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LARGE-SCALE LINKS BETWEEN TOURISM ENTERPRISES AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector is embedded within the global economy, human society and natural environment, and large-scale links outside the sector itself are as significant for sustainable development as small-scale environmental management practices within the industry. Sustainable development is still a somewhat contested term in the theoretical literature, but its practical interpretation by national governments and multinational corporations may be deduced from topics covered at the 1992 Earth Summit and the 2002 Rio World Summit on Sustainable Development (“Rio +10”) in Johannesburg. Agenda 21, the top-level policy product from the Earth Summit, did not include tourism in its sectoral studies, and a separate Tourism Agenda 21 was produced subsequently by the industry itself. Rio +10 did indeed include tourism, and a number of previous meetings such as the World Ecotourism Summit in Quebec produced internationally-agreed documents which were delivered at Rio +10. In addition to inputs from the tourism industry itself, tourism received a significant mention in contemporaneous inputs from the conservation sector, such as the *Benefits Beyond Boundaries* statement from the 2003 World Parks Congress. More recently, as governments worldwide have begun to grapple with policies related to climate change, the tourism sector produced a report and a declaration on this topic at Davos in 2007 (UNWTO et al., 2007).

To assess the significance of tourism enterprises for sustainable development with any degree of thoroughness, e.g., for comparison with other industry sectors, we need a reasonably comprehensive and systematic triple-bottom-line analytic framework, not merely a collection of anecdotes. Triple-bottom-line accounting has a number of theoretical deficiencies, practical difficulties and data shortages, but does provide a good starting point (Buckley 2003a).

At a global scale, the tourism industry is commonly estimated to account for about one tenth of global GNP and employment. Aggregate financial figures from the World Travel and Tourism Council, the peak industry association, are several times higher than those from the UN World Tourism Organisation, the peak multilateral government organisation, but both estimates are in the trillions of US dollars. The outdoor tourism sector, particularly significant for sustainability because it involves regional communities and operates in areas of high conservation value, comprises around one fifth of the entire tourism sector. At a national scale, many countries now maintain tourism satellite accounts as part of their GDP statistics, and some have also estimated the scale of nature-based and adventure tourism, amounting to hundreds of billions of US dollars in some countries. As with other industry sectors, some tourism enterprises are large multinational corporations, whereas others are small businesses run by a single proprietor. Some are commercially successful and others less so, for much the same reasons as businesses in other industry sectors. Tourism enterprises, like any other, compile and report detailed information on financial income, expenditures and assets. Very few enterprises compile corresponding information on social or environmental costs and contributions. This chapter therefore focuses principally on those aspects.

References

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