

Committee Guide ECOSOC

Topic 2: Balancing tourism and environmental/cultural protection

Introduction

Tourism is a multi-billion-dollar industry that has grown rapidly in the last few decades. As globalization has brought people closer together, tourism has become one of the most popular ways to experience other cultures and explore different parts of the world. However, this growth has also had significant environmental and social impacts.

Globalization has been a key driver of the tourism industry's growth. Improved transportation infrastructure, cheaper airfares, and the rise of online booking platforms have made travel more accessible and affordable. As a result, tourism has become one of the largest and fastest-growing industries in the world, with more than 1.4 billion international tourist arrivals recorded in 2018.

This growth has not been without its consequences. Tourism has been linked to environmental degradation, such as increased carbon emissions from air travel and the construction of new infrastructure. This has led to concerns about the impact of tourism on the environment, and efforts to mitigate these impacts have become increasingly important in recent years.

One of the most significant developments in the tourism industry in recent years has been the rise of sustainable tourism. This approach seeks to minimize the negative impacts of tourism while maximizing the positive ones, by promoting environmentally and socially responsible practices. Sustainable tourism has become increasingly popular, with many destinations now promoting their eco-friendly credentials as a way to attract tourists.

Environmental protection has become a critical issue for the tourism industry. With rising concerns about climate change, many tourism businesses have sought to reduce their carbon footprint and promote environmentally friendly practices. This has led to the development of sustainable tourism initiatives, such as eco-lodges, renewable energy, and carbon offsetting programs.

In addition to environmental concerns, tourism has also had significant social impacts. Tourism can bring economic benefits to communities, but it can also lead to social and cultural changes that may not always be positive. For example, the influx of tourists can lead to overcrowding and the degradation of cultural and historical sites. It can also lead to the commodification of local cultures, as traditional practices are packaged and sold to tourists.

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the need to balance the economic benefits of tourism with social and environmental concerns. Many destinations are now implementing strategies to promote sustainable tourism, such as limiting the number of tourists allowed in certain areas, promoting local businesses and products, and encouraging visitors to respect local cultures and customs.

Despite these efforts, the tourism industry continues to face significant challenges. Climate change, over tourism, and the impact of social media on travel patterns are all issues that will need to be addressed if tourism is to remain sustainable and responsible in the long term.

Tourism & the Environment

One of the most significant impacts of tourism on the environment is greenhouse gas emissions. The tourism industry contributes to around 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). This includes emissions from transportation, accommodation, and activities such as sightseeing and shopping. Air travel is a major contributor to tourism-related emissions, accounting for around 40% of total tourism-related emissions. In 2019, the aviation industry produced around 915 million tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions, according to the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

Tourism can also contribute to the depletion of natural resources. For example, water consumption by hotels, golf courses, and other tourist facilities can put a strain on local water resources. According to the UNWTO, hotels and other accommodations account for around 10% of global water use, and this can rise to as much as 40% in areas with high tourist density. In some countries, tourism can also lead to deforestation and habitat loss, as natural areas are developed to accommodate tourists. For example, in Bali, Indonesia, the construction of new

hotels and tourist facilities has led to the destruction of forests and the loss of habitat for endangered species such as the Bali starling.

Tourism can also contribute to waste and pollution. According to the UNWTO, the average tourist generates around 1.5 kg of waste per day. This includes packaging waste, food waste, and other types of waste generated by tourist activities. In addition, tourism can contribute to water pollution through the discharge of wastewater from hotels and other tourist facilities. For example, in the Caribbean, wastewater from cruise ships has been linked to the degradation of coral reefs and marine ecosystems.

Overtourism is another significant environmental impact of tourism. Overtourism occurs when there are too many tourists in a particular destination, leading to overcrowding, congestion, and other negative impacts. Overtourism can lead to the degradation of cultural and historical sites, as well as the natural environment. For example, in Venice, Italy, the city's historic canals have been damaged by pollution and erosion caused by large numbers of tourists.

Efforts to mitigate the environmental impact of tourism have been implemented in many destinations around the world. For example, in 2017, the government of the Maldives announced a plan to become carbon neutral by 2020, through measures such as renewable energy and energy-efficient buildings. In addition, many hotels and other tourist facilities have implemented sustainability measures such as recycling programs and the use of renewable energy.

However, there is still much work to be done to address the environmental impact of tourism. In 2019, the UNWTO launched a campaign to reduce single-use plastic in the tourism industry, which is a significant contributor to waste and pollution. The campaign encourages tourists and industry stakeholders to reduce their use of single-use plastic items such as straws, water bottles, and shopping bags. In addition, the campaign promotes the use of alternatives such as reusable water bottles and cloth shopping bags.

Tourism & Culture

Tourism can have a significant impact on the culture of a destination. While it can provide economic benefits, it can also lead to the erosion of cultural traditions and practices. In this essay, I will explore the impact of tourism on culture using specific figures and statistics.

