

ITM BA 2. Sem. 8035: Special Tourism Management

- Tourism Politics, Globalization, Sustainable and Responsible Tourism -

Tu 11.45 - 13.15 h, Audimax II

Sustainable Tourism since Brundlandt Commission 1987

"The 20th century has seen remarkable advances in the development of science and technology and in social productivity. The abundant material wealth created by mankind is unprecedented and it has resulted in a rapid development of civilization.

However, aggravations caused by **population expansion, excessive consumption of resources** and global environmental problems such as **pollution, reduced biodiversity** and **increased gap between north and south**, have seriously hampered the development of economies and improvements in people's quality of life, and are even **threatening human existence** itself.

Given the pressures of these harsh realities, mankind has no choice but to re-examine its social and economic behavior and its path of development. Traditional ideas of considering economic growth solely in quantitative terms and the traditional development mode of **"polluting first and treating later"** are no longer appropriate when considering present and future requirements for development.

It is now necessary to find a path for development, wherein considerations of population, economy, society, natural resources, and the environment are coordinated as a whole, so that a path for non-threatening **sustainable development** can be found **which will meet current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.**" (White Paper on China's *Agenda 21*)

Sustainability - Term and Meaning

Kofi Annan, the then UN General Secretary remarked in 2002: "While sustainable development may be the new conventional wisdom, many people have still not grasped its meaning." (Annan 2002)



Definitions

In 1983 the United Nations started the World Commission for Environment and Development (WCED), which was given the task to deliver a study on the long-term perspectives of World development up to the year 2000 and beyond.

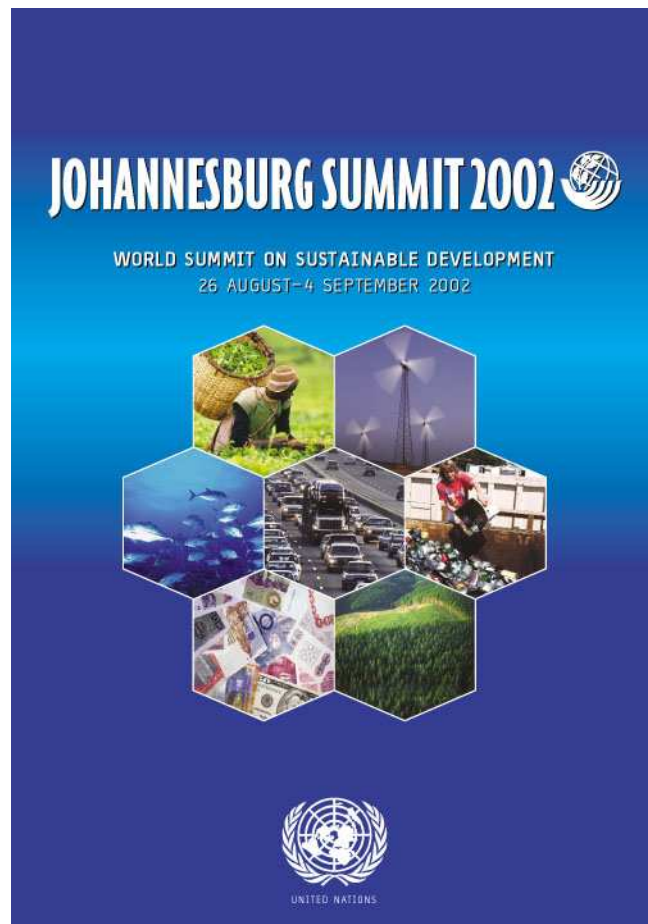
Under the leadership of the then Prime Minister of Norway, Mrs. Gro Harlem Brundlandt, the commission delivered in 1987 the paper "**Our Common Future**", better known as the "Brundlandt Report".

This report triggered the development which led to:

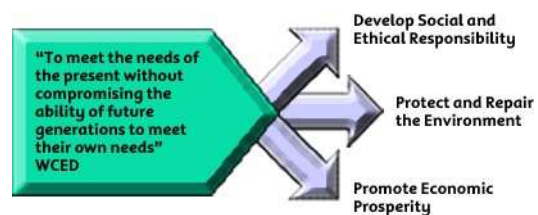
the 1992 United Nations conference on Environment and Development in **Rio de Janeiro**



and the United Nations World summit on Sustainable Development 2002 in **Johannesburg**



It also started the career of the term "Sustainability", whereby Sustainable Development was defined as **"Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."** (WCED 1987)



Ambiguities

With popularity and over-usage however, the term developed many ambiguities, especially in international institutions as it had been "appropriated to support the full spectrum of development agendas". (Doorne 2001)

