



Jörn W. Mundt

**Tourism and  
Sustainable Development**  
Reconsidering a Concept  
of Vague Policies

Extract, for more details visit [ESV.info/978 3 503 13041 2](http://ESV.info/9783503130412)

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ERICH SCHMIDT VERLAG

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# 1 The nexus between sustainability, development and tourism

“Truth gains more even by the errors of one who, with due study and preparation, thinks for himself, than by the true opinions of those who only hold them because they do not suffer themselves to think.”

*John Stuart Mill*<sup>1</sup>

The idea of ‘sustainability’ needs some clarification. Since some decades now the term has seen a phenomenal revival, not least in its combination with tourism. Within a fifth of a second, in January 2010 Google listed some 35,100,000 hits for the term ‘sustainability’ and 6,760,000 for its combination with tourism on the internet. 2,610,000 documents contained the expression ‘sustainable tourism’. Its French equivalent, *tourisme durable*, within the same time amounted to 1,030,000 hits, and for the corresponding German term, *nachhaltiger Tourismus*, some 35,600 hits were produced. Compared to the same exercise in February 2008, the number of websites and documents featuring “sustainability” within less than two years had increased by more than 80 per cent from the then 19,300,000 hits. The same is true for ‘sustainable tourism’. ‘Sustainability’ has even been adopted as a constitutional objective: Since the reform of 1999, ‘sustainable development’ is one of the general aims set in article 2 (2), and with regard to planning and agriculture, in articles 73 and 104 respectively of the Swiss Federal Constitution<sup>2</sup>. From this, one may conclude that sustainability is both increasingly popular and particularly that there is an understanding of what it actually means. The latter, however, is far from true. The term ‘sustainability’ may be plausible at first glance but, as Robert M. Solow, the 1987 Nobel Prize Laureate, has put it: “The less you know about it, the better it sounds”.

Nevertheless, on the canvas of ongoing discussions about the projected severe consequences of global warming and climate change for many regions of the world, most of it being attributed to side-effects of industrialisation and other human activities, the quest for sustainable development becomes more prominent. This is reflected by practically every government at least of the highly developed world, a vast number of government agencies, charities and other non-government organisations and international as well as transnational establishments being involved with

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<sup>1</sup> ‘On Liberty’, 1859; quoted from page 43 of the 1993 edition.

<sup>2</sup> In Germany, however, ‘sustainability’ is not mentioned in the constitution as it is wrongly asserted by Schmied *et al.* (2009: 24), thus it is not ranking as a constitutional national objective (*Staatsziel*) as they also claim. Switzerland world-wide so far probably remains the only country with such a constitutional provision.

aspects of sustainable development. A plethora of political statements and promises, rows of international conferences, and thousands of plans and papers which all strive for, or at least pretend to, more sustainable development, economies, and lifestyles have been delivered, held and distributed. With regard to development agencies, which since decades have formed a significant industry in donor countries, 'sustainability' has become yet another paradigm for their projects and continuous presence in the poorest countries of the world. 'Sustainability' sells well with the respective audiences and reference groups in the donor countries, thus making it easier to find societal, political, and financial support for their undertakings.

### **Opening a can of worms**

The Brundtland-Report (WCED, 1987) and the outcomes of the subsequent Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 have revived the centuries old concept of sustainability and shaped the global discourse ever since. Being conceived in line with the preceding Brandt-Reports (1980; 1983) on the North-South divide, the Brundtland-Report identified the increasing global environmental problems becoming apparent at that time as an overarching topic for both the development of North and South – thus its title "Our Common Future". Rather than keeping to the original principle – which denotes an equilibrium of the use of natural resources and their replenishment –, the modern understanding of 'sustainability' now puts the cart before the horse and focuses on a consequence of its employment when it addresses a present "need" satisfaction "without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987: 24-5). With respect to the consumption of natural resources, for instance, this would be the *outcome* of applying the principle, not the principle itself. Moreover, speaking of general 'needs' not only underscores an anthropocentric understanding of the environment, it also opens the door for bringing in additional features and dimensions of human existence. Most notably, this has been the case with the introduction of the 'three pillar' (or circle) concept of 'sustainability.' In this view, the overall concept rests on the three columns of ecological, economic, and social sustainability (often also referred to as the 'triple bottom line'). Particularly with regard to tourism, the adding of 'culture' to the supporting structure for the overall term 'sustainability' extended the concept even further when some sort of 'cultural integrity' is seen as a component of 'sustainable tourism' (WTO, 2004).

