SUSTAINABLE SAUDI BUSINESS TOURISM (SBT) INNOVATION: IMPROVING THE POSITION OF SBT COPING WITH INFORMATION SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

This study provides insights about the activities, challenges, and options SBTs face when confronted with rapidly advancing information technology.Although much of the discussion of innovation focuses on new products and technologies, all innovation is based on challenging existing assumptions and ways of thinking. The tourism sector has experienced rapid technological development. In this new tourism environment innovation and knowledge creation are important for establishing a competitive advantage. This advantage can be accomplished by integrating marketing information systems and organizational knowledge creation methodologies. Management information systems (MISs) are generally described as sets of data that are analyzed through statistical programs and models. It is a unified scheme that brings together all of the components being used (raw data, information, reports, and models) in order to meet specific management objectives.This paper argues that one option to develop new ways of thinking and innovation in business tourism is to argue that there is no such thing as sustainable tourism. If we begin with the assumption that tourism cannot be sustainable in its own right but may contribute to the sustainable development of some regions under some circumstances, then a number of new approaches to tourism development emerge. In particular, it is argued that stronger links may emerge between tourism and other economic activities and development options. These potential synergies are described and illustrated with a range of examples. In addition, the paper sets out a series of additional criteria that could be used to evaluate different potential tourism developments and makes suggestions about the development of sustainability performance indicators. Finally, the paper highlights the importance of better knowledge management systems to support innovation in tourism.

Keywords: *Business tourism, Saudi Business tourism (SBT), Sustainable development, Sustainable tourism, Potential tourism innovation, regional development, Management information system (MIS).*

INTRODUCTION

Innovation can come in many forms but all of these share three common elements — creativity, a problem-solving approach and a new way of thinking. This paper proposes that current approaches to tourism and sustainable regional development have a number of problems and new solutions to these problems could come from using creative thinking methods. It is argued that challenging basic assumptions can lead to very simple but powerful new ideas. Specifically, this paper will seek to demonstrate that by taking the position that there is no such

thing as sustainable tourism, a number of new ways of thinking about the role of tourism in sustainable regional development can be described. Typically discussions of tourism development concentrate on the resources, skills and infrastructure that a community offers to tourism developers. This paper will take the inverse of this approach and will explore a number of ways in which regional communities can use tourism developers and tourists to achieve the destination region's broader goals and aspirations.

INNOVATION AND CREATIVITY — KEY POINTS

Hjalager (1997) argues that there is a tendency to associate innovation only with invention or the creation of new products and this limits our understanding of the potential for innovation in a sector. Hjalager (1997) goes on to argue that this product innovation is only one of several types of innovation. Other types include classic process innovations (where the production process is altered), information handling innovations (where new forms of knowledge management are adopted), management innovations (where the way in which a business is managed is changed) and institutional innovations (where the structure of the organization is altered) (Hjalager, 1997). Perdomo-Ortiz *et al.* (2006) provide a similar argument in their review of definitions of innovation. They concluded that innovation is best defined as a 'dynamic capability' (p. 1173) based on patterns of thinking and action that allows an organization to regularly modify the way it operates to improve its effectiveness. The importance of patterns of thinking is stressed in this definition and these authors note that all innovation is based on new ways of thinking often associated with creative thinking techniques. Edward De Bono (1998) is one of the leading proponents of creative thinking techniques and offers a number of options to stimulate new ideas for innovation. Although De Bono (1998) offers a wide range of thinking techniques they are all connected by two common themes — challenging existing assumptions and looking at an existing situation from a different perspective. Put simply, all innovation is ultimately based on challenging existing assumptions and looking at things from an alternative viewpoint.

THE PROBLEMS FOR TOURISM AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Tourism is an option chosen by many governments as a key tool for regional development (Forstner, 2004). Despite a relatively long history of use as a regional development tool and substantial investments of resources, there is considerable debate about the value of tourism for communities in rural and peripheral areas. Numerous evaluations have highlighted many negative consequences from tourism development including

- ➢ — Modest or no economic returns from tourism for locals (Kiss, 2004)
- ➢ — negative impacts on local culture and social structure (Forstner, 2004)
- ➢ — restriction of access to land for traditional activities (Vail and Hultkrantz, 2000)
- ➢ — disruption of traditional subsistence and other activities (Abakerli, 2001) and
- ➢ — damage to natural and cultural heritage (Briassoulis, 2002).

