

TURISTIC DEVELOPMENT MODELS TENDENCIES AND PERSPECTIVES IN MEXICO

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The weight held by touristic activity, varies among those countries of the world, in order with the benefits that each country has considered convenient obtaining. A first argument about it, resides at the moment when it is decided to encourage touristic activity.

For many of those involved in such activity, this critical moment is more oriented to needs in the economic order than diversification; and even less, to establish socio-cultural relationships with their economic pairs. In other words, to most Latin American countries: depending, underdeveloped and even the now called emergent, the origin of the decision on tourism is related to great deficit in the current accounts of their payments scale and with an enormous need to round up foreign currencies via exportations.

Mexico, as many of these countries, decides to set about a path towards the development of touristic activity in the 50's. Not knowing, perhaps, the consequences of engaging in a development model like the one chosen, dedicates a good part of the efforts to impel a good consistent moment in encouraging the so called "traditional" touristic centers.

Whereas these traditional destinations had an incipient economic development and touristic spatial, enjoyed already, the interest around a newly born global demand, generated; among others, as a consequence of the post-war period. Such period was distinguished by changes in the structures of touristic-demand expenditure, reduction of the air-component in the travel costs (via technology), integration of "plastic" expense (credit) and the incorporation of a larger volume of travelers who until then, were margined from the activity.

On the other hand, the urgent need to enter an industrialization stage; as well as the need for major resources for this, made this countries think about the kindness in developing an activity which basically required investment in substructure and which would bring along foreign multinational investment in the services offer. It seemed like the host-country would only provide natural resources. Unfortunately they weren't bound to imagine or foresee the impact which activity and practice would bring upon the environment, society and, precisely, upon the sustainability in the structure of the touristic offer itself.

A second stage, after the development of traditional centers, corresponds to the most notorious need to propitiate trips with more mobility. Tourists began

drifting away from the idea of embedded-type resorts and started searching for much larger spaces.

This element adds an extra component in transportation systems, communication routes, more airports and; mainly, extra hotel touristic services. The stages called “corridors” or “circuits”, enhance this moment and express, not only the market concerns but, additionally, the characteristics of the current developing model.

To explain the implications of the ruling touristic-development model, there is a last element to be considered, same which resides in the dependency conditions had by the eminent receptive countries. The inequities in the exchange terms, which in the past had been observed in other products; mainly raw material, persist now with a new product called “tourism”, which is no other than “in situ” exportation subject to a central control; moreover to the price exchange in commercial terms. More recently, the travel wholesaler, with obsolete meddling in distribution channels put a strong pressure on the composition of the product. The paradox is, precisely, that the richness of the product granted strength to the offering country or at least that was, to begin with, what was expected.

Nevertheless, the chosen model for launching tourism in most of the eminently receptive countries, reproduce in itself the characteristics of the “industry” model of the macroeconomic surroundings. In the touristic context is called “traditional” model, “touristic industry” model and more recently “mass” model.

One of the main characteristics of the “touristic industry” model is the homogeneous products, referred to the unification of concepts and components of the touristic product, as well as the uniformity of goods and services.

The tendency shows that the lodging, recreation and complementary services offer, look more alike each time; preventing with this, the necessary differentiation which distinguishes one destination from the other. This feature allows the wholesaler to pressure tourism operators to unfair exchange conditions. For example, a quick vision of the tendency towards the reduction of hotel rates best illustrates this behavior.

The similarity of the product or the differentiation and diversification as an alternative, requires analysis of the attracting elements towards the destination. The right combination between the resources and touristic attractions, and the result of such combination in the optimization of the traveler’s flow. It is peculiar to observe that one folklore element impacts only one quarter of the attraction exercised by only one natural attraction. This fact is particularly important, given the explanation in the changing of the product’s structure, and in the planning scheme of the mass touristic destinations which tend to retract from urban areas.

The second feature, specialization, refers on one side to the intention of gathering of tasks, products and services due to the interest in making the best out of the use of the resources. On the other hand, this feature is also observed in the work division, similar to the production conveyor belt, where an individual is unaware of the final product; but only what they contribute with to the whole.