This permeation of the original principle with social features ultimately even led to the commingling of 'sustainability' with concepts of 'corporate social responsibility' (CSR) to the point of even regularly designating CSR-statements now as 'sustainability reports'. This is being advocated, for instance, by the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and seems to have become common practice now. It is not only confusing, it also eases the original concept of sustainability by distracting the attention from its core meaning through the introduction of additional characteris-

tics and dimensions. The increased propagation of CSR came in the wakes of the 1992 UN Earth Summit, where, due to smart industry lobbying, decades-long moves to introduce internationally binding legislation to regulate transnational corporations ultimately failed (Curbach, 2009). Instead, industry-led non-governmental organisations launched initiatives for the spreading of CSR-concepts as they are non-binding and give corporations a much wider scope of making their own decisions.

This marks a general shift from the environmental to even more complex and less specific issues under the ‘sustainability’ headline, prone to ideological hijacking. Exactly this seems to have happened over the past decades. The words ‘sustainable’ and ‘sustainability’ have become an inherent part of political rhetoric just as they are regularly represented in the vocabulary used in PR-related corporate language and in the wording of industry associations. As politics is much about words and terms and the way by which to ‘take possession’ of them, this is just another example for an old game by which meanings of words sometimes can even be used in such a way that they eventually denote the contrary of their original meaning.

A prominent case in point in political history is federalism. While in a European context the term has a connotation of protecting and furthering the rights of the states, in the United States of America it normally is associated with the strengthening of the central powers (Bieber, 2008: 122). This is to do with the historical debate about the US Constitution in the 1780s. The famous Federalist Papers by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay in fact

“stole a march on its opponents by claiming the good name of federalism for the new Constitution and its supporters. ... [T]he Constitution’s opponents – now the defenders of the Articles of Confederation against the much stronger central government proffered in the Constitution – thought themselves entitled to be called ‘federalists’. After all, they were advocates of loose con-federal government, and (as they saw it) the Constitution’s supporters were pushing consolidated or centralised government. Hamilton beat them to it, however, and his opponents were left in an awful political limbo: History knows them only as Anti-Federalists” (Kesler, 1999: x; see also Ketcham, 1986 a).

This 18<sup>th</sup> century debate thus forms an impressive early example of how to play political semantics and how important they are in political discourse.

The concept of ‘sustainability’ is in danger to undergo a similar process by which it will be eased and loose its conciseness, having to give way to cloudy, imprecise and non-binding declarations rather than to well-founded political concepts and actions. The fact that the adjective ‘sustainable’ has two different meanings, one in general language and one in science, makes it almost impossible for politicians to resist its suggestiveness. While in general language it means ‘steady’, ‘enduring’ or ‘long-lasting’, the scientific understanding, as explicated in more detail in chapter 2, more specifically denotes an ecological and economic equilibrium of

usage and regeneration. By deliberately mixing both levels of meaning – i.e. by speaking of ‘sustainable growth’ (i.e. Paqué, 2010) – it is possible to mask even the most heedless exploitation of resources by suggesting one uses the ecological meaning of the term when in fact one utters the contrary by simply saying this will go on forever (Grober, 2010: 17).

