

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE CARIBBEAN ISLAND NATION-STATES

James Goodwin, JD

For many developing nations, tourism is an important pathway for development. In recent years, however, tourism has become associated with a number of economic, environmental, and cultural challenges. This article examines how sustainable tourism development could be applied in the Caribbean. The article begins with an introduction to the concept of sustainable tourism development and a brief history of the Caribbean tourism industry. The unique economic, environmental, and cultural challenges associated with tourism in the Caribbean are discussed, with particular attention given to the cruise industry. The article concludes with recommendations for addressing these obstacles, including increasing public participation among Caribbean citizens and taking steps to change tourist consumption patterns.

James Goodwin is pursuing his Master in Public Policy from the School of Public Policy at University of Maryland, College Park. He earned his JD from the School of Law at the University of Maryland, Baltimore, in 2007, and his BA in Political Science from Kalamazoo College in 2003. A member of the Maryland Bar, he currently works as a Policy and Legal Analyst with the Center for Progressive Reform.

INTRODUCTION

Like any consumer product, the Caribbean vacation is packaged, marketed, and sold for mass consumption (Duval 2004b, 10). One tourism website describes this product in the following terms:

As befits heaven on earth, there is much to enjoy, see, and do. Beaches, boats, banks, and bikinis are Caribbean vacation essentials. But the No 1 [sic] playground for the Americas also comprises movie-set beauty, coconut-tree-clad mountains, verdant valleys of sugar cane and bananas, and seashore galore. (Caribbean.com)

One can readily compare the Caribbean tourism industry to such industries as petroleum production or forestry in that they all involve exploitation and commoditization of natural resources (see, *e.g.*, Miller 2006, 35; noting that “Jamaica’s tourism is based primarily on natural resources like sun, sand, and sea”). As with the exploitation and commoditization of any other natural resource, Caribbean tourism provides both a pathway for economic development¹ and a source of stress on the local environment.

The question then becomes how to embark on this pathway without imposing irreversible damage on the local environment. Not only do ecocentric principles demand a resolution to this question; pragmatic considerations do as well. After all, a degraded environment is hardly compatible with the Edenic image on which the Caribbean tourist industry depends for its success (Duval and Wilkinson 2004, 71).² Indeed, because tourism has become a competitive and globalized industry, international tourists can simply take foreign exchange elsewhere if the Caribbean environment becomes too contaminated (Wood 2004, 152; Johnson 2002, 261).

The Caribbean tourism industry also differs from the typical paradigm of natural resource exploitation and commoditization in the degree to which it directly affects local cultural and social conditions. The constant influx of foreign tourists has the potential to disrupt local social norms and cultural institutions and traditions. Such sociocultural dislocation not only tends to breed animosity between the guest and host, it also threatens to cultivate divisions within the local Caribbean community. Preservation of social and cultural stability is not merely a matter of principle. Sociocultural dislocation exacts significant social costs and contributes to the atmosphere of tension between tourists and native Caribbean peoples. These phenomena threaten the continued success of Caribbean tourism.

In this paper, I explore how each of these considerations—economic, environmental, and cultural—contributes to the notion of sustainable tourism development in general, and how they apply to the Caribbean tourism context in particular. To this end, I will introduce the concept of sustainable tourism development and describe the history of the Caribbean tourism industry. I will then examine how the elements of sustainable tourism development apply to the unique circumstances of Caribbean tourism. Given its growing importance and distinctive characteristics, Caribbean cruise tourism will receive special focus.

This analysis involves a significant amount of generalization about the island nations of the Caribbean. This generalization is intended to highlight the challenges of sustainable tourism

development common to all of these island nations. What makes this topic so interesting is that similar challenges exist despite the diversity of the Caribbean nations. In most cases, to the extent that there are differences, I contend that they are a matter of degree rather than form. Specific examples are utilized to illustrate the challenges facing individual nations.

WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT?

Although a relatively new phenomenon, tourism has become one of the world's largest industries in recent years. In 2005, international tourism arrivals reached over 800 million worldwide. In macroeconomic terms, 9 percent of global employment and ten percent of global economic activity is tourism related (Travel and Tourism 2006, 363). Given its sheer magnitude, it is not surprising that the tourism industry has a substantial environmental impact. In particular, tourism development is associated with environmental problems like deforestation, soil or beach erosion, and coral ecosystem destruction. Since tourism development also tends to result in rapid urbanization, it can contribute to such problems as increased air and water pollution, as well as inadequate solid waste management (Baver and Lynch 2006, 5). The scale and gravity of these impacts tend to be amplified in the Caribbean, where the environment comprises some of the most fragile ecosystems on earth, including beaches, coral reefs, and tropical forests (Lynch 2006, 158).

