

The Role of Values in Sustainable Tourism Education

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Abstract

This presentation discusses the role of values in the context of sustainable tourism education. However, it does not seek to engage in the debate about the definition of Sustainable Tourism nor the differences between this concept and Sustainable Development, but rather focuses on ‘sustainability’ or ‘sustainability-driven thinking’ as a paradigm or frame of mind (Hunter, 1997; Bonnett, 1999). Unlike concise definitions of Sustainable Tourism which are accompanied by ongoing debate, the underlying concept of ‘sustainability’ is widely accepted in terms of its core components as well as not just a desirable but increasingly necessary approach or paradigm in the context of all aspects of human life. For the benefit of this presentation and to establish a common understanding of the topic at the outset the concept will be reduced to its most defining qualities:

- as derived from the verb ‘to sustain’ – “keep something going over time, or continuously” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2002)
- encompassing environmental considerations, economic considerations, cultural considerations, and social considerations
- encompassing positive and negative, direct, indirect, and induced impacts of human activity at local, regional, national, and international levels and over the short, medium, and long-term.

For several years now, some may even argue decades, authors have been calling for a paradigm shift that promotes ‘sustainability’ and ‘sustainable thinking’; and not surprisingly universities have been identified as key stakeholders in facilitating this shift, “higher education institutions bear a profound, moral responsibility to increase awareness, knowledge, skills and values needed to create a just and sustainable future” (Cortese, 2003:17). In response to this call and in recognition of the fact that a comprehensive shift in values, which for this purpose are broadly defined as “expressions of, or belief in the worth of objects, qualities, or behaviours” (Kates, Parris and Leiserowitz, 2005:16), is required to equip the tourism managers of tomorrow adequately for the creation of a more sustainable future, this paper initially explores the central, overarching values that underlie the sustainability concept - not in the context of a particular economic activity (such as tourism),

nor as an applied management system (i.e. Hall, 2007), but rather as a frame of mind or paradigm. The paper then proceeds to relate the identified core values to tourism-focused university teaching and learning environments by outlining opportunities to incorporate these crucial values: (1) in the context of students learning about the values and their significance, (2) by students applying and 'experiencing' these values, (3) and by cultivating these core values in the learning environments by implementing them into the curriculum and delivery of the learning experience - essentially in a 'walk the talk' fashion. The last point is of particular interest as 'normalizing' a paradigm by cultivating it through actions rather than merely words is believed by the author to be a particularly powerful means of assisting the tourism managers of the future to internalize these fundamental values, which are essentially the foundation of a paradigm shift towards a 'sustainability-driven frame of mind'.

The presentation advocates a positive, comprehensive and proactive approach to addressing the diverse challenges that the tourism industry and the world at large are facing by fostering the adoption of sustainable thinking as a long-term investment, rather than merely offering fragmented and reactive 'sustainable' solutions to the numerous challenges that are already common place. Core sustainability values identified by authors and specific learning contexts, as promoted for example by Tribe (2002), will be combined with the authors own experience of incorporating core sustainability values in a second year course on Sustainable Tourism.

References

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