

The Importance of Preserving and Protecting Natural Resources for the Future of Tourist Destinations in Mexico

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Abstract

The indicators in tourism planning and activity are a fundamental tool to boost the protection and proper development of tourist destinations, which are considered a national and local key pillar for the economic progress of any place where tourism is applied as an activity.

This essay aims to reflect on the importance of preserving tourist and cultural sites, this derived from a growing interest of visitors to experience the culture and traditions of the places they visit around the world. The fundamental pillars of organizations such as the World Economic Forum (WEF) and its recommendations are intended to be valued, considering a potential positive future for tourism in Mexico and the world.

Keywords: indicators, sustainable protection, tourist destinations

1. Introduction

For the entire world, the preservation and protection of cultural and natural resources in tourist destinations is a matter of great economic importance for any country. Furthermore, due to the excessive growth of globalization and the accessibility of social networks for populations that increasingly value the popularity of certain tourist destinations, it is necessary to ensure that these resources are protected for future generations, in addition to caring for the historical niche that also values the continuity of its economic impact, resulting in national and local progress for the country where it is applied.

This issue is not minor, as cultural and natural resources are attractive to tourists and are considered a key factor in the decision to visit a tourist destination. Authors such as Buckley and Wittmer (2019) define ecotourism as a primary sector due to the impact it generates on the environment and local communities. However, there are some important aspects to consider, which will be analyzed during the development of this document.

It is therefore essential to address the conservation and protection of these resources as something that seeks to guarantee the medium- and long-term sustainability of the tourism industry, taking into account that the greater the visitation, the greater the economic impact, but also a greater deterioration of the place derived from tourist overcrowding.

It is reflected that for countries like Mexico, the preservation of cultural resources is essential to maintain the identity and heritage of a community and its country. When talking about cultural resources, aspects such as historical monuments, archaeological ruins, heritage buildings, national parks, museums, and art galleries, among others, are included, but the issue is deeper. Xu and Wang (2018) assert that promoting sustainability and economic development of local communities would cause a positive effect on the places and the population. However, measures must be sought that does not put at risk the Tourist Carrying Capacity of the sites and their deterioration.

In Mexico, these resources are an integral part of the tourist experience and attract thousands of visitors each year. According to data from the UNWTO (2020), more than 24.28 million international tourists arrived in the country, representing a 46.1% decrease compared to 2019. However, the UNWTO (2021) states that in that year, Mexico received approximately 55.3 million foreign tourists, resulting in an 8.2% increase compared to 2020. As a result, it can be understood that the tourism sector is one of the most important to the economy of Mexico and one of the industries with the greatest potential in the medium and long term.

However, the lack of adequate protection can lead to the deterioration and eventual loss of these resources,

which would be detrimental to the community, the tourism industry, and the national economy. Authors such as Holland and Rugendyke (2019) argue that contributing to education and awareness directly to those living in these communities is an indispensable aspect of achieving the objectives of tourism conservation and environmental protection.

On the other hand, the protection of natural resources is equally important. Authors such as Pratt (2018) emphasize the importance of sustainable tourism in economic development, arguing that it is a powerful tool for promoting sustainable long-term economic growth. Natural resources include biodiversity, landscapes, beaches, rivers, mountains, and forests, among others. These resources are essential to maintaining ecological balance and are fundamental attractions for tourists seeking adventure and contact with nature. Authors such as Kaefer (2022) discuss trends toward more sustainable and culturally focused tourism, leaving behind the mass tourism of all-inclusive hotels.

Nevertheless, the lack of regulations and adequate protection can result in the degradation and loss of these non-renewable resources, which can harm the tourism industry and the environment, making this issue essential to address in countries like Mexico where visitation is one of the main economic niches, but on the other hand, lax measures for their cultural and environmental care and protection are being observed.

2. Objective

This article proposes to gather and discuss general data on the importance of implementing effective measures that ensure the preservation and protection of cultural and natural resources in tourist destinations in Mexico.

This includes recommendations on the regulation and supervision of tourism activities, the sensitization and education of the local population and tourists, as well as collaboration between communities, businesses, and authorities to ensure the long-term sustainability of this economic activity. It will also evaluate some projects carried out by Mexico under parameters of economic-tourism improvement in coordination with environmental and cultural projection.

