



## Special Session Proposal

### **The conflict between tourism expansion and sustainability: The case of Less Developed Countries**

Organiser:

**Flora Maria Díaz Pérez**, University of La Laguna, E-mail: [fdiazp@ull.edu.es](mailto:fdiazp@ull.edu.es)

#### **Abstract**

Most previous studies are based on the idea of conflict between tourism expansion and sustainability. However, increased tourist arrivals can be highly desirable in communities where tourism is seen as a solution to problems of economic backwardness and poverty, as is the case in many less developed countries (LDCs) (Brooks, Waterton, Saul, & Renzaho, 2023).

The dilemma faced by many underdeveloped and developing countries is that they need the economic income generated by tourism, and there comes a time when overcrowding slows down development by itself. Actually, promoting sustainable development at local, regional or national level and managing natural resources in a controlled manner is the responsibility of both public entities and the community at large, as the survival of future generations depends on these resources. In particular, when implementing a sustainable tourism strategy, the interest of the local population has to be taken into account. Nowadays, it is assumed that the acceptance of tourism by local communities contributes to its sustainability (Olorunfemi & Rabeem, U A, 2008; Mak, Cheung & Hui, 2017; Iqbal, Ramachandran, Siow, Subramaniam & Afandi, 2022). In this line, the study by Telfer and Sharpley (2015) for developing countries is revealing. It presents different stages in the attitudes of the local population towards tourism expansion. First, the development of the sector starts with a euphoric attitude of the local population. This is followed by apathy, then increasing irritation and total antagonism. Finally, it ends with forgetting traditional values and the environment destroyed by mass tourism.

However, the reality is that in LDCs, local communities are more concerned about the lack of clean water, food and adequate shelter than about sustainable tourism

development, as these are more pressing needs. Moreover, social tourism production in LDCs is not allowed to be developed by the local population, since tourism development in LDCs is generally considered a national industry (Brooks et al., 2023). But, it is commonly accepted that in a sustainable tourism model, the local community must define what sustainability means to them and then determine whether the resources available to the destination are sufficient to ensure the image they wish to project, setting limits to expansion (Lopez-Sanz, Penelas-Leguia, Gutierrez-Rodriguez & Cuesta-Valino, 2021). Therefore, before determining the carrying capacity of a territory in relation to tourism development, what the local population understands by sustainability should be specified.

The model, known as traditional tourism development, is one of extensive growth based on the central objective of a continuous increase in the number of visitors, without taking into account the reception capacity of a territory (Fullana & Ayuso, 2002). Moreover, even if companies and governments are aware that tourism has irreversible consequences for the local community, economic dependence on the activity in LDCs becomes an obstacle to new forms of management. In fact, based on the systematic relationship between the different components of sustainability, as well as its non-universal character, in the case of Least Developed Countries (LDCs), income and employment are fundamental components of sustainability. Indeed, in LDCs, tourism can be considered an economic activity capable of rationalising economic policy, especially through a balanced growth arising from the production cycles of new tourism enterprises. In this sense, Cardoso, Biau, Pereira, Figueiredo & Oliveira (2023) concludes that the negative impacts of tourism often outweigh positive ones. Specifically, if competitiveness is the capacity to maintain or increase levels of business profitability with respect to rivals (Dwyer, Forsyth & Rao, 2000; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003), the elements that make improvement possible must be defined. Among them will be, on the one hand, prices and, on the other, the quality of the production offered. The latter, in the case of tourism production, goes hand in hand with the sustainability of the resources on which the supply is based (Díaz-Pérez, García-González & Fyall, 2021).

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People to invite for this session:

- .- Hayley Saul, [h.saul@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:h.saul@westernsydney.edu.au); School of Social Sciences, Western Sydney University, Sydney, Australia, Department of Archaeology, University of York, York, United Kingdom
- .- Aatif Iqbal, [aatifyousafzai@gmail.com](mailto:aatifyousafzai@gmail.com); School of Business and Economics, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, 43400, Selangor, Malaysia
- .- José María López-Sanz; [Jm.Lopez@uah.es](mailto:Jm.Lopez@uah.es); Department of Economics and Business Management, University of Alcalá, 28802 Alcalá de Henares, Spain
- .- Bonnie K. L. Mak, [kwunling@connect.hku.hk](mailto:kwunling@connect.hku.hk); Department of Geography, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China