This ambiguities can be divided into:

- different languages and their different cultural approaches to the idea of Sustainability
- Scope of usage of Sustainability and
- the Socio-political contest of the discourse on Sustainability in tourism

Different languages and their different cultural approaches to the idea of Sustainability

Different languages transport different ideas about "Sustainability":

For the **English** language the Merriam-Webster Dictionary tells us:

sus·tain·abil·i·ty [*s&s-'stA-n&-'bi-l&-tE*] *noun*
1: capability of being sustained; **2a:** of, relating to, or being a method of harvesting or using a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged
 < *sustainable* techniques> < *sustainable* agriculture> **b:** of or relating to a lifestyle involving the use of sustainable methods < *sustainable* society>
 circa 1727 *Merriam-Webster*

To sustain is an active process of keeping something alive, Sustainability here is a situation which is favorable for the action of sustaining, with no explicit reference to time.

An organisation in Colorado/USA therefore shortened the imperatives of Sustainable Development to the catchphrase "**People, Planet, Profit**". (3P Colorado)

This misses however the fourth dimension connected to Sustainable Development:
Institutions

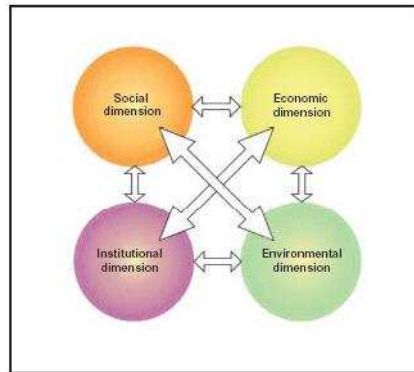


Figure 1: The complex interactions among the fundamental dimensions of sustainable development.

In **German** the idea is very different and – unsurprisingly – based on the beloved German concept of a **Perfect machine**:



The German term used for Sustainability - "Nachhaltigkeit" is based on the idea of a carefully crafted perfect system, which once in place, does not need any outside action anymore. "Nachhaltigkeit" actually originates from forestry and was coined in 1713 by the mining official **Hans Carl von Carlowitz** in the silver-mine town of Freiberg (Saxony). Because of lack of wood needed for the mines he developed the concept that only so many trees should be cut down as would regrow to keep the supply stable.

In **French** the temporal dimension is stressed: Long-time existence.

"Durabilité" therefore concentrates on the fact that something can exist for a long time and is not easy to destroy. Plastic for instance is very durable.

Other European languages, like **Polish**, **Finnish** and many others have no noun for Sustainability at all, they use something similar to "long-time development", but normally just take the English term for granted.

Chinese has a complex meaning on offer: Existence and Movement

"Ke Chi Xu" 可持续 combines "possibility", "existence" and "not stopping over a long period of time" to a multi-dimensional term.

Each term is based on the relevant worldview and outlook of different countries, most of the time without realising that in other languages the connotations might be quite different, leaving to endless misunderstandings in multicultural projects.

Scope of usage of Sustainability

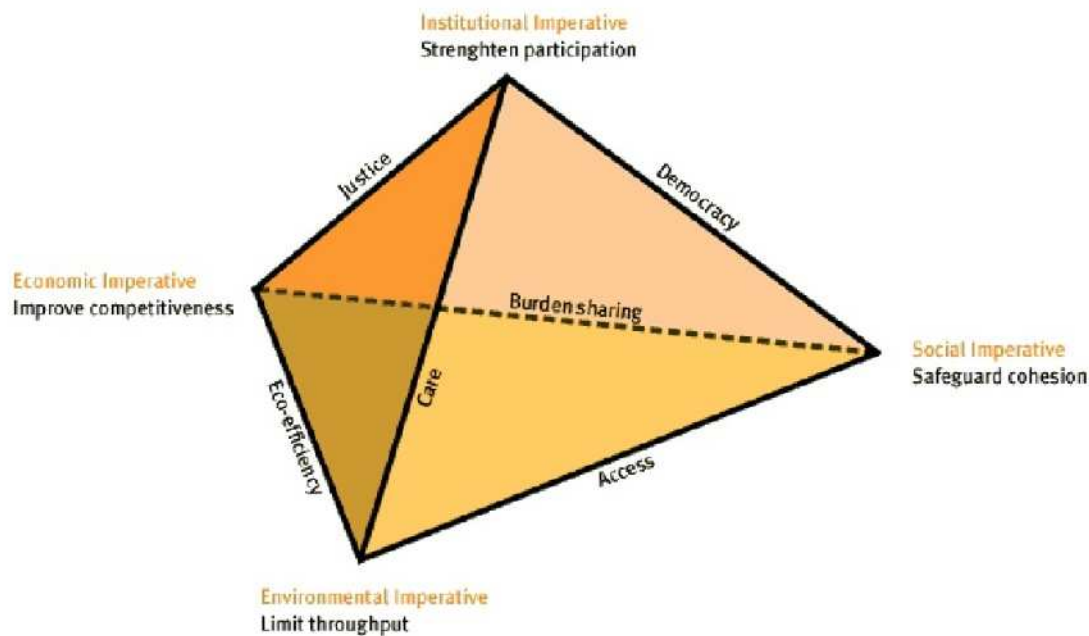
Beside socio-semantic trap-doors, the scope of the concept of Sustainability also differs widely. **Biocentric** and **anthropocentric** approaches clash, and the famous sustainability triangle has been further developed.