In response to these critical assessments of tourism development in rural and peripheral regions many researchers and governments have argued for the use of alternative forms of tourism such as ecotourism and community-based tourism. Such options are claimed to have better outcomes because they are smaller in scale, which is typically associated with more limited environmental and social impacts and greater opportunities for local businesses to get involved (Kirsten and Rogerson, 2002). Community-based approaches to tourism are particularly popular as they explicitly describe processes for involving local stakeholders in decisions about the types and locations of proposed tourism developments (Hall, 2005).

These community-based approaches to tourism are not, however, universally hailed as positive options for the development of peripheral and rural regions. Okech (2006), for example, notes that the effective involvement of local residents and stakeholders in decision making requires them to have sufficient understanding of tourism and their rights to be able to contribute meaningfully to the discussions of tourism. Johnson and Wilson (2000) also note that the proponents of community involvement in decision making often make naive assumptions

about the existing political structures in a destination community, and that in many cultures and places it cannot be assumed that all stakeholders will be able to speak openly about their attitudes towards a proposed development. In practice, this means that development decisions are often dominated by external agents such as consultants and NGO staff.

Despite the best of intentions, these external agents tend to limit community participation to choosing between tourism options developed by people outside the community. Moscardo (2006) provides an analysis of the social representations of tourism planning held by many professionals and academics in which locals are seen as lacking the knowledge and skills to participate in tourism and are therefore excluded from many marketing decisions. In essence, tourism development becomes almost completely market driven which Collins (1999) notes limits the capacity for tourism to contribute to sustainable development.

CHALLENGING BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

The concept of sustainable tourism development has received considerable academic and government attention and support as evident in the number of policies for sustainable tourism and books, papers and journals. Within this literature, there is considerable debate about what constitutes sustainable tourism and how it can be achieved and several authors have questioned the value of the concept itself. Coccossis noted as early as 1996 that discussions of sustainable tourism are often restricted to an analysis of how to ensure the continuity of tourism by minimizing negative impacts. In other words, it could be suggested that the concept of sustainable tourism is much more about the continuity of tourism than it is about the contribution of tourism to sustainable outcomes (Coccossis, 1996; Stabler, 1997). According to Wall (1997), the real question to be asked about tourism and sustainability is 'whether and in what form might tourism contribute to sustainable development?' (p. 34). Further it could be argued that few tourism authors have explicitly contemplated the concept that tourism may not be an option for sustainable development in some destinations. A further barrier identified in consideration of the role of tourism in sustainable development is that it is often considered in isolation from other sectors and activities (Butler, 1999). Other issues

identified by Butler (1999) are the power given to external parties over tourism development, a limited understanding of tourism process and impacts, and a tendency to focus on a limited range of tourism forms.

This tendency to assume that tourism can be considered sustainable in its own right and the subsequent confusion between sustainable tourism and tourism as part of sustainable development has three important consequences for communities where tourism is proposed as a tool for regional development. The first of these is that already noted by Butler (1999)—considering tourism in isolation to other activities. While some tourism planning textbooks refer to the need to consider the interactions between tourism and other activities, specific mechanisms for analyzing these interactions are missing from the tourism literature (Collins, 1999).

The second important consequence of the sustainable tourism sustainable development confusion is the widespread and uncritical use of tourism planning models that look at communities and their regions only as resources for tourism (Hall, 2000). The various tourism planning textbooks provide detailed discussions of the methods for assessing the available resources for tourism but there has been virtually no discussion of assessing tourism as a resource for regional communities (see Inskeep (1994), for an example endorsed by the World Tourism Organization).

The third and final consequence of the focus on sustainable tourism rather than tourism for sustainable development is the disempowerment of local residents and other local stakeholders in the tourism development and management process. A focus on tourism models and planning approaches that see local residents and their regions as resources for tourism contributes to a view of tourism as an activity that needs to be directed by those with specialist knowledge of sustainable tourism practices and tourism marketing.

