

Committee: United Nations Environmental Program

Issue: Towards sustainable tourism in the light of climate change and potential pandemics

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Position: President, Deputy President

PERSONAL INTRODUCTIONS

Dear all,

My name is Marilina Gerassimou and I'll be serving in this year's ATSMUN Conference as the President of the United Nations Environmental Program. As a graduate of Arsakeia-Tositseia Schools in Ekali and as an MUN enthusiast, it always feels good to take part in this conference. I'm a law student and as such all issues discussed at an MUN interest me very much. In this study guide me and my fellow partner Spyros gathered all the useful information for you in order to be prepared for the conference. For any further question you might have please do not hesitate to contact me via my email: marger049@gmail.com. I'm looking forward to meeting you!

Regards,

Marilina Gerassimou

Dear Delegates,

My name is Spyros Stavrakis and I am a student at A' Arsakeio Lyceum of Psychiko. I am an aviation and computer enthusiast and I enjoy history, politics and global affairs. I will be serving as the Deputy President of the United Nations Environmental Program for this year's ATSMUN conference. I really hope that this guide is useful to you and that it will provide with all the necessary knowledge to address this issue. I look forward to meeting you all! Should you have any inquiries, feel free to contact me at my email: spyrosstavrakis3@gmail.com

Kind Regards,

Spyros Stavrakis

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is the world's biggest industry and it is still growing to this day. Over the years, it was made clear that the market is not compatible neither with the peoples' demands, nor with the planet's resources. In order to combat this issue, the initiative of Sustainable Tourism started to grow. Since the start of the new millennium, extended research has been made regarding climate change and its possible effects on our planet. It was obvious that a lot of tourist destinations all around the globe were to be heavily affected by climate change. Even nowadays, although the field of sustainable tourism is off to a good start, this problem has not been solved. The new pandemic caused by the spread of Covid-19 completely changed the way we travel. The tourism industry was immobilised for a long period of time while international tourist activity has been decreased by 40%-90% in various nations resulting in a devastation of the global economy. There are different forms of sustainable tourism such as ecological tourism, green tourism, soft tourism, rural tourism, community tourism, solidarity tourism and now Internet tourism, all of them diverging from the traditional all-inclusive hotel, group organised type of holidays. In the face of a new pandemic starting and while the fear of climate change continues to exist, sustainable tourism will soon be the rule, rather than the exception.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Sustainable Development: According to the UN, sustainable development is a form of development that meets the current needs of people, while also assuring that future generations will be given the same treatment as the present ones.

Sustainable tourism: A form of tourism which adapts to the people's and industry's needs, while also being friendly to the environment.

World Tourism Organization (WTO): The World Tourism Organization is a United Nations specialized agency committed to promote sustainable and worldwide quality tourism.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): An agenda, with the approval of the United Nations, that contains 17 separate goals to be achieved until the year 2030.