From the triangle
- **ecological meaningful modernisation**

- **economical meaningful modernisation**
- **social justice and participation**

Spangenberg and Bonniot developed a prism which includes institutions as well:



Socio-political contest of the discourse on Sustainability in tourism

For the tourism sector, the World Tourism Organisation first defined „Sustainable Tourism“ in **1988** – clearly in the footsteps of the Brundtland Report – as follows:

“Sustainable tourism development meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social, and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, and biological diversity, and life support systems.” (WTO-UNEP 2002)

The WTO Committee on Sustainable Development of Tourism, at its meeting in Thailand, March **2004**, agreed to revise the WTO definition of sustainable tourism. The purpose of this revision is to reflect better the sustainability issues in tourism, in light of the results of the Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development. The new conceptual definition places emphasis on the balance between environmental, social and economic aspects of tourism, the need to implement sustainability principles in all segments of tourism, and it refers to global aims such as poverty alleviation.

“Conceptual Definition” of Sustainable Development of Tourism:

“Sustainable tourism development guidelines and management practices are applicable to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, including mass tourism and the various niche tourism segments. Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability.

Thus, sustainable tourism should:

Make **optimal use of environmental resources** that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.

Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, **conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values**, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.

Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, **providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed**, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation.

Sustainable tourism development requires the **informed participation of all relevant stakeholders**, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary.

Sustainable tourism should also maintain a **high level of tourist satisfaction** and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them.” (WTO 2004)

Looking at the differences between the Pre-Rio and the Post-Johannesburg definition one cannot fail to notice that *parallel interests* exists between the tourism industry, the guests and the hosts to uphold **environmental** quality – because this is what is sold, visited, and

lived in.

No parallel interests exists however in **social and cultural sustainability**: The industry wants sellable product (and therefore standardization, commodification), guests want the fulfillment of their expectations. Both are not automatically interested in the well-being of hosts, resulting in the perceived need for "strong political leadership" and "corrective measures".

Where these are absent, very often host hostility is developing over time, with unfulfilled promises of development letting local turn to short-term profitmaking that also endangers their own nature and economy.

Even more important than the differences in language and scope is the fact that "Sustainability" is ".. used by a variety of interests in a variety of ways as a means of supporting and enhancing their power base". (Duijm/Caalders 2004)

"Sustainable development of tourism is" – Duijm/Caalders conclude – "a contested concept that is socially constructed and reflects the interests of those involved."

For example:

US President's Council on Sustainable Development:

"Sustainable development is economic growth that will benefit present and future generations without detrimentally affecting the resources or biological systems of the planet. A sustainable United States will have a growing economy that provides equitable opportunities for satisfying livelihoods and a safe, healthy, high quality of life for current and future generations. Our nation will protect its environment, its natural resource base, and the functions and viability of natural systems on which all life depends."

Muscoe Martin, Author of: "A Sustainable Community Profile"

"The word sustainable has roots in the Latin subtenir, meaning 'to hold up' or 'to support from below.' A community must be supported from below - by its inhabitants, present and future."

Richard Butler, inventor of the "Tourism product cycle":

Sustainable tourism is "tourism which is in a form which can maintain its viability in an area for an indefinite period of time".

Conclusion

For the development of Sustainable Tourism it is necessary to pay attention to all three sides of the triangle: economic prosperity, careful use of natural and human resources and civil society.

Sustainable development is first of all definition of goals, objectives and criteria for measurement, and the instrumentalization of these through governmental and non-governmental organizations. i.e. **development of policies**.

When speaking about Sustainability one has to be aware of linguistic and cultural differences of the concepts behind, the differences in scope and the fact that different definitions serve different interests



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