More subtly, this is underpinned by the introduction of ‘weak rules’ for sustainability, which work on the assumption that, at least partly, natural capital may be substituted by other forms of capital. While with ‘strong rules’ natural capital has to be held constant, with ‘weak rules’ this applies to the overall capital stock. In the updated national ‘Sustainability Strategy’, the Swiss Government, for example, opts for ‘sensible sustainability’, in their words a middle course between ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ sustainability rules. They follow the ‘weak’ rules insofar as in principle they agree that natural may be substituted by man-made capital (Schweizerischer Bundesrat, 2008). In fact, however, they do not even comply with ‘weak rules’ as there is no identifiable approach for employing the necessary account on the total capital stock. Instead, there is a confusing number of different dimensions and sets of indicators which are pretended to measure ‘sustainability’ – and with no information as to when it will be reached. Although some data may be given, for instance, per cent of reduction of a pollutant within a given time frame, no threshold values have been determined. This also holds true for other supranational (i.e. European Union), national (i.e. Austria, Germany, UK) or regional ‘sustainability strategies’ (i.e. German *Länder* and Swiss cantons).

The huge number of dissimilar indicators for the proposed different dimensions of ‘sustainability’ used in the context of evaluating ‘sustainability strategies’ (i.e. on EU and national as well as on state and sometimes even city levels) is another expression of a zeitgeist materialising himself in the form of digits. Whether or not the resultant dimensions and figures are always corresponding even with the vague modern concept of ‘sustainability’ more often than not would be a matter of debate.

### **Dogmatic symbolic politics**

While on the one hand side the original concept of ‘sustainability’ has become more blurred and less conclusive, on the other hand side the term ‘sustainability’ is on its way to become kind of a key word that has to be included in whatever topic one deals with. It’s not unlike the term ‘socialism’ in the so-called communist world of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Irrespective of the theme, there one had to first put the contribution in line with the basic principles of ‘socialism’ and the latest party convention resolutions of the ruling communist party (which more often than not tended to be in contradiction with the one before). Otherwise there was almost no possibility of getting research results published (not to speak of the consequences it could have had for the authors’ careers). Thus scientists (as well as everybody else) had to become masters of the application of the governing ideological semantics to basically

unrelated fields of research. When, as occurred recently in Australia, a PhD candidate was strongly advised by an academic supervisor to infiltrate the concept of 'sustainability' into a fine arts research proposal to better reflect the interests of key staff and the orthodoxies of a newly-established research centre, we are not too far away from the same kind of doctrinal interpretations asked for in totalitarian regimes or, for that matter, in fundamentalist religious communities or churches. Admittedly, it's not quite as bad as it has been with 'socialism' and in the long history of the Catholic Church. However, 'sustainability' is not only becoming an ideology as well but some of its proponents are also showing the related signs of intolerance towards those questioning the usage of the term and some of its implied aspects. Even though it may sound somewhat exaggerating and alarmist, we are in the danger of sacrificing scientific scrutiny for some sort of sustainable correctness, as it were, and the subsequent consequences for curtailing plurality and the freedom to speak or leave out. Yet, as we all know, freedom dies by inches and maybe sometimes even by millimetres, but at the end of the day incrementally we may have lost the significant metre that finally makes all the difference between being in a prison or outside of it.

This also holds true for the related topic of 'climate change' and the way it is being dealt with on a political level in order to reduce contributing green house gas emissions. A case in point is the 2008 decision by the magistrate of the medieval city of Marburg in Hesse (Germany). In order to actively contribute to climate protection, the respective ordinance was forcing the installation of solar plants on the roof of every newly built house and on old (including medieval) houses whenever any major work is done on the roof or the house is being extended. With this verdict, approved by the town council, the state on this level is not only disruptive of property rights but also prescribes a technology not suitable at locations in Central Europe with mainly cloudy or overcast skies. Germany only has an average of some 1,500 hours of sunshine annually with a mean absolute deviation of only 105 hours between weather stations covering the whole of the country.<sup>3</sup> Australia, by contrast, is averaging more than double the number of sunshine hours with vast areas in Western and Central Australia featuring in excess of 3,600 hours per annum<sup>4</sup>. As Marburg's number of sunshine hours is even below the national average, denouncing people objecting this decision as 'climate killers' and the like is inappropriate. The forced application of this technology is the most expensive and inefficient way of reducing carbon dioxide emissions in Germany (Weimann, 2008). In spite of this, some cities have announced to follow the Marburg example. However, the

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<sup>3</sup> data derived from an excel sheet with mean hours per month from 427 weather stations for the period from 1961-1990, published 2005 by Deutscher Wetterdienst; own calculations ([www.dwd.de](http://www.dwd.de)).