Environmentally sustainable tourism development, like environmentally sustainable development in general, has been a subject of concern since the 1970s (Barrow 2006, 333). The sustainable tourism movement gained momentum in the 1980s, soon after the concept of sustainable development came to international prominence with the publication of the Brundtland Report. The report, produced by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, was the first to articulate sustainable development as an issue for international policymaking (Hunter, Salzman, and Zaelke 2007, 174-75). The Commission studied the various interrelated issues concerning the environment and economic development, and revised strategies to ensure the simultaneous and effective pursuit of the goals of environmental protection and economic development (Hunter, Salzman, and Zaelke 2007, 174-75).

As with sustainable development³, the international community has struggled to develop a universally accepted definition of sustainable tourism development (see, e.g., Harrison, Jayawardena, and Clayton 2003, 294-99; discussing various competing definitions of sustainable tourism development). The definition of sustainable tourism development followed in this paper is that adopted by the World Tourism Organization:

[S]ustainable tourism development meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social, and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems (Harrison, Jayawardena, and Clayton 2003).⁴

This definition balances the interests of host communities with those of the visiting tourists. Moreover, it demonstrates how each of the considerations for sustainable tourism development—economic, environmental, and social/cultural—must be taken into account in order to strike the proper balance between those interests.

Sustainable tourism, though related in many ways, is distinct from ecotourism (Barrow 2006, 337; Travel and Tourism 2006, 365). As is the case with sustainable tourism, there is no universally accepted definition of ecotourism (Miller 2006, 37), though there are recurring themes in both including minimizing negative impacts and maximizing positive effects on both the environment and local populations. Ecotourism goes beyond sustainable tourism, however, in that it caters to tourists committed to authentic experiences and learning in pristine, natural destinations (Barrow 2006, 335; Travel and Tourism 2006, 365; Weaver 2004, 172-75). These additional requirements have led some observers to criticize ecotourism as elitist because it is too expensive for many people to afford and ecotourist destinations tend to be highly exclusive. In many cases, ecotourism operators set aside large land reserves with restricted entry requirements in order to maintain the pristine, natural quality of the destination.

Sustainable tourism does not have to be ecotourism. Instead, sustainable tourism could include a trip to a casino, provided that the casino has minimal negative effects on the environment and contributes positive benefits to the local population. Both ecotourism and sustainable tourism are concerned with the same economic, environmental, and social considerations, but sustainable tourism development seeks to apply these considerations throughout the industry (Barrow 2006, 337).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CARIBBEAN TOURISM INDUSTRY

Most historians place the beginning of modern mass tourism in the Caribbean in the middle of the twentieth century (Duval 2004b, 4), though its roots stretch as far back as the late 1800s (see, e.g., Wood 2004, 153; describing the origins of cruise tourism in the Caribbean as beginning with the “banana boat” excursions around the 1880s). Modern mass tourism in the Caribbean has generally developed according to two dominant paradigms: (1) beach-oriented, all-inclusive resort packages; and (2) cruise tourism (Duval 2004b, 10). Both fall into the broader category of what is popularly referred to as “3S tourism” or tourism that is based on sun, sand, and sea. The modern tourism industry is now one of the most important economic drivers in the Caribbean (Duval and Wilkinson 2004, 59). According to recent estimates, tourism accounts for over 15 percent of the region’s employment and almost 6 percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Duval 2004b, 4). Caribbean tourism is growing faster than the global industry average (Duval 2004b, 4).

A number of factors have contributed to the development and rapid growth of the modern Caribbean tourism industry. First, the post-World War II era witnessed a significant increase in available leisure time, particularly in the countries that comprise the target market for Caribbean vacation product (Duval 2004b, 10).⁵ Second, the advent of jet airplanes facilitated the journey to the Caribbean (Duval and Wilkinson 2004, 61). Third, beginning in the 1950s, many Caribbean islands began moving towards political and economic independence. Despite the skepticism of

critics of neocolonialism,⁶ many of these islands viewed the development of a robust tourism industry as a means for eliminating colonial dependence (Grandoit 2005, 90).