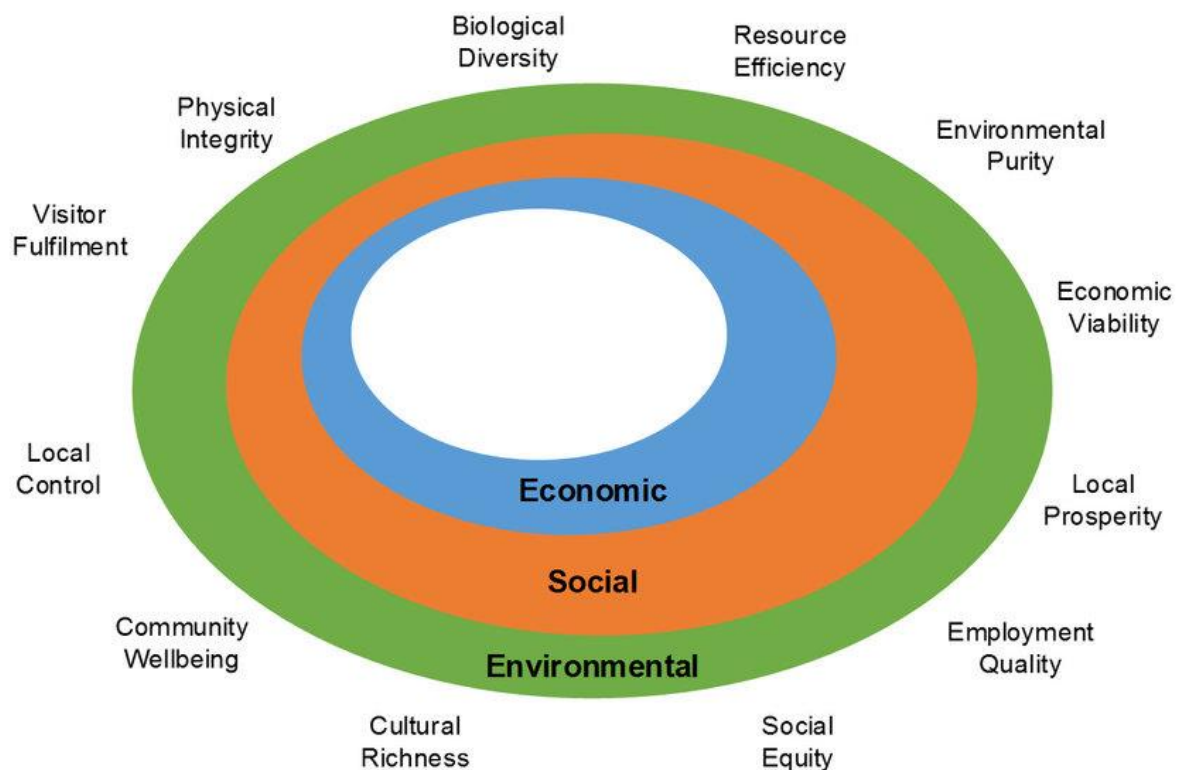
Climate Change: Climate change is a long-term shift in global or regional climate patterns. Often climate change refers specifically to the rise in global temperatures from the mid-20th century to present.

Pandemic: A pandemic is a disease outbreak that spreads across countries or continents. It affects more people and takes more lives than an epidemic. For example, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 to be a pandemic when it became clear that the illness was severe and that it was spreading quickly over a wide area.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

History of Sustainable Tourism

The international tourism market has seen a dramatic increase of people travelling, all around the world. Since, the global community has adopted several measures to counter the growing demands of the people and the industry itself. The concept of sustainable tourism was introduced in the first issue of “The Journal of Sustainable Tourism” in 1993, although it was already created, almost two years ago. At this time, the majority of people did not take this idea seriously, but as the years passed, the concept started gaining a lot of support. The Earth Summit in 1992 resulted in the creation of Agenda 21, which supported sustainable tourism, as a tool to make the tourism industry more friendly to its consumers. Ever since the UN started elaborating on the idea and in 2002 the UNWTO launched the Sustainable Tourism - Eliminating Poverty program, along with the UN’s Millennium Development Goals. Sustainable has three main objective categories, which are displayed in the chart below.



Recently, the majority of governments across the globe have been embracing only the social factor of

sustainable tourism. As a result, countries do not apply a balanced sustainable tourism model, but rather a fairly more convenient to their own national needs and capabilities.