This specialization, nevertheless, far from achieving maximization in the use of resources, divides the components and separates them even in the interest of the final objective; which, in the case of touristic destinations, should be focused towards the visitor's satisfaction. In the apparent convergence of many offering destinations, a vertical structure is observed, where large corporations detain the productive chain almost by completely. In this new concentration characteristic not only market's behavior is explained but also the reached synchronization expressed in the adjustments, in order to reach better results in timing, movement and cost. Synchronization, therefore, leaves out of the product chain those small offering destinations, which lack flow generating systems and are dependant on the interior mobility of the traveler.

Around the same concentration symptom, there is a second paradox in tourism; the richness of the product depends on the existence of attractions with strong hierarchy which generates a constant flow of tourists. The spatial location of the offer tends to saturate the primary resource, affecting the state of conservation of the own resource. In other words, the behavior towards over-densification, excessive growth of the room offer and damage of the resource causes a great disbursement in investment for its recovery, changing this way, the operational costs and the image of the destination.

Last, the magnification of the economic benefits which lie within the model and measurable in most of the quantitative indicators, make us drift away from the original intention of the proposal. Arguments about the implications regarding regional development, generating jobs, multiplying effects; among other impacts, not only have they not been studied but are also a part of tourism's greatest myths.

The aspiration of driving our countries to a new developing phase: in the past "alternative" now so called "sustainable" must transcend speeches and set the basis towards a real change. It won't be possible to pretend being sustainable without evaluating the living conditions of the touristic employees as well as those communities supporting the activity. It is not enough knowing how many direct or indirect jobs are generated, but the working conditions of such jobs. It won't be enough knowing that we have one of the most important touristic destinations in the region and not knowing the magnitude of the impacts. It isn't possible even to think in the viability of changing models if the implications of a new alternative model are unknown.

Definitely, it is not possible to pretend, just by opposing, that the features and consequences of the model contra positioning the current one, is the answer to some countries' needs. In other words, we are left with the doubt that the

launched model is the correct one; adequate to the moment's needs and the ruling conditions. What it seems inevitable is the presumption of the sacrifice as a function to the service of an economy, which couldn't have put up with and encourage the growth of other sectors.. The function, therefore, has been accomplished. If that is true we will be freed of the original burden and willing to initiate the reconversion of the model.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM FORUM

PRELIMINARY REPORT

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This report has the following objectives:

1. Identifying the main problems had by some of the touristic projects in the region (ecotourism, communitarian tourism, etc) divided in function of the operation, management and politics and regulations existent.
2. Indicating topics, which, according to individuals interviewed and the consultant's own experience, are subject to be included in the agenda for the Sustainable Tourism Forum.
3. Knowing the expectations about holding the forum, and
4. Identifying the possible participants and implementation of the forum.

1. PROBLEMATIC

- a. **Operative.** (Interviews with enterprises, communitarian organizations, touristic cooperatives, etc.)
 - Scarce training in the designing, handling and administration of ecotourism projects.
 - Little or none distinction between ecotourism projects, alternative projects and sustainable development.
 - Insufficient Markets. The current kind of tourist in the region corresponds to recreational and diversion (ref. Eric Cohen) for whom ecotourism activities, adventure, etc., are only complementary attractions.
 - Difficulties to maintain products. It refers to financial situations: costs and competition.