The growth of the Caribbean tourism industry has had a profound effect on agriculture, the region's other primary economic sector (Conway 2004, 187, 191-93). Agriculture remains an important source of income in the Caribbean, though it has declined as a percentage of several islands' GDPs in recent decades, coinciding with a gradual shift from traditional export products like bananas to non-traditional crops like lettuce, cucumbers, and tomatoes (Duval 2004b, 8). Many goods consumed by international tourists, including food, are often imported from outside of the Caribbean. As a result, the revenue generated from the consumption of these goods is exported, limiting economic benefits for the local population. If more local products were consumed locally by tourists, money spent in the Caribbean would ultimately remain there, rather than flowing out of the region to foreign economies—a phenomenon that tourism and development scholars refer to as “leakage.”

Despite the dominance of modern mass tourism, elements within the Caribbean tourism industry have come to embrace the sustainable tourism development movement in recent decades. For example, Dominica has sought to promote its ecotourism industry by aggressively marketing itself as the “nature island” and emphasizing its “unspoiled” natural beauty (Discover Dominica Authority). Other nations have sought to diversify their tourism products by promoting their unique cultural landmarks and traditions. One notable example is the effort of Trinidad and Tobago to promote its annual Carnival celebration as an alternative to beaches and other attractions common in modern mass tourism (Trinidad and Tobago Tourism). These developments have in part been motivated by increasing concern with the attendant economic, environmental, and cultural costs of the industry's continued growth. The more entrepreneurially minded elements in the industry have also begun to recognize sustainable tourism as an alternative product that can be offered to the growing numbers of socially conscious consumers in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe (Duval 2004b, 12-13).

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE CARIBBEAN

Economic Considerations

Tourism is economically sustainable when it results in continuous future returns on past investments. The goal of economic sustainability often conflicts with the environmental and social/cultural elements of sustainable tourism development. To be consistent, future investment returns typically must cover the costs of remedying the effects of tourists on the local natural environment and to compensate locals for the social and cultural disruption caused by the presence of foreign tourists (Duval and Wilkinson 2004, 74).

One economic consideration for sustainable tourism in the Caribbean is whether the local economy is sufficiently diversified. Diversification is particularly important given the many sources of instability in the tourism industry. For many of the Caribbean destinations, tourism is a seasonal phenomenon (the peak tourism period generally runs from December until April) and does not provide a steady stream of income throughout the year. Moreover, as a globalized industry, tourism is subject to the vagaries of shifting international tastes and fads (Barrow 2006,

336). Regardless of the quality of the product offered by the Caribbean tourist industry, tourists may periodically lose interest in the region and decide to pursue adventures elsewhere. Finally, the Caribbean is particularly susceptible to natural disasters like hurricanes and volcanic eruptions (Barrow 2006, 6). These disasters can devastate the tourist infrastructure and undermine consumer confidence. As a result, it may be years before a destination regains its former earning capacity. For example, it has taken years for the island of St. Martin to recover from the damage it sustained in Hurricane Luis in 1995. Similarly, tourism on the island of Montserrat has only partially recovered since the 1995 eruption of Soufriere Hills volcano (Duval 2004b, 16-17).

In light of all the sources of instability, economic diversity is necessary to avoid excessive dependence on the tourism sector, and the substantial risks that such dependence creates (Harrison, Jayawardena, and Clayton 2003). Sustainable tourism development could promote this kind of diversity in the local tourist economies. An economic policy consistent with the tenets of sustainable tourism development would ensure that the industry is not developed to the exclusion of other economic sectors. For example, a sustainable approach would require the local government to follow a balanced strategy in building elements of public infrastructure—such as water, sewage, and power transmission—that are equally available to all sectors of the economy. Presently, however, Caribbean governments tend to pursue public infrastructure projects that exclusively benefit the tourism industry (Harrison, Jayawardena, and Clayton 2003).

Another economic consideration for sustainable tourism is minimizing leakage. In the Caribbean tourism context, there are two primary causes of leakage: many of the goods used by the tourism industry (i.e. building materials, food, and furniture) are purchased from foreign sources; and most of the industry's profits are exported, since many of the tourism operations are owned by foreign or transnational corporations (Duval and Wilkinson 2004, 60). Regardless of its cause, the occurrence of leakage results in the local population bearing the environmental and cultural costs of tourism while retaining relatively little of the economic benefits (Barrow 2006, 341). To be sure, many of the local Caribbean economies are not entirely monolithic. Agriculture still provides an important source of income on every island and the region as a whole boasts a great deal of economic diversity, including vigorous sectors in petroleum and energy, mineral extraction, banking and finance, and manufacturing and technology (Duval 2004b, 8). Nevertheless, because the economic benefits of tourism are minimized by leakage, the multiplier effect on the rest of the Caribbean economy is significantly reduced (Duval and Wilkinson 2004, 60).