<sup>4</sup> Australian Government Bureau of Meteorology map of annual average daily sunshine hours measured over a period of at least 15 years; [http://www.bom.gov.au/jsp/ncc/climate\\_averages/sunshine-hours/index.jsp](http://www.bom.gov.au/jsp/ncc/climate_averages/sunshine-hours/index.jsp) (25 April 2009).

communal supervisory authority has disapproved of the decision and, as the town council insisted on their determination, there had been be a court case. The decision by the Administrative Court, handed down in May 2010, disapproved of particular regulations provided by the city's solar power ordinance, i.e. no provision of a transition period, no exception for very small houses (violating the *de minimis non curat lex*-principle), while accepting the city council's principal right to decree such measures. The court has been criticised, however, for stating that the specific topographic situation of the city, which is mainly located in a river valley, justifies the local reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by coercing house owners to install solar power plants although these emissions are of global nature and hence independent of local conditions (Kahl, 2010: 372). At the same time, referring to article 8 of the revised decree (Stadt Marburg, 2010 a), the utilisation of biomass (i.e. wood) for the heating of buildings is allowed in cases where buildings are not (sufficiently) exposed to sunlight or where it would contradict unspecified objectives of both urban planning and the protection of historical monuments. Although it is questionable that this will contribute to the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, it certainly adds to the discharge of carbon-particulate matter, respirable dust, nitric oxides, and sulphur oxide – substances that will significantly impact on the local quality of air and not generally on the world climate. In this case, the above mentioned grounds for restrictive local regulations would be given (*op. cit.*: 372), yet paradoxically the court approved of this article (article 9 of the original decree; Stadt Marburg, 2010 b). Moreover, the court did not consider the consequences of the decree for the medieval townscape (*op. cit.*: 374), one of the major reasons for tourists to visit the city. As the regulations for the protection of historical monuments do not embrace the whole architectural ensemble it was feared that historical buildings would have to be disfigured by the installation of solar power plants on their roofs. Thus finally, in December 2010 the State Parliament of Hesse decided to delete article 81 (2) of the building code on which the decree was based. Town councils now no longer have the right to decree special requirements for buildings.

While Marburg forms an example of political activities in Germany driven by the need to be seen to be doing something against climate change rather than by the necessity to get it right (that is, symbolic politics), on the other hand for Australia it would make a lot of sense to invest in solar energy and other forms of alternative power generation like wind farming or tidal plants for which there are many suitable locations. Until now, however, there is only very limited activity in these fields. Constrained by vested interests of the coal mining industry with their strong lobbying, state governments as well as the Commonwealth Government have not yet drafted and implemented respective regulations and incentives in order to change to alternative ways of energy production (the case of Western Australia has been highlighted by Pforr & Brueckner, 2009). Here, rather than in German medieval cities would it be appropriate to force the utilisation of, for instance, solar energy in the vast regions of the Australian continent with the sufficient number of

sunshine hours. Rather than installing solar power plants in Germany this has the potential to significantly reduce carbon-dioxide emissions, thus mitigate climate change and therefore contribute to the development of a sustainable economy.

