns, such as territories that at first were considered marginal and with few alternatives for development, but with great natural and cultural attributes; sites where there was a mass tourism focused on cargo capacity and which shows the cheap tourism offer of sun and beach that has prevailed without evolution for more than 40 years, coupled with the natural and cultural destruction of the site for the benefit of a few.

For a long time, tourism researchers have questioned how many tourists are many tourists, when they should specify the questioning with qualitative variables that consider the territory, such as: How many tourists are appropriate for this tourist space? Or better yet, who are the tourists who, by their profile, are suitable for this territory? That is, change how many? By the “who”, thus represent in a broad sense, a problem of operability and its response, which inevitably transcends the areas of time and space.

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