One method for minimizing leakage is to promote the consumption of locally produced goods and services. Among the most important local goods in this regard are foods and beverages. As discussed earlier, this is currently being accomplished to a limited extent, as Caribbean agricultural products are increasingly consumed domestically by tourists. Another important approach is promoting locally produced souvenirs, since many of the items are now mass-produced commodities manufactured and imported from abroad (Barrow 2006, 336). This can also minimize the occurrence of cultural dislocation, as it encourages the host population to take pride in its culture. Ideally, the sharing of the indigenous culture in this fashion can help to promote congenial relations between the local hosts and the visitors. Island governments concerned with promoting economically sustainable tourism development can seek to devise

policies that promote the consumption of domestically produced goods and services, such as food items, beverages, and souvenirs. Governments can subsidize organizations that function like chambers of commerce to promote the use of native goods and services in major tourism operations.

Promoting the consumption of domestically produced goods and services has become more and more difficult given the growing popularity of all-inclusive resort-style tourism and cruise tourism. Tourists who purchase these packages rarely venture into local communities. Spending is generally restricted to the cruise ship, tour operator, or resort operator, all of which tend to be owned by multinational corporations (MNCs). Cruises run by Carnival or Royal Caribbean; resorts operated by Hilton, Hyatt Regency, Sandals, and Beaches; and tours sold by Apple or Funjet, illustrate the involvement of MNCs in Caribbean tourism. All-inclusive vacation packages siphon most spending out of the country and minimize the potential multiplier effect that tourist spending might otherwise have on the local economy (Harrison, Jayawardena, and Clayton 2003).

Environmental Considerations

The future success of the Caribbean tourism industry is intimately joined to environmental conservation, particularly since a clean and unspoiled environment is what attracts many visitors to Caribbean destinations (Duval and Wilkinson 2004, 71). The Caribbean environment is characterized by fragile ecosystems, including shorelines and beaches, coral reefs, and inland tropical forests (Lynch 2006, 158). These ecosystems are susceptible to the increased levels of pollution that have accompanied development of the tourism industry. Environmentally sustainable tourism development requires that local natural resources be used to meet the needs of present tourism development activities without unduly compromising the ability of future residents to draw upon those same resources.

Modern mass tourism can cause significant damage to marine and terrestrial environments (Duval 2004b, 5). Common environmental problems include deforestation; water and air pollution resulting from rapid urbanization; solid waste management; and coral ecosystem destruction. The coral reef ecosystems that surround many of the Caribbean islands have been severely damaged by land-based water pollution, ocean dumping, boat anchors, and contact with numerous divers (Lynch 2006, 162; Miller 2006, 37; Baldwin 2000, 210-11). In addition, beachfront development of hotels, marinas, and other harbor facilities has damaged shoreline ecosystems, which on most islands contain ecologically vital wetlands and mangrove forests.

As with other developing nation-states, the small size and high level of poverty in most of the Caribbean islands renders them especially vulnerable to the causes and effects of environmental degradation (Baver and Lynch 2006b, 5). Municipalities often lack adequate waste management infrastructure. As a result, many resorts dump untreated or under-treated waste into nearby bodies of water, particularly wetlands, which can severely degrade coastal ecosystems (Baldwin 2000, 204-05).

One of the most destructive development activities has been beach construction. Few Caribbean islands naturally boast the idyllic white, sandy beaches framed by lush palm forests

that most people imagine when they envision the Caribbean environment. Instead, beaches must be artificially constructed to comport with tourists' expectations (Baldwin 2000, 194). Construction often requires filling in coastal wetlands and salt ponds, dredging the ocean floor for sand, and bulldozing and leveling existing shoreline (Baldwin 2000, 205-07). These massive disturbances of the ocean floor have resulted in significant beach erosion as well as coral reef destruction, hastening the decline of marine life in the Caribbean Sea (Baldwin 2000, 211-14).

Though the Caribbean is experiencing many threats to its fragile ecosystems, these are not among the primary concerns for local community members. Instead, their concerns are generally related to public health issues, including access to natural resources and clean drinking water, air pollution control, and improved waste management (Lynch 2006, 16-65). Rapid expansion of tourism places great stress on municipal infrastructure, such as drinking water supply and waste management. Few Caribbean municipalities possess the necessary revenues to meet the accelerating demand for these services. Since the highest priority for the provision of these services is often reserved for the foreign tourists, the interests of local populations are often sacrificed (Harrison, Jayawardena, and Clayton 2003). This problem is evident in places like the Dominican Republic, where municipal governments are unable to satisfy local demands for public services like sewage and waste disposal in rapidly growing urban areas (Lynch 2006, 164). Unless these basic public health concerns are adequately addressed, it seems unlikely that the Caribbean peoples will dedicate much concern or effort to the protection of the fragile ecosystems that comprise their natural environment.