### **Sustainability, development and tourism**

The use of inappropriate political measures in this context, however, is not confined to climate change mitigation; it also applies to the developmental aspects inherent to the modern understanding of ‘sustainability’. What is more, some of the proposed instruments for attaining more ‘sustainability’ even turn out to be counter-productive. This is particularly the case with regard to the measures by which highly industrialised service economies intend to contribute to the creation of a sustainability-based ‘Common Future’ of both the developed and less developed countries as demanded by the Brundtland-Report. The national ‘Sustainability Strategies’ mainly mention aid as a means of facilitating ‘sustainable development’ in these countries. The Austrian strategy, inter alia, lists expenses for poverty abatement and official development assistance (ODA) in per cent of the gross domestic product as indicators, yet without further specification (Bundesministerium für Land- und Forstwirtschaft, Umwelt und Wasserwirtschaft, 2006). The respective Swiss document (IDANE, 2007 b) advocates new forms of financing development aid and wants the gap between the rising demand for development aid and decreasing public funds to be filled by private initiatives, again without specifying any quantitative targets. The UK’s and the German ‘Sustainability Strategy’ arbitrarily set the target of public spending for development aid at 0.70 per cent of gross national income (GNI) for 2015 (HM Government, 2005; Deutsche Bundesregierung, 2004; 2008). As will be shown in chapter 3, most of the recipient countries of aid, however, are not in need of money but of statehood. Although nominally featuring governments, public administrations and a judiciary, they lack the state monopoly for the legitimate use of force. This translates into these institutions to be more of a façade, occupied by the governing élites through mechanisms of markets of violence and nepotism. Behind this façade, the incumbent tend to enrich themselves in every possible way. This is not only to do with corrupted officeholders, but also is a reflection of societal structures in these rent seeking economies. They bear on locality-based favouritism and dependencies which prevent the installation of productive organisations while at the same time requiring constant incomes from outside. These may be derived, for instance, from selling mining rights to foreign companies and/or receiving foreign aid. Without a poor and suffering populace this aid is not as easily available, thus development cannot be in the interest of the governing élites. Against this background it almost sounds cynical when it reads in the UK’s ‘Sustainability Strategy’ that “where aid is given, countries are empowered to decide their own priorities and needs” (HM Government, 2005: 139). This certainly is

one of the reasons why, after five decades of aid, there still is a significant number of countries that do not show any positive signs of development.

Tourism often is not only seen as “one of the world’s largest industries, accounting for nearly an eighth of global Gross Domestic Product” (HM Government, 2005: 60) and one of the catalysts for further economic growth, but also considered as an appropriate tool for developing backward economies (*ibid.*). In their view, the introduction of tourism constitutes an important path to development as “it has massive potential to support the economic and social development of poorer countries.” In this context, “[t]he Government ... aims to promote more sustainable patterns of tourism globally“ (*ibid.*). This is in line with perceiving tourism as an easy path to development because, at first glance, it does not require as much investment as the erection of industrial plants and, unlike the export of tangible goods, has the great advantage of not being subject to trade barriers. Yet tourism is not an isolated field of activity with different rules and therefore it has often been demonstrated in these countries that “tourism development enriches local élites and international and expatriate companies” (Jamieson & Nadkarni, 2009: 114) rather than being able to arrange for viable sources of income for the populace. In that regard it does not differ from any other economic activity. In order to change this situation, the concept of ‘pro-poor tourism’ (PPT) has been developed by Bennett, Roe & Ashley (1999; see also Ashley, Roe & Goodwin 2001) and been particularly linked to ‘sustainable tourism development’ by Jamieson (2003). Rather than waiting for the possible positive economic effects of tourism development in destinations to also trickle down to the poor majorities of the populations of less developed countries (rather indiscriminately referred to as “the South” by Ashley, Roe & Goodwin, 2001), with pro-poor tourism it is intended to let them benefit more directly. “The core aim of PPT strategies is to unlock opportunities for the poor, rather than to expand the overall size of the sector” (*op. cit.*: 2). Its further objective is “to change the culture of tourism development from one concerned with growth to one with the specific objective of improving the condition of the less fortunate in society” (Jamieson, 2003: 4).

Nevertheless, generally the establishment and advancement of an overall economically viable tourism sector requires a functioning state. As tourism on a larger scale is impossible without the provision of (mainly) public goods such as safety, security and a respective transport and communication infrastructure, the state in fact always is a co-producer of any tourism related businesses. Without the dependability of a functioning state and its effectively working public administrations these prerequisites for tourism development are not given. Whatever amounts of aid may be transferred and whatever projects will be funded within the frame of technical co-operation – without the implementation of property rights, functioning public administrations and judiciaries there is no case for development in these countries, let alone this being sustainable. Accordingly, there is not much use in promoting tourism when these requirements cannot be met. Hence, it is rather doubtful that it

will be possible to overcome the rigorous impediments arranged by the ruthless incumbent particularly in least developed countries for the general public not to be able to participate adequately in economic progress, let alone to found their own legal businesses and become independent entrepreneurs.