3. Methodolog

A theoretical review will be carried out on various sources related to the problem posed in the social, cultural, and environmental conservation of this economic activity, as well as the evaluation of necessary aspects that provide protection to tourism and ensure the long-term continuity of this activity. With the reference material gathered and the debate of pros and cons, some conclusions will be proposed to reference the practice of tourism and the implementation of a more beneficial model that helps to establish greater continuity in this sector.

4. Discussion

Tourism has become a social phenomenon that has increasingly developed over the years, with aspects such as technological progress, communication improvements, and infrastructure enhancements (roads, ports, airports) being important elements in the gradual cheapening and popularization of tourism, making it easier for travelers to find all the necessary comfort and safety to travel with guarantees from their places of origin.

Authors like Maza and Calfucura (2020) argue that the conservation of natural resources is essential to ensure the sustainability of tourism and to maintain the diversity and richness of tourist destinations. Likewise, it is understood that a site must undergo certain modifications to be developed for tourism, allowing for visitation and experiences that cater to different cultures, as well as a mass tourism carrying capacity that leads to greater economic benefits.

The massification of tourism can certainly cause some problems, such as environmental degradation and pressure on local resources, but these problems are minor compared to the economic income that can be generated. Additionally, the income generated by tourism can be used to improve local infrastructure and mitigate these negative impacts.

Based on this perspective, it is considered important to invest in the conservation and restoration of cultural and natural resources, ensuring their availability for future generations under these expansion paradigms that allow for greater visitation and the emergence of activity without loss. Authors like Koens and Koens (2017) argue that the participation of local communities is essential to ensure that natural and cultural resources are protected and conserved responsibly.

Mexico is a popular tourist destination, with a wide variety of natural and cultural resources that attract tourists from all over the world. However, the increase in tourism in Mexico has led to greater pressure on natural and cultural resources, requiring a sustainable approach to ensure their protection and conservation.

Mexico must adopt a more sustainable approach to tourism planning and management to ensure the long-term

sustainability of natural and cultural resources. Authors like Wittmer and Li (2019) argue that sustainable management must consider the environmental, cultural, and economic impacts of tourism to take measures to minimize them.

The involvement of local communities is important, where local communities should be involved in the planning and management of sustainable tourism in Mexico.

Another fundamental aspect is education and awareness as key factors for developing sustainable tourism in Mexico. Authors like Gössling and Scott (2016) argue for the importance of increasing environmental education for all sectors and ages, providing a path for caring about the importance of protecting and conserving natural and cultural resources, as well as raising awareness about their impact on the destination being visited.

Various analyses are discussed, such as that of the World Economic Forum (2021), which lists in the following image the position of the top 50 countries that value a set of factors and policies, enabling the sustainability and resilient development of the tourism sector, using data from the Travel & Tourism Development Index (2022).

These economies are examined based on five sub-indexes, 17 pillars, and 112 individual indicators, distributed among different columns that typify the socio-economic conditions, impact, and above all the demand for travel and tourism based on new global trends.

The analysis implemented in this research examines Mexico and its performance in the aforementioned topics. It can be observed that for the year 2019, Mexico was in the thirty-fourth position, and for 2022, it dropped to the fortieth, resulting in a six-position drop over three years. This reveals a lack of a scheme to position Mexico better in the face of new tourism sector demands. This aligns with Rentería and Sánchez's (2022) view that sustainable practices are the main driving force for future tourism.

In summary, the importance of Mexico in developing sustainable tourism lies in its potential as a tourist destination, the need to adopt a sustainable management approach, the participation of local communities, and the importance of education and awareness. By considering these aspects, the aforementioned country can protect and conserve its natural and cultural resources while maintaining its attractiveness as a tourist destination and ensuring the long-term sustainability of this economic activity.

In Figure three, we can see a breakdown of Mexico's tourism indicators, showing that it is the second country with the richest natural diversity and the fifth in the world in terms of cultural resources, positioning Mexico as an ideal country to lead sustainable tourism destination perspectives (Ramirez & Rangel, 2018). Authors such as López, Favila, Osorio, Hernández and Guzmán (2019) emphasize the importance of these resources for Mexico, as they can attract tourists, generate income, and contribute to the country's economic development. However, it is also essential to manage these resources carefully and responsibly to avoid any decrease in their value and conservation.