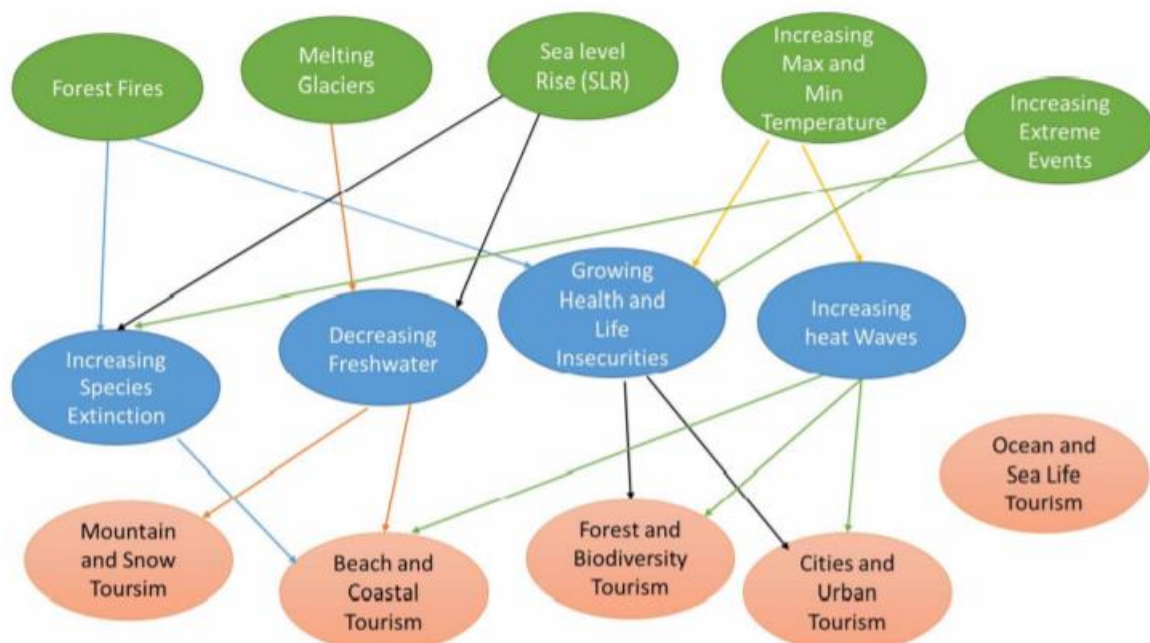
International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development



2017 was the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development and was declared in 2015 by the UN’s resolution A/RES/70/193. The United Nations took this opportunity to encourage all nations to proceed with actions that would promote sustainable tourism in an international level. Seeing the potential of the tourism industry in the near future, people were informed about the benefits of sustainable tourism and reforms started to accommodate this prosperous form of travel.

Effects of Climate Change on Tourism

Climate change has been an increasingly alarming issue over the last two decades. Many tourist destinations have been heavily affected (refer to the graph below) by climate change, thus decreasing tourism levels in the region.



The issue is yet to be solved, as the majority of the measures proposed so far are either not implemented by the governments or ignored by the international community.

Effects of Pandemics on Tourism

During the last 20 years, our planet has seen many major pandemics rising. The first of them being SARS pandemic lasting two years from 2002 to 2004, the Ebola outbreak in Africa and the recent Coronavirus pandemic, all have their own impact on tourism. The most recent example being the one we currently live in. Travel restrictions and quarantines are the most common ways we use to prevent the spreading of the virus. Many countries that heavily rely on tourism, like Greece or the Caribbean islands, have their economies devastated. Governments should set certain standards, to help contain any pandemic that may arise in the near future.

Types of Sustainable Tourism

- Ecological tourism is the generic notion for natural exploitation (commercialization) of resources as tourism products, in a sustainable manner. Some people suggest that only tourism in natural reservations and national parks is considered to be ecological or eco-tourism.
- Green tourism is represented by all particular forms of tourism circulation, with a development in perfect harmony with the natural and socio-cultural environment of the receiving area.
- Soft tourism serves social purposes (respect for customs, traditions, social and family structures of the local population) and economic purposes (equitable revenue distribution, tourism offer diversification). Soft tourism sets itself away from the artificial and impersonal forms of the mass tourism.
- Rural tourism refers to holidays spent in rural area.
- Community tourism is focused on involving local populations in a tourism development localized and developed to their benefit.
- Solidarity tourism is a social movement that aims at keeping under control and valorise tourism economy, to the benefit of local communities at destinations, in a territory development intercession.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

People's Republic of China (PRC)

The People's Republic of China is the world's most outbound tourist market. impact on the environment. Most of the population of country believes that There have been many attempts to promote

sustainable and responsible tourism, to minimize the negative immediate action should be taken to contain the environmental damage. Nevertheless, the PRC is responsible for approximately 29% of global carbon emissions and the numbers are still growing to this day. The PRC has passed through lots of epidemics and pandemics over the last two decades, but it has been proven that it always keeps the situation under control.