Although originally Ashley, Roe & Goodwin stated that “[p]ro-poor tourism overlaps with, but is different from the ‘sustainable tourism’ agenda” (2001: viii), already Walter Jamieson stated that “[s]ustainable tourism development involves promoting appropriate uses and activities to reduce poverty” (2003: 15). So it comes as no surprise that meanwhile pro-poor tourism “is sometimes referred to as Sustainable Tourism” (Scheyvens, 2009: 91), thus significantly adding not only to the already existing confusion about the meaning of ‘sustainable tourism’ but also to the general denotation of ‘sustainability’.

This confusion also originates in various approaches by both tourism researchers and international bodies like the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) and the European Union (EU) to characterise ‘sustainable tourism’, looked at in more detail in chapter 8. In the first place tourism by these designations more often than not is reduced to the level of destinations, thus excluding all aspects of transport. Secondly, by widening the original idea of sustainability even further and including besides social also cultural aspects, ‘sustainable tourism’ in that respect has been conceived as if civilisations were more or less closed entities and with no inherent societal developments. The conservation of both the human and physical environment (Butler, 1993: 29) and the coincidence with the “prevailing value system and cultural integrity” (Wahab & Pigram, 1997 b: 277) will make for ‘sustainable tourism’. The same applies for the World Tourism Organisation’s approach, which, amongst others, asks for the conservation of “living cultural heritage and traditional values” in destinations and for the provision of socio-economic benefits of tourism to be “fairly distributed ... and contributing to poverty alleviation” (WTO, 2004) and the European Union’s Tourism Sustainability Group calls for both “environmental and cultural protection” (TSG, 2007: 5).

Life styles, social structures, value systems and cultural traits, however, are not static but constantly changing. Even more so, culture becomes evident only from encounters with the other and evolves by processes of adoption, adaptation and assimilation of foreign elements. While tourism may be one of the agents of change both for the perambulated and, though to a lesser extent, the tourists, it certainly is not the only one. The development of local industries and the establishment of new companies, i.e. through inward investment, have not only the potential for sometimes even drastic transformations – they often lead not only to environmental problems but also to fundamental rearrangements of power, living conditions and social structures (i.e. Brueckner & Ross, 2010). Moreover, media, television and internet in particular, have a significant influence not only by transporting images and narratives from different cultures but also by changing the leisure behaviour patterns and life-styles through their consumption. Thus it would be hard, if possible at all, to

identify the influence of tourism on social and cultural changes within a community and separate it from other agents of change (Kibicho, 2009: 194).

When opening the perspective from focusing on destinations and also looking at other, often more relevant components of tourism, it becomes evident that ‘sustainable tourism’ may turn out to be an uncalled-for concept. Apart from a very small and, in terms of environmental impacts, negligible sector formed by tour operators, travel retailers, tourist offices and organisations, however, there is no such thing as a tourism industry (Davidson, 2005; Leiper, 2008). In other words: tourism is not an industry but denotes a *behaviour* which is facilitated by the combined consumption of parts of the goods and service production of a variety of different industries which will be looked at more closely in chapter 8. Hence, whether or not a holiday or business trip has been produced and consumed in a sustainable way is far less determined by the organisational means by which its components have been selected and combined, but by the methods by which each of these elements has been generated.

The most relevant components are provided by the transport and the hospitality industries – both not only cater for the needs of tourists but for a number of different customers. Airlines, for instance, do not only carry tourists but also forward mail and freight in the cargo bellies of their passenger aircraft; trains and busses also move commuters and the respective transport infrastructures are also being utilised for hauling goods; restaurants are catering for locals as well as for tourists and even hotels do not only provide accommodation for travellers but also house functions for the resident population, to name but a few. In other words: as tourism draws heavily on the outputs of other industries which are delivering only partly to tourism, it only can become sustainable itself if these industries, whose complete businesses in functioning states are subject to government regulations, are applying sustainability principles. Hence, addressing only the tourism-related output of industrial sectors in that regard would not make sense. The same applies to regional planning as tourism is only one of numerous possible land usages. If all these sectors were geared towards sustainability in its original sense, then tourism as an activity integrating their supplies and spatial structures would be sustainable as well.