CONSEQUENCES OF A NEW WAY OF THINKING

According to Devuyst and Hens (2000: 100)'the road towards sustainable development is inevitably a search for new ways of thinking and

acting'. Such a sentiment suggests that innovation in considerations of tourism and sustainability will require changes in ways of thinking. An alternative way to view the role of tourism in sustainable development is to challenge the assumption that it can be sustainable in its own right and more explicitly label it as a potential resource for communities seeking sustainable development options. Re-conceptualizing tourism as just one among many possible development options is likely to result in a more direct comparison of tourism to other development options. Additionally, the treatment of tourism as a development tool just like any other is also likely to encourage the application of concepts and processes from these other activities to tourism, particularly ideas about building community capacity. Literature in agriculture (Bokor, 2001) and health (Slater *et al.*, 2005), for example, provide models for the development of community capacity that could be adapted for tourism.

A consideration of tourism as a resource for communities rather than *vice versa* might also encourage a discussion of wider and more innovative types of tourism development than are typically considered. Discussions of tourism options for rural and peripheral regions tend to focus on forms of tourism that have been established in other contexts. Richards and Wilson (2006) refer to this as 'serial reproduction' (p. 1210). This discussion raises the question of what sorts of resources tourism might be able to contribute to the sustainable development of a rural or peripheral region. Holmefjord (2000) suggests that there are three types of synergies between tourism and other activities that can be exploited by rural communities — product synergies, market synergies and marketing synergies.

Product synergies

Product synergies refer to the shared use of facilities and resources by tourism and other activities. A common benefit often claimed for tourism is that it relies upon and contributes to infrastructure that can then be used for other activities. Transport and communication systems are typically considered as such resources (Hall and Mitchell, 2000). If, however, tourism becomes an end in itself, rural communities may find themselves having to fund the infrastructure that was meant to be provided by the tourism development. This is especially the case when the planning is based on developing the infrastructure for tourism and then finding other uses for it.

The alternative is to determine the infrastructure already available and/or required by non tourism activities and then find the type of tourism that can utilize these resources. Holmefjord (2000) offers the example of tourism in two regions of Norway where local food producers are able to use their existing buildings and facilities for tourism in low production times. Fisherman, for example, can take tourists on sightseeing cruises or charter fishing trips when commercial fish stocks are not available.

Market synergies

The market synergies category recognizes that tourists can be additional customers for other products and services. Thus, tourists can be a customer base for various specialist or niche agricultural, craft and other products (Bessiere, 1998; Cawley *et al.*, 1999: Hall and Mitchell, 2000). Kangaroo Island, off the South Australian coast, offers an example of this approach. The specific characteristics of this region make traditional agriculture difficult to sustain but do provide good conditions for organic and specialized food products. The challenge for such a small community has been producing these products in sufficient quantities to both make transport to the mainland viable and to attract the attention of mainland distributors. One solution has been the development of food and wine tourism with the specific goal of generating a customer base for these products that allows the producers to sell directly to the consumer (see Good Food Kangaroo Island (2006) for further details). But this solution required a change in thinking about the type of tourists attracted to the island. Traditionally, tourism to this area has been based on wildlife viewing and a change in tour products, promotion and event planning was necessary to create the conditions under which the Good Food movement could be successful (TOMM, 2006). The critical element again was to determine the needs of the non tourism activity and then seek to attract the appropriate type of tourism to support that.

Tourists can be seen as more than just customers, they can also be seen as human resources for regional development. Volunteer tourism is a form of tourism that has been given little

attention in the literature on rural tourism development. Volunteer tourism refers to people paying to participate in various nature-based and community development projects on their holidays (Wearing, 2001). While many of the existing volunteer tourism opportunities focus on contributions to heritage research and restoration, the potential use of volunteer tourists in other areas such as educational development and assistance with traditional economic activities has yet to be fully explored. Willing Workers on Organic Farms (WWOOF, 2006) is an example of the use of tourist volunteers to support local organic agriculture. The initial establishment of organic agriculture can be challenging as it is often associated with limited income during the transition period and lower levels of productivity. The ability to access low-cost labour can be an important benefit for regions where this form of agriculture is seen as an option for development. WWOOF is an organization that matches tourist volunteers to host organic farms. The volunteers exchange their labour for free accommodation and meals and the opportunity to access a destination.