United States of America (USA)

The United States of America was one of the first countries to implement sustainable tourism acts in their lands. Initial attempts included the creation of large national park, for the people to visit, and industrial limitations in certain states. The USA holds approximately 14% of the world's total carbon dioxide emissions, but this is changing over the last five years, as the US senate has allowed for large-scale companies to apply their own set of rules to minimize the environmental damage. This strategy has succeeded and it is now applied to almost all the states. Being a severely struck by various viruses in the 21st century, the USA has effectively overcome the several crises that have occurred.

European Union (EU)

The members of the EU are the first ones to introduce sustainable tourism products into the market, especially countries such as France, Germany, Spain and Italy. More and more tourists are visiting member-states of the EU and they are respectively adapting to accommodate and please tourists by offering a different experience via sustainable tourism. Nowadays, there are many top sustainable tourism destinations across the continent. It is remarkable that the European Union is actually subsidizing business involved with sustainable tourism in order to promote it. Europe is mostly stuck by the recent pandemic and the economical impact by the absence of tourists was huge.

Kingdom of Norway

Norway is a very well-known tourist destination. It promotes sustainable tourism at all of its forms. In 2007, the government introduced the "Sustainable Norway 2015" program, in order to take advantage of its natural resources to create one of the largest sustainable tourism systems in the world. The natural landscapes that the country possess, attract lots of tourists every year.

Nepal

Nepal's largest source of revenue is tourism. To expand the local industry many changes have been applied over the years, mainly regarding sustainable tourism. The creation of national parks and the great management of natural resources in the area, combined together, lead to an increase of tourist activity and thus more revenue for the country itself.

World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

"The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is the United Nations agency responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism"

The UNWTO is committed to promoting tourism and sustainable development, all around the globe. More specifically its main responsibilities are:

- i. Encouraging sustainable tourism
- ii. Ensuring the prosperity of tourism
- iii. Organizing conferences and events to promote tourist activities

Developing Countries (LEDCs)

Developing countries, as suggested by the scenarios pointed out by the experts, are the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and those least able to cope with them. Thus, efforts to expand research and production of knowledge that can help decision-makers in planning and creating public policies that include the tourism industry in approaches to climate change, become essential. Meanwhile, it is also often the case that LEDCs rely on the tourism sector very much in order to maintain their GDP, therefore a lack in incoming tourists can be detrimental to their economies.

World Health Organisation (WHO)

The World Health Organization's primary role is to direct and coordinate international health within the United Nations system. The data that WHO provides help identify infected areas and areas affected by the climate change. This organization played also a major role during the handling of the pandemic, by supporting the international community with its research work and helping governments make decisions on safety measures.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of Event
1993	Publication of the "Journal of Sustainable Tourism"
1999	The 7th Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development was held, in which the topic of sustainable tourism was discussed
2002	The UNWTO initiates the "Sustainable Tourism - Eliminating Poverty" program
2006	Foundation of the International Task Force on Sustainable Tourism Development by the UNEP
2012	The Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development was held, which emphasizes on the importance of sustainable tourism for the future of humanity
2020	The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic

UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

- Resolution [A/73/274](#) was submitted by the UNWTO to the 73rd UNGA and is one of the most important resolution regarding this topic, as it encourages "poverty eradication and environmental protection" through sustainable tourism, thus embracing the 2030 Agenda's goals.
- Resolution [A/RES/70/193](#) was adopted in 2015 and declared 2017 as the "International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development"
- Resolution [A/RES/74/211](#) promotes sustainable tourism in Central America, a region with relatively poor infrastructure, and calls for the creation of a sustainable network that would take advantage of the local natural resources, to attract more tourists every year.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Both the UN and the EU have previously established that the tourism sector cannot address the challenge of climate change in isolation, but must do so within the context of the broader international sustainable development agenda. The critical challenge before the global tourism sector is to develop a coherent policy strategy that decouples the projected massive growth in tourism in the decades ahead from increased energy use and GHG emissions, so as to allow tourism growth to simultaneously contribute to poverty alleviation and play a major role in achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG). In this light, four major mitigation strategies for addressing greenhouse gas emissions from tourism can be distinguished: i) reducing energy use, ii) improving energy efficiency, iii) increasing the use of renewable energy, and iv) sequestering carbon through sinks.