Cultural Considerations

Like an alien
In we own land
I feel like a stranger
And I sensing danger
We can't sell out the whole country
To please the foreign lobby
What's the point of progress?
Is it really success
If we gain ten billion
But lose the land we live on? (Seon)

As the lyrics to calypso singer Rohan Seon's "Alien" suggest, many observers believe that the development of the Caribbean tourism industry has negatively impacted Caribbean society and culture. Concern with these negative impacts has led to an increased emphasis on socially and culturally sustainable tourism, which exists when the local population is able to function in harmony with tourists (Duval and Wilkinson 2004, 72).

Among the most prominent forms of social disruption is that which results from the tension between local Caribbean hosts and foreign tourists. At its most basic level, this tension arises from the fact that many Caribbean communities are struck by abject poverty, pervasive unemployment, malnourishment, and exploding population growth, while coexisting alongside "playgrounds for the wealthy" (Duval and Wilkinson 2004, 60). The tension between local community members and foreign tourists is further aggravated by the fact that tourism

development often results in increased prices without necessarily increasing local incomes (Duval and Wilkinson 2004, 72).

The Dominican Republic exhibits many of these characteristics. According to 2007 estimates, the GDP per capita is approximately \$9,200, with 42.2 percent of households living below the poverty line and 15.5 percent of the workforce unemployed. The country's population growth rate (1.5 percent) and HIV/AIDS incidence rate (1.7 percent) are among the highest of any country outside of sub-Saharan Africa (Central Intelligence Agency). The tourism industry in the Dominican Republic stands in stark contrast to the living conditions of the local population. The website for the Dominican Republic's Ministry of Tourism lists approximately 150 different hotels and resorts. One tour operator offers a five-night stay at the Sunscape Punta Cana Resort for \$749.00 per person including roundtrip air flight from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Apple Vacations). Such a trip would cost the average Dominican about one month's salary.

The effect that tourism development has on community members' access to local natural resources introduces another source of tension between tourists and the Caribbean population. On many of the islands, foreign owners and operators of tourism facilities have acquired exclusive property rights over extensive tracts of land and shoreline. In Jamaica, for example, all but nineteen of the island's 488 miles of coastline had been privatized by 1992 (Miller 2006, 39). As a result, many Caribbean communities are being systematically excluded from land that served agricultural purposes and from shorelines that were formerly used for fishing and recreation (Bayer and Lynch 2006b, 8; Miller 2006, 39; Duval and Wilkinson 2004, 72). Efforts at preventing environmental degradation have actually contributed to this development as well. For example, a number of Caribbean islands have created conservation areas, often at the behest of international environmental nongovernmental organizations. While intended to mitigate the environmental degradation caused by foreign tourists, these protected areas effectively deny the local population access to portions of the island's territory. In some cases, the protected areas encompass natural resources on which local populations once depended for their livelihood (Bayer and Lynch 2006b, 8). This example illustrates why sustainable tourism must be comprehensive in nature; even when environmental and economic considerations are taken into account, it is possible that a policy could result in negative social impacts.

Not only does tourism tend to create divisions between the local population and the tourists, it also tends to create social divisions within Caribbean society that did not exist prior to the industry's development. In particular, gaps developed between those that benefit from the tourism industry, such as those that obtain relatively high paying jobs, and those who are marginalized by it, such as those that must relocate because of increasing rental rates near tourist locations (Duval and Wilkinson 2004, 72). The locals who benefit from the tourism industry might be perceived as betraying their community and culture. In rare cases, these divisions might run along preexisting Caribbean societal cleavages, such as racial lines. For example, since the best jobs often go to the local residents with the lightest skin color (Gmelch 2003, 13), the growth of the tourism industry might create or exacerbate preexisting racial tensions.

The Unique Case of Cruise Tourism

As with its traditional resort-style counterpart, modern cruise tourism in the Caribbean began after World War II. Currently, cruises are the fastest growing segment of the Caribbean tourism industry and, for a number of Caribbean islands, cruise ship passengers outnumber stay-over guests (Wood 2004, 156). Given the increasing importance and unique impact cruises have on local economic, environmental, and social conditions, cruise tourism requires heightened attention in any discussion of sustainable tourism in the Caribbean.