Marketing synergies

Marketing synergies are ways of using tourism to create a broader awareness of other aspects of the region (Holmefjord, 2000). These marketing synergies can involve the joint use of marketing distribution systems, the use of tourists themselves as a promotion tool for regional products and the joint development of regional brands. Hall and Mitchell (2000) provide evidence of the use of tourism distribution and promotional opportunities to establish awareness of products such as fruit and wine. Good Food Kangaroo Island provides a limited example of this type of activity. Tour operators and accommodation establishments on the island are encouraged to use local produce as part of their services and to advertise this use of local produce in their promotional activities. In addition, local produce suppliers are listed on tourism websites and in tourism brochures. Thus, local food producers are taking advantage of existing tourism distribution systems. There is, however, potential to expand on this, for example with online opportunities to buy produce connected to tourism websites and the development of tourist databases that could be exploited by the local food producers.

Holloway *et al.* (2006) describe such a system in an Italian example. A scheme has been developed in the Abruzzi region of Italy to support traditional farming practices and specialist food production. Here customers from outside the region can 'adopt' a milking sheep in return for food products. The adoption funds support the continued traditional agricultural practices. The original aim was not to support tourism, but tourism accommodation and a restaurant have been developed to support the scheme. The tourism development here is associated with growing interest from the 'adopters' who act as promoters for the scheme.

The development of regional brands has not been given much attention in the rural tourism development literature despite the growing emphasis of tourism promotion organizations on the concept of regional or destination branding (Caldwell and Freire, 2004). Once again most of the discussion within the tourism literature is about developing a destination brand that is attractive to the tourist markets chosen by external agents rather than about developing a brand that supports other activities conducted in the destination.

SOME IDEAS FOR NEW WAYS OF ASSESSING TOURISM DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

The key innovation that has been suggested in this paper is to re-conceptualize tourism as a tool to support the development of activities such as traditional or specialist agriculture, craft, education, health or other socio-economic activities, rather than solely as a development option separate from other activities in the destination region. In addition to new ways to look at types of tourism development, such a change in thinking about tourism can contribute to two important changes in the planning and management of tourism in regional destinations — the use of a different set of assessment criteria for evaluating tourism development proposals, and the development, and more extensive use, of sustainability monitoring systems.

Many tourism planning texts provide substantial detail on the methods and contents of audits of the resources available for traditional forms of tourism (Gunn, 2002; World Tourism Organization, 1998). These approaches focus almost entirely on what the destination region

has to offer for tourism developers. The change in thinking about tourism and its potential role in sustainable development suggested in this paper would change the focus of assessments of tourism development proposals to include audits of the value of the proposed tourist markets and the associated tourism distribution systems that would result from the proposed tourism development, for existing or desired non tourism products and services. So the following sorts of questions could be posed with regard to a proposed tourism development.

- ➢ — Are the tourists likely to be attracted to this tourism development also likely to purchase other products?
- ➢ — Are the tourists likely to be attracted to this tourism development likely to promote other products or services to others in their work and home environments?
- ➢ — Does this form of tourism provide support for the development of infrastructure for non-tourism economic development activities?
- ➢ — Will this form of tourism create sufficient demand for non-tourism products and services to support the development of networks and clusters to provide these non tourism products?
- ➢ — Will this form of tourism create pressures that will limit the expansion of other activities in the region?
- ➢ — Does the destination brand proposed for this form of tourism match or enhance the brands for other products and services?

The second key change in tourism planning and management that would result from a focus on the potential role tourism can play in a broader sustainable development framework for a destination region is that of supporting the need for comprehensive sustainability monitoring systems. Despite a widespread recognition that a core element of sustainable development is the monitoring of different areas or dimensions of sustainability (Devuyst and Hens, 2000), there has been little progress in the development and use of sustainability monitoring systems for tourism development (Choi and Sirakaya, 2006; Ko, 2005; McCool et al., 2001; Twining-Ward and Butler, 2002).