- Alternative Tourism is constituted as a new colonializing system, where abuse is frequently observed in the terms of exchange (prices, payment conditions) as well as the difficulty to access markets.
- It is frequent to find investors who attend communities, achieving concessions on the use of land and resources, instead of creating alliances or associations, which would benefit the community. In these cases the community turns into employee of its own natural resources instead of becoming allied.
- The high concentration of the market in hands of a few wholesalers (more than 70% of the market is channeled through 13 international wholesalers) driving to a high control of the prices and the promoted services.
- The increasing existence of lodging facilities in the modality of "all inclusive". Similar to the tendency in the average expense of visitors.
- The sales commissions paid by the "eco" products to the local intermediaries (travel agencies) make prices less competitive.
- Proliferation of products presuming to be ecotouristic and even sustainable, same that deviate the demand from other projects which could be considered, if not sustainable, of communitarian interest emphasizing in conservation.
- Insufficient financing schemes to projects of the kind, as well as the low administrative capability for the conforming of touristic micro-enterprises.
- Ignorance on the methodology for designing ecotouristic products.

b. Management and Organization. (Interviews with consultants, specialists, private-sector directors, scholars and entrepreneurs).

- Again, ignorance on the features of adventure, alternative, communitarian, etc., ecotouristic projects (and products) is sensed.
- There is a profound incompatibility, in coexisting, between the current massive traditional and the alternative sustainable models.
- The market concentration noted above, has led to changes in the product. In other words, in order to satisfy the demand's needs the product is modified, losing its original qualities; turning it into a "one more" sub-product of the mass market.
- As a consequence of the above, satisfaction in the users of "eco" products is diminished; therefore the flow. (The search for authenticity for both market groups is different).

- High levels of simulated products. Due to the non-existent minimal conditions or characteristics for designing this kind of products. There are many options that make tourists believe that it is a non-simulated product.

c. **Politics and Regulations.** (Interviews with specialists, entrepreneurs, consultants, scholars, etc.)

- The turistic politics set about in the region, has focused in favouring the construction of hotel rooms (currently there are 52,000 hotel rooms in the region operating. Most of them in the 4- star rank) as well as politics focused in the promotion with the intention of impulsing demand (which has been sustained in rates inferior to the demand, creating a reduction in hotel occupation)
- The deregulation process begun in 1993, has allowed entrepreneurial sector to participate, very discretionally, in the decisions competente of the superstructure (Promotion plans, growth strategies, etc.)
- Except for Reserves and Protected areas, there aren't programs designed for measuring or mitigating the social impacts (employment, migration for example), enviromental and economic. In those cases where there are protection meassures, these are insufficient or unknown.
- Government's support is very scarce. When it is decided to launch a global action on the subject of sustainable tourism, they are instructed from the top downwards, not taking the community into consideration.
- In the cases where there are management plans (Costa Maya, Cozumel), There are many vias to keep on the maximum allowed limits. In the Riviera Maya case (20,000 hotel rooms which represents a 500% growth in 4 years) the plan continues being a matter of public consultation same that is over exceeded.
- To the interior of the Reserves where there are management plans, problems are centered in the precision about coastal and marine resources, turistic activities that take place and the little surveillance and control.
- Sian K'an is one of the few projects that have accomplished a correct management of the resources with participation of the community, even when the micro level of communitarian projects suffer from the same situations above mentioned.
- There are some initiatives for communitarian organization, work is incipient and support dispersed.

2. SUGGESTED TOPICS TO BE ADDRESSED IN THE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM FORUM.

- a. Unifying criteria and differences between ecotouristic projects, alternative, adventure, communitarian, sustainable (or in the frame of sustainability), etc.; specifically, features and conditions that must accomplish and propose a mechanism to spread out these criteria.
- b. Unifying criteria on the conditions and methodology for designing ecotouristic projects in order to orient communities towards their implementaton. Involve recommendations for the financing and commercialization.
- c. Present practical and successful cases in the region.
- d. Take advantage of implementing the Forum, to emit recommendations for the designing of management of sustainable regional politics.
- e. Sustainable tourism's social, enviromental and economic impact versus tradicional tourism, with the intention of communities' understanding the viability of projects of the kind.
- f. Defining criteria and sustainability indicators (or in the frame of) that could be used at regional scale.

3. WHAT IS EXPECTED AT THE FORUM?

- a. Unification of criteria.
- b. Working parameters in the whole.
- c. Exchange of experiences.
- d. Contingence mechanisms and problem solving.

4. KEY ACTORS, POSSIBLE PARTICIPANTS IN THE FORUM.