The UN Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) supported by the EU-level SCP initiatives provide the policy framework to link the tourism sector with sustainable development, and is known as the “Marrakech Process”. The purpose of the “Marrakech Process” was to elaborate a draft 10-year Framework of Programmes (10YFP) on sustainable consumption and production (SCP) which will then be negotiated by countries at the 19th session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development in 2011. A Sustainable Tourism Task Force operated as part of this process, encouraging actions that promoted sustainable tourism through the development of support tools, pilot projects and good practice exchanges between countries. Areas of priority are climate change, biodiversity, cultural and natural heritage, and local development.

A key development has been the agreement of the “Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria” (www.sustainabletourismcriteria.org), which provide a common set of criteria to model and manage the sustainability of tourism businesses. It is a step closer to bringing the 60 plus global certification systems towards a single recognizable global benchmark. Such a tool permits a genuine greening of the tourism supply chain, especially when linked to sustainable purchasing policies.

However, despite the positive developments about one decade ago and the fact that the Rio 2012 summit reaffirmed that sustainable tourism is really a *conditio sine qua non* for the ways this industry has to take in the 21st century, it is still a fact that tourism, being constantly overwhelmed by crises such as the COVID19 pandemic and natural disasters, sometimes fails to follow – or even to want to follow these principles.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

It is argued that climate change studies reveal a deficiency in past conceptualizations of sustainable tourism that focused almost exclusively on destination scale issues and highlight the need to properly account for the environmental and social impacts of tourism's travel phase. Addressing climate change is considered a prerequisite to sustainable development and therefore germane to advancing sustainable tourism research. Tourism is currently considered among the economic sectors least prepared for the risks and opportunities posed by climate change and is only now developing the capacity to advance knowledge necessary to inform business, communities and government about the issues and potential ways forward. Any retreat from engagement with climate change issues by the tourism industry or its researchers would be to their substantial detriment.

There are many ways to promote sustainable tourism including, educative programs, in order for people to learn about the concept of sustainable tourism and apply it in their everyday lives. This can be done by various methods, such as advertisements and campaigns. Sharing experiences could also motivate people to travel sustainably and thus reducing damage to the environment and the local landscapes and resources. The creation of infrastructure to host large-scale sustainable activities in the area is another possible act that may result in an increase of tourism. Another step to improve sustainable travel is choosing environmentally friendly products to minimize the personal impact on the environment. In addition, supporting local societies and communities could prove to be beneficial, as they would take care and develop the region's tourism industry. In the light of the coronavirus pandemic, health standards should be created, in order to avoid any potential spreading of a virus, should it arise. Meanwhile, the Member States would need to ensure that tourism in their countries survives the detrimental blow of coronavirus, by investing in financial help, security measures and campaigns.

Another very much celebrated possible solution is a switch to low-carbon tourism. This mode of alternative tourism is very much relevant to the issue in question, because it helps towards minimizing climate change and promoting sustainable tourism at the same time. The initiatives for low-carbon tourism should involve the entire tourism system (demand, local population, private initiative, public authorities, and NGOs), promoting measures to address climate change in the short and medium term. Among the main objectives to achieve a low-carbon economy in the sector, many researchers highlight that it is necessary:

- To create a platform for tourism companies to calculate their GHG (greenhouse gases) emissions and present their reduction commitments;
- To bring together these reduction commitments and disseminate the progress and impacts achieved to different stakeholders;

- To promote training and information campaigns on the low-carbon economy in the tourism industry;
- To promote partnerships between tourism companies aiming at the reduction of GHG emissions;
- To promote scientific events on priority topics on climate change and tourism.

In the light of these principles, the tourism industry from the ecological efficiency (or eco-efficiency) outlook, presents itself as a perspective that can provide initiatives that are considered more sustainable. Also, destinations that are more vulnerable to extreme events (lack of water, heat waves, hurricanes, floods, landslides, sea level rise, etc.) should try to adapt to new environmental and climate scenarios. From this adaptation, new forms of tourism can emerge, such as community-based tourism, which seeks an alternative to mass tourism, favoring low environmental impact activities. The Member States who will handle this topic should keep in mind to always look for a middle ground which can keep everyone safe without harming the tourism industry, but always in a light of maximum sustainability.

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