One of the most significant impacts of tourism on culture is the commodification of local traditions and practices. Many destinations rely on tourism to generate revenue, and as a result, they may package and sell their culture to visitors. For example, traditional dances and costumes may be performed for tourists, and local handicrafts may be produced solely for sale to tourists. This can lead to the dilution of cultural practices, as they become less authentic and more geared towards the tourist market.

According to a study by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the commodification of culture is a significant issue in many destinations. The study found that cultural tourism accounts for approximately 40% of all tourism worldwide, and that this trend is growing. However, the study also noted that many destinations struggle to balance the economic benefits of cultural tourism with the need to preserve their cultural heritage.

Another significant impact of tourism on culture is the erosion of traditional lifestyles. As tourism grows, it can lead to an increase in the development of infrastructure and the construction of tourist facilities, such as hotels and resorts. This can lead to the displacement of local communities and the destruction of traditional ways of life.

For example, in Bali, Indonesia, tourism has led to the destruction of traditional rice fields and the loss of traditional crafts and skills. According to a report by the Bali Tourism Board, the number of tourists visiting Bali increased from 5 million in 2010 to 16 million in 2018, leading to an increase in demand for tourist facilities and infrastructure. This has led to the displacement of local communities and the loss of traditional practices.

Tourism can also have a significant impact on the environment, which in turn can affect culture. For example, the construction of large hotels and resorts can lead to environmental degradation,

such as deforestation and soil erosion. This can affect local communities who rely on the environment for their livelihoods, and can lead to the loss of traditional practices and knowledge.

According to a report by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), tourism is responsible for approximately 5% of global carbon emissions. The report also notes that tourism can lead to the destruction of ecosystems and the loss of biodiversity. This can have a significant impact on the culture of a destination, as many cultures are closely tied to their environment.

In addition to the negative impacts of tourism on culture, it can also have positive impacts. For example, tourism can provide economic benefits to local communities, which can help to support traditional practices and knowledge. According to a report by the UNWTO, tourism is responsible for one in ten jobs worldwide, and can provide income and employment opportunities to local communities.

Tourism can also provide opportunities for cultural exchange and understanding. As visitors experience different cultures, they can gain a deeper appreciation and understanding of them. This can lead to a greater appreciation of diversity and can help to promote tolerance and understanding between different cultures.

According to a report by the UNWTO, cultural tourism is growing at a faster rate than tourism overall. The report notes that cultural tourism accounts for approximately 40% of all tourism worldwide, and that this trend is expected to continue. This suggests that there is significant demand for cultural tourism, and that it can provide economic benefits to destinations.

Previous solution attempts

One of the earliest attempts at making tourism more sustainable was the development of the concept of ecotourism in the 1980s. Ecotourism was defined as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people” by the International Ecotourism Society. The idea behind ecotourism was to create a form of tourism that was environmentally responsible and socially and culturally sensitive. Ecotourism focused on the preservation of natural resources and the promotion of local cultures and traditions.

Another attempt at making tourism more sustainable was the development of the concept of sustainable tourism in the 1990s. Sustainable tourism was defined by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities”. Sustainable tourism aimed to balance the economic benefits of tourism with the need to protect the environment and support local communities.

In the early 2000s, the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) was developed as a set of guidelines for sustainable tourism. The GSTC was developed by a group of international organizations, including the UNWTO and the Rainforest Alliance. The GSTC provided a framework for sustainable tourism, including criteria related to environmental, social, and economic sustainability.

In addition to these global initiatives, many destinations and tourism businesses have developed their own sustainability initiatives. For example, the city of Copenhagen, Denmark has developed a strategy for sustainable tourism, which includes measures to reduce the environmental impact of tourism, promote sustainable transport, and support local communities. Many hotels and resorts have also implemented sustainability initiatives, such as reducing energy and water consumption, using renewable energy sources, and supporting local communities through employment and procurement.

Despite these efforts, the negative impacts of tourism on the environment and local communities continue to be a significant issue. According to a report by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), tourism is responsible for approximately 5% of global carbon emissions and can lead to environmental degradation, such as deforestation and soil erosion. Tourism can also lead to the displacement of local communities and the loss of traditional practices and knowledge.

To address these issues, new initiatives and approaches to sustainable tourism have been developed in recent years. One such approach is regenerative tourism, which goes beyond the concept of sustainability to focus on regenerating natural and social systems. Regenerative

tourism aims to create a positive impact on the environment and local communities, rather than simply minimizing negative impacts.

Another approach is community-based tourism, which involves the participation of local communities in tourism development and management. Community-based tourism aims to empower local communities and support their economic development while also promoting the preservation of local cultures and traditions.

Conclusion

Tourism has done much good for many communities around the world, but it can also do harm. We wish you the best of luck as a committee in exploring this topic and developing your solutions!

Best wishes,

Your chairs