Caribbean communities derive fewer economic benefits from cruises than from resort-style tourism. Scholars note that cruise tourists spend only a fraction of what stay-over guests spend. According to one study, cruise tourists contributed as little as 12 percent of all tourist expenditures in the Caribbean in 2000, despite comprising around 42 percent of all tourist arrivals during that period (Wood 2004, 158-59). Thus, the economic multiplier effect from cruise tourists is comparatively smaller. In addition to decreased spending, cruise tourism experiences an even greater incidence of revenue leakage. For example, the little spending that cruise tourists do undertake typically occurs in duty-free shops that cater to cruise passengers. Since these shops are typically owned by foreign companies and sell imported goods, the tourist dollars spent in these duty free shops contribute little to the Caribbean economy (Wood 2004, 166).

Of the more than seventy cruise ships that travel through the Caribbean, none are Caribbean-owned. Almost 90 percent of ships are owned and operated by multinational corporations and sail under flags of convenience (Wood 2004, 159-60).⁷ Thus, much of the revenue generated by cruises flows out of the Caribbean. Ships operate almost completely independently from the ports they visit. Ship construction materials and furniture are mostly imported, the food and beverages consumed on board are frequently imported, and only a fraction of the staff is Caribbean (Wood 2004, 166).

There has been disagreement over the extent of cruise tourism's impact on the environment. The cruise industry contends that cruise tourism has comparatively less impact on the environment than traditional resort-style tourism, since effects are localized and confined (Wood 2004, 162; Johnson 2002, 263). Closer inspection reveals that the industry has significant impacts on the Caribbean environment, primarily in the form of air and water pollution. While in port, cruise ships contribute massive amounts of air pollution and ships dump much of their waste into the ocean when in transit.

Cruise ships have become a particularly troubling source of water pollution since dumping is increasing rapidly and is difficult to monitor and control. Much of the dumping goes unchecked, particularly when it occurs in international waters. Current international law—the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL)—does not cover all of the wastes that are dumped. Moreover, few of the affected Caribbean nations possess the monitoring or enforcement capacity, much less the political will, to prevent dumping activities that do contravene international or national laws (Wood 2004, 162-63).

The detrimental effects that cruise ships have on the marine environment are not limited to water pollution. Cruise ship anchors destroy fragile coral reef ecosystems throughout the Caribbean. Accidents involving cruise ships have also contributed to reef destruction, as in 1997 when a cruise ship ran aground and destroyed 80 percent of the coral reef in a marine park near

Cancun, Mexico (Wood 2004, 164). Even in the absence of accidental damages, cruise tourism involves a great deal of intentional damage to the marine environment. The development of deep-water ports to accommodate the cruise ships at the various Caribbean destinations requires extensive dredging, excavation, and construction, degrading fragile coastlines, coral reefs, and ocean floor ecosystems (Johnson 2002, 263).

Cruise tourism causes significant damage the Caribbean environment while contributing comparatively little benefit to the local economy. Nevertheless, the competition between potential Caribbean port destinations remains fierce, producing a textbook example of the “race to the bottom” phenomenon. Governments appear willing to trade environmental damage, the costs of which will typically not be fully realized until some time in the future, in exchange for immediate, albeit relatively small, economic gains. In order to attract greater numbers of cruise ships, many of these port destinations have engaged in a battle of relaxing environmental standards and willfully sustaining significant economic costs. This phenomenon is perhaps best exemplified by the port passenger fees that destinations charge cruise ships. These fees, charged on a per head basis, are intended to compensate for economic and environmental burdens. The port passenger fees for Caribbean cruises are by far the lowest in the world, with many below ten dollars (Wood 2004, 166-67). By way of comparison, the island of Bermuda, which lies outside of the Caribbean Sea, charges a port passenger fee of sixty-three dollars (Johnson 2002, 268).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

If properly integrated into an adequately diversified economy, sustainable tourism can provide an important pathway toward broader development for the island nation-states of the Caribbean. Whether considered in economic, environmental, or cultural terms, however, the region’s current tourism industry is far from sustainable. The solutions that have been suggested for this problem generally fall into two categories: increasing the participation of the local Caribbean population in development decisions or changing tourist behavior.