Ko (2005) reviewed 12 studies where a sustainability assessment for tourism had been completed and concluded that the overall assessment was often based on the judgment of the author using a limited range of indicators with little discussion of how or why those indicators were chosen or how the indicators would be measured in a completed system. It can be further argued that few, if any, of the systems described in the tourism literature are based on the perspectives of the residents and/or other key stakeholders in the destination regions. Choi and Sirakaya (2006), for example, used tourism academics to determine a list of sustainability indicators to assess tourism development. McCool et al. (2001) looked at the perspectives of local tourism industry members on sustainability and tourism and found significant discrepancies between what the tourism industry respondents saw as the goals of sustainable tourism and the measures they selected as indicators. The tourism industry respondents in this study recognized the potential for tourism to contribute to a broad range of community development factors but selected mostly indicators of the economic success of tourism business.

Northcote and MacBeth (2006) also argue that many attempts to assess tourism sustainability concentrate on measuring environmental and cultural heritage conservation to the exclusion of considering how and if, tourism can contribute to the enhancement of resident quality of life. Northcote and Macbeth (2006) go on to outline an alternative approach to assessing tourism based on expanding the concept of yield to include a range of dimensions other than finance. This application of a yield-based approach to tourism sustainability assessment uses a number of indicators that have been established in the broader sustainability assessment literature. Surprisingly, very few tourism academics have used the broad sustainable development assessment literature to guide their approaches to assessing tourism developments (Ko, 2005). Such broader approaches do, however, provide a number of indicators that would allow tourism to be judged and compared to other development options in terms of its contribution to the improvement of a range of dimensions. Such systems include the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI, 2002), and the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development Indicators of Sustainable Development (2005). In addition there exists a growing body of literature on the measurement of quality of life (Massam, 2002; McMahon, 2002), social capital

(Wilson, 2006) and social aspects of community development (Copus and Crabtree, 1996; Moles et al., 2007; Parkins et al., 2001) that could be used to develop sustainability monitoring programmes for destination regions.

Business Development Analysts (BDAs)

Business development involves evaluating a business and then recognizing its full potential, using such tools as marketing, sales, information management and customer service. The person who carries out this task is called a business development analyst. A business development analyst (BDA) focuses on implementation of the strategic business plan through equity financing, acquisition of technologies, products, and companies, plus the establishment of strategic partnerships where appropriate through a set of efforts for identifying, researching, analyzing and bringing to market new businesses and new products

Each of these elements needs to be addressed by using a co-ordinate process irrespective of the size of the organization. It is rare that any of these four fundamental elements can be changed without affecting the others. Each element is interdependent on the other. Business development analysis involves planning and managing these elements to ensure a complete approach to business growth, and achievement of the business goals.

Business development involves nurturing a business and its elements through change. Business development expertise is required:

To grow an idea into a viable business venture.

> When an existing business is to change or expand its mode of operation.

For Business Development to be successful, four fundamental elements need to be considered and addressed.

Generate a strategy based on the owner's required business performance and goals.

✓ Review, analyze and plan markets, and ensure the managed implementation of the plan.
✓ Review, analyze and plan operations, and ensure the managed implementation of the plan.

✓ Review, analyze and plan finances, and ensure the managed implementation of the plan.

A business development analyst supports the design and implementation of project development facility programs and projects by providing accurate and timely research and analysis in three key areas: identification and evaluation of market opportunities, project design and structuring, and project monitoring and implementation.

Business development analysts (BDAs) are people with technical knowledge, business knowledge, and analytical and communication skills. They frame business problems in technological terms during project definition, and help manage the business implications of technology solutions during implementation.
A business development analyst administers the business development activities through strategic planning, negotiation and business planning. He researches, identifies and manages new alliances. He cultivates strategies for establishing partnerships and business relationships. He participates in deal negotiations, contract development, due diligence and other business/alliance expansion projects. He provides recommendations on new product or service features to be developed to meet the current and future customer needs.