### **Academic markets for ‘sustainable tourism’**

It has been the merit of the Brundtland-Report to initiate a global discussion about development issues, yet it is an interesting observation that the vague and debatable definition used by the Brundtland-Commission, which largely rests on human needs and ‘intergenerational justice’, more often than not even in scientific circles has only been echoed in the past decades. This led to a situation in which, as has been demonstrated above, the term now is being used indiscriminately and has become just another buzzword which may be used in whatever context.

This may have to be seen also in the wider context of the ‘publish or perish’ paradigm that rules much of the academic world. The immense amount of scientific literature that has appeared in the last decades on tourism in general and respective ‘sustainability’ concerns in particular is probably more to do with the rising numbers of tourism courses taught at university level during that time rather than a reflexion of a growing societal and political importance of these issues. In the English speaking world in particular, academic careers are largely based on formal criteria like, for instance, the combination of the number of publications in ‘anonymously refereed’ academic journals with their ‘impact factors’ (the number of citations journals achieve in other publications). Hence, the growing number of academic staff that goes with the rising number of courses has to publish in order to keep their university career opportunities. The attractiveness of ‘sustainability’-related research topics in that respect is not only a manifestation of the perceived overall importance of respective issues, not least also supported by ongoing debates about global warming and resultant changes of the world climate, but often appears to be also an unthoughtful matter of fashion. This has led to such a vast number of publications that the above mentioned paragon now probably reads ‘publish *and* perish’, as it is almost impossible to get an overview about what has been published on ‘sustainability’, ‘sustainable development’ and ‘sustainable tourism’, and respective issues. Not least it also led to the publication of a specialised academic journal since 1993 – the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*. Even though the initiators of this journal undoubtedly have been led by high academic and unadulterated virtues, its conception and publication has also to be seen in this wider context

The focus on measuring and quantifiable ratings by using indicators not only affects academic careers and, as we have seen, the ascertainment of ‘sustainability’, but is an expression of a general development by which more and more societal areas are increasingly being dominated. It is a partly contradictory entanglement of digitalisation, liberalisation, commoditisation and bureaucratisation that has taken place over the past decades and which has led to a degradation of reasoning powers, experience and practical reason (Rödder, 2010). Numerical data give an impression of univocal objectivity while at the same time reduce complexity and provide a sense of controllability. Thus, numbers are an attractive means for formulating strategies and may be used as target values for political goals, implying a numerical and overall objective measurability of the outcomes of policy-making. “It is not so that this thinking is really convincing: who does not mock the validity of the so-called rankings and their criteria? At the same time, sure enough, the aggrieved parties would like to be ranked as high as possible. That they adjust their behaviour, by the majority at any rate, against their own conviction, all the more reveals the hegemonic power of this ‘technocracy of innovation’” (*ibid.*)<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> All citations from other languages have been translated by the author.

It is not being denied, of course, that the concern with 'sustainability' often is a well founded and subject-driven activity. In the light of tourism being one of the world's most significant catalysts for business activities and employment, at first glance it seems more than appropriate to focus on it in order to gear the world economy along a more sustainable path of development. However, the term 'sustainability' in this as well as in most other contexts appears to be of rather imprecise character and unsuitable to scientific analysis. Thus, before describing, analysing and appraising respective approaches, it has been necessary to find out more about the concept of sustainability and its application to tourism.

## Sustainability, Development and Tourism: Back to the Basics

▼ Sustainability is a central term in today's political rhetoric. At the same time, sustainable development is one of the notions which mainly base on an intuitive public understanding and mark ideas almost nobody would deny. Thus, even in scientific discourse and particularly in tourism the term 'sustainability' is often being used without scrutiny.

This volume by Jörn W. Mundt contributes to a deeper understanding of the concept of sustainability by

- providing a closer look at the original definition and
- reviewing its conceptual history which helps to untangle the terminological confusion.

Finally, the book demonstrates that 'sustainable tourism' cannot be a political objective in its own right and is only achievable within the context

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