Increased Local Participation

Increasing local participation in development decision-making must be addressed from two directions. The first direction, a bottom-up approach, is principally manifested by the development of a robust and active civil society. Deirdre P. Shurland, Director of the Caribbean Alliance for Sustainable Tourism (CAST), noted that if the NGO sector “is weak, there is very little that will follow by way of sustainable development—tourism or otherwise.”⁸ The empirical evidence bears this out. Martinique has been relatively successful in terms of incorporating the tenets of sustainable development into its tourism sector. One observer attributed this success to the development of a series of environmental NGOs in the 1970s-1990s that helped, “convince economic elites and public officials to move from a traditional concept of tourism to a more modern view of sustainable tourism” (Burac 2006, 65). In particular, these NGOs successfully lobbied against policies intended to aggressively expand the island’s tourism sector. In 1995, three NGOs—Association pour la Sauvegarde du Patrimoine Martiniquais, Comité de Résistance à la Destruction de la Martinique, and Association de Défense Du Patrimoine Martiniquais et des Mal Logés—worked to ensure that Martinique’s Regional Management Plan carefully balanced tourism development against their likely environmental and land use impacts (Burac 2006, 71-

72). Amongst other things, the amended plan provided a limitation on hotel and resort development to minimize environmental destruction (Burac 2006, 72).

A robust and active civil society can provide direct or indirect solutions to many of the challenges to sustainable tourism development by promoting the development of a diverse economic base. Representatives of businesses unrelated or tangentially related to tourism can apply pressure on local governments to ensure that scarce public resources are not expended on tourism-related development to the exclusion of other economic sectors. Moreover, the development of local environmental NGOs will be vital for ensuring that environmental considerations—both of the natural resource and public health varieties—are fully accounted for in tourism development decisions.

The increased emphasis on local involvement also implies a need for a top-down approach, so that strategic coordination between the diverse local elements can be achieved (Barrow 2006, 341). There are already a number of regional bodies that could fulfill this coordinating role, such as the Caribbean Community and the Association of Caribbean States (Duval 2004b, 6).⁹ The role of these bodies is particularly important given the number of barriers to effective cooperative action faced by the peoples of the Caribbean. Some of these barriers include differences in language, culture, governance, history, and the nature of the development problems they face (Bayer and Lynch 2006b, 14-15; Lynch 2006, 161).¹⁰ The sheer number of political jurisdictions within the Caribbean region presents another obstacle to cooperation, as well (Lynch 2006, 161). Nevertheless, if these obstacles can be overcome, then a regional body can promote coordination and cooperation between Caribbean nations, such that many of the challenges they face in pursuing sustainable tourism development can be addressed more effectively.

At its most basic level, a regional coordinating body could provide a means for sharing information and best practices for addressing the challenges of sustainable tourism development. As a loose confederation, the Caribbean could function much like the United States, in which the states act as “laboratories” of policymaking. Under this paradigm, national Caribbean governments could experiment with specific policy prescriptions to address the challenges of sustainable tourism development. If a policy prescription ultimately proves successful, then it can be exported to the other nations in the region, where it can be adjusted to suit local needs.

The involvement of regional bodies is also necessary to overcome the lack of political will among the individual nations. Pan-Caribbean cooperation offers a means for avoiding the race-to-the-bottom phenomenon that can result from the stiff competition for tourism income between the island nations, especially from cruise lines (Bayer and Lynch 2006b, 15). Increasing competition for tourists and foreign investment among the Caribbean islands can induce them to sacrifice economic and environmental health, as well as social stability. Regional bodies could enable the Caribbean islands to establish uniform minimum standards to protect local economies and the environment and preserve social and cultural authenticity. For example, regionally observed standards could regulate environmentally destructive practices, such as artificial beach construction. Likewise, such standards might limit the amount of coastline that could be privatized, thereby preventing a significant source of social dislocation experienced by Caribbean populations. In addition, a regional body might provide the islands with a means for

negotiating with investors and multinational corporations as a cohesive unit, thus alleviating the race-to-the-bottom phenomenon. Lastly, members of a regional body can use organizational communication to monitor the development activities of other members to ensure that these activities are consistent with regional economic, environmental, and cultural standards. Where potential inconsistencies with these standards become evident, the other members can employ public shaming to pressure wayward members into resuming compliance with the prevailing standards.