A business development analyst generates leads and provides analytical support to the business development team. They identify prospective clients and distribute their contact information to business development officers.
Process for Business development Analysis

Nature of product or service

✓ Identifying market and its customers
✓ Product distribution
✓ Check competition
✓ Expenses of startup
✓ Projecting sales and expenses
✓ Legal types of businesses
✓ Advertising

Goal of business development analysts

Reduce waste

✓ Create solutions
✓ Complete projects on time

7

- ✓ Improve project efficiency
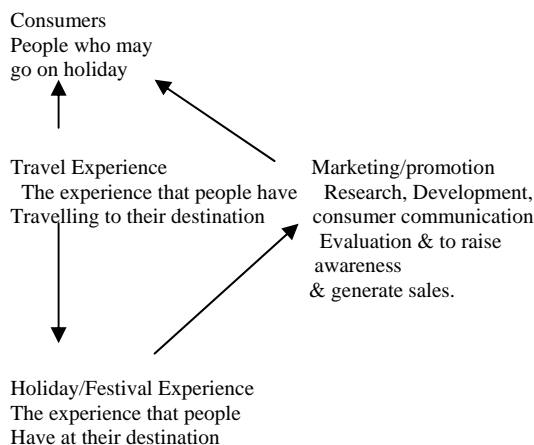- ✓ Document the right requirements

One way to assess these goals is to measure the ROI or return on investment for all the projects. For all of these software development projects, keeping score is also important and business leaders are constantly asking for the return or ROI on a proposed project or at the conclusion of an active project. However, asking for the ROI without really understanding the underpinnings of where value is created or destroyed is putting the cart before the horse.

An efficient business development analyst assists in defining the projects better, more clearly establishing vendor responsibilities, and setting better expectations with the affected business units regarding the impact of the changed software systems being implemented.

With the market imposing increasingly faster implementation times, more efficient and global solutions, along with a more controlled return on investment, business development analysis has become an essential step for the satisfactory completion of large-scale projects. Nowadays, most large-scale projects are managed by a team of project managers, in association with business development analysts. One group monitors project management, while the other focuses on the management of business needs.

The tourism system

Before developing a tourism product it is useful to understand how the tourism system operates. The following diagram shows the basic components involved:

Consumers
People who may
go on holiday

Travel Experience
  The experience that people have
Travelling to their destination

Marketing/promotion
  Research, Development,
consumer communication
  Evaluation & to raise
  awareness
  & generate sales.

Holiday/Festival Experience
The experience that people
Have at their destination

CONCLUSIONS

It has already been noted that adherence to the idea of 'sustainable business tourism' tends to be associated with a focus on ensuring the continuity of tourism (Coccossis, 1996; Stabler, 1997) that limits consideration of the possibility that tourism may not be a sustainable option in some places (Wall, 1997). This tendency to assume that there will always be some form of tourism that can be sustainable means that there has been almost no discussion in the academic or government policy literature on provisions or procedures for dismantling tourism or restoration of tourism areas. Other development sectors, such as mining (Hebestreit et al., 2005) and agriculture (Banerjee et al., 2006), are often required to have plans for site rehabilitation and restoration as part of their development plans and increasingly restoration and rehabilitation of buildings and precincts is seen as key component of sustainable development (Franz et al., 2006).Specially in the holy places for pilgrims. Such considerations are a major gap in the discussion of principles of sustainable tourism.

Finally, it is important to return to a consideration of innovation more generally. Perdomo-Ortiz et al. (2006) presented evidence that innovation was more likely to occur in organizations that pursued the principles of total quality management. In particular, they noted the importance of knowledge management for successful innovation. A major barrier to creating innovative approaches to regional tourism is a lack of knowledge. A lack of understanding and experience of tourism and tourists has been identified as a major barrier to effective community participation in, and control over, tourism development (Reid et al., 2004). Residents of many rural and peripheral regions have limited experience of tourism themselves and lack an understanding of the full range of potential impacts and changes associated with tourism (Pearce et al., 1996). This lack of understanding can result in false expectations about the benefits of tourism, a lack of preparedness for the changes associated with tourism and an inability to benefit from tourism development opportunities (Hall, 2005). The dual challenge for tourism researchers is to find ways to effectively transfer existing knowledge about tourism and tourists directly to regional communities and to further develop an understanding of tourism as a social and economic phenomenon. In the kingdom most recently research is going on development of sustainable economic development programmes

thru economic cities like King Abdullah's rising Economic city ("To become the single greatest enabler of social and economical growth for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia") & in other regions. The sustainability of the city is based on a concrete plan of actions with the required proof points to aid and maintain credibility. Academically focus on special Business & tourism departments & colleges have been opened.

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