Changing Tourist Consumption Patterns

While increasing local participation would provide vital support for the pursuit of sustainable tourism development in the Caribbean, the success of this movement will depend on whether consumption patterns change. Ultimately, demand will dictate tourism offerings in the region and the industry will not fulfill the three components of sustainable tourism development unless consumption patterns demand it (Shurland 2007). It is undoubtedly difficult to change an individual's consumption patterns. The tourism industry has a unique advantage in this regard, however: tourists can bring home new ideas (Barrow 2006, 334). In other words, because it can introduce tourists to new ideas and experiences, international tourism offers the opportunity to introduce people to new ways of thinking about the world and their roles in it. Perhaps as a result of their experiences in the Caribbean, traditional 3S tourists can return home with a new understanding of the economic, environmental, and cultural implications of their travels. This recognition could lead to the changes in consumption patterns necessary to enable the Caribbean region to pursue a sustainable tourism development strategy.

There is no simple way of employing incentives to encourage tourists to alter consumption patterns. The most promising approach of promoting change is through the application of information-based policy instruments; that is, actively educating tourists about the effects of tourism. An education campaign would induce foreign tourists to recognize that their activities might have significant economic, environmental, and cultural impacts on their travel destinations. Given that the chain of causation between the tourists' activities and their ultimate impacts is not always clear, there are significant barriers to achieving success with an education campaign. More to the point, it is not easy to envision what a successful education campaign might look like. One potential methodology might involve the presentation of an informational video on airplane flights en route to the Caribbean, though there is no practical way to ensure that the necessary information is presented in an effective manner or that the airplane passengers even watch the video. In the end, it seems that citizens of developed nations (i.e. the people most likely to visit the Caribbean for tourism purposes) will need to reorient their views towards the rest of the world. In many ways, the lack of understanding that fuels unsustainable tourist consumption patterns is a small part of the overarching problem of consumers in the developed world not carefully considering the full global impacts of their actions. Resolving this problem seems to be too great a burden for sustainable tourism development policy to bear alone.

CONCLUSION

Caribbean tourism development has resulted in a number of unique economic, environmental, and cultural challenges in the region. The concept of sustainable tourism development offers a

way to understand the causes and effects of these challenges, so that appropriate policy responses can be devised and promoted. In time, with more attention to the concept of sustainable tourism development from both scholars and the general public, perhaps the Caribbean tourism industry can be transformed to meet the needs of present travelers and hosts without undermining the ability of future generations to engage in Caribbean tourism activities.

ENDNOTES

1. Some critics dispute the view that tourism can provide a pathway towards economic development. Indeed, these critics view tourism as a form of neocolonialism (see, *e.g.*, Duval and Wilkinson 2004, 67-68).
2. In this regard, one Caribbean scholar has compared Caribbean tourists to locusts: they descend upon a tourist destination, engage in consumption patterns that ultimately despoil the local environment, and then move on to the next tourist destination where the process is repeated. John Hogue (doctoral student in Caribbean History and Culture, University of Wisconsin), in a telephone interview with the author, November 10, 2007.
3. The most widely cited definition is that provided by the Brundtland Report, which defined the term as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, 43).
4. Husbands and Harrison define a similar term, “responsible tourism,” as “a way of doing tourism planning, policy, and development to ensure that benefits are optimally distributed among impacted populations, governments, tourists and investors” (Harrison, Jayawardena, and Clayton 2003). In addition, the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States defines “sustainable tourism” as “the optimal use of natural, cultural, social, and financial resources for national development on an equitable and self-sustaining basis to provide a unique visitor experience and an improved quality of life through partnerships among government, the private sector, and communities” (Harrison, Jayawardena, and Clayton 2003).
5. These developed nations include the United States, Canada, and most parts of Europe. Even within this larger group of developed nations, the Caribbean vacation product is marketed in distinct patterns. The most notable trend is that specific Caribbean destinations are frequently targeted towards those developed nations with which they share language or history. For example, the English speaking, former British colonies, such as the Bahamas and Jamaica, tend to be more popular with American and British tourists. Similarly, the French speaking, former French colonies, such as Martinique and Guadeloupe, tend to be more popular with French tourists. This trend is becoming increasingly attenuated in recent years, however, as tourists seek novel and varied vacation experiences.
6. See, *e.g.*, note 1.
7. Most of the ships operated by the three leading cruise lines fly the flags of Liberia or Panama (Wood 2004, 160).
8. Deirdre P. Shurland (Director, Caribbean Alliance of Sustainable Tourism), e-mail message to author, November 5, 2007, 15:32:00 EST (on file with author).
9. Notably, neither of these organizations comprises all of the Caribbean islands (Lynch 2006, 161).
10. Ms. Shurland observed that the Caribbean “is a very fragmented region with more than 32 national jurisdictions—it is therefore very difficult to achieve consensus with so many differing interests—this is just being understood.” E-mail message to author, November 5, 2007, 15:32:00 EST (on file with author).

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