Firstly, Mexico's cultural diversity is an important tourist attraction. The country has a large number of archaeological sites, historical monuments, cultural traditions, and unique handicrafts that attract millions of tourists each year. Additionally, Mexican cuisine, according to Acle-Mena, Santos-Díaz and Herrera-López (2020), is globally recognized for its flavor and variety, becoming an essential part of the tourist experience in the country.

Promoting cultural diversity through tourism can contribute to the respect and valuation of local culture, as well as the preservation of national identity.

On the other hand, Mexico's natural resources are also an important source of tourist attraction. The country has a large number of natural landscapes (the second-best positioned in the world), from paradise beaches to jungles and mountains, offering unique experiences to visitors. Additionally, according to Mascareño (2020), Mexican biodiversity is one of the richest in the world, making it attractive for nature lovers and ecotourism. Sustainable tourism can contribute to the conservation of these natural resources, ensuring their protection for future generations.

Despite the benefits that cultural and natural resources have for Mexico's tourism and economy, it is important to consider that their inadequate exploitation can generate negative impacts. As mentioned throughout this document, mass tourism, pollution, degradation of cultural heritage, and excessive exploitation of natural resources can negatively affect local communities and the environment, diminishing the value of resources themselves. Therefore, it is essential to implement sustainable tourism policies and practices that allow for the conservation and proper use of these resources.

5. Pros y Cons

5.1 *The Impact of Tourism on the Environment*

An important aspect to discuss is the negative impact that tourism can have on the environment, such as the degradation of natural resources, pollution, and the overexploitation of resources. Authors such as Buckley and Barry (2019) argue that a sustainable approach to tourism planning and management is necessary to minimize its negative impact on the environment.

5.2 *The Importance of Cultural Conservation*

Another important aspect to discuss is the importance of cultural conservation in the development of sustainable tourism. Authors such as Gössling and Scott (2016) argue that the protection and preservation of cultural resources are essential to ensure the continuity of tourism.

5.3 *The Importance of Economic Continuity*

A third important aspect to discuss is the importance of ensuring the economic continuity of tourism activity to guarantee economic benefits. Authors such as Wittmer and Li (2019) argue that tourism can be an important source of income and employment in tourist destinations, but it is important to develop a sustainable approach that ensures long-term economic continuity.

5.4 *Collaboration Among Stakeholders*

Finally, it is important to discuss the importance of collaboration among stakeholders in the development of sustainable tourism. Authors such as Koens and Koens (2017) argue that it is essential to involve all stakeholders, including local communities, tourism businesses, and authorities, to ensure sustainable planning and management of tourism activity.

Tren Maya is a project to integrate Mexico under a cultural, natural, and sustainable tourism approach.

The Mayan Train project is a tourism development initiative that seeks to connect and enhance the southeast region of Mexico, including the states of Quintana Roo, Yucatán, Campeche, Tabasco, and Chiapas. The following are some reasons why projects like the Tren Maya can be beneficial to continue the cultural and sustainable tourism identity of a country like Mexico.

Preservation of cultural heritage: The main objective of the Tren Maya is to promote tourism in the region, but the preservation and promotion of the archaeological, cultural, and natural sites along the train route have also been considered. In this way, the project can help conserve and protect the cultural heritage of the region, while at the same time showcasing its history and cultural richness to visitors (Flores, Deniau, & Prieto, 2019).

Promotion of sustainable tourism: Tourism is a fundamental economic activity in Mexico, but it can also hurt the environment and local communities if not properly managed. The Tren Maya has been designed to promote sustainable tourism, which takes into account the protection of the environment, the conservation of local culture, and the improvement of the economic conditions of the local communities that are part of this project.

Boost to the local economy: The Tren Maya can help boost the economy of the southeast region of Mexico, which has historically been less developed than other areas of the country. The project has the potential to generate employment in the construction, operation, and maintenance of the train, as well as in the tourism industry in general. Additionally, by promoting tourism, it can generate income for local communities through the sale of handicrafts, local products, and tourism services.

Promotion of cultural diversity: Mexico is a country with great cultural diversity, and the Tren Maya can be a way to promote and showcase this cultural richness at a national and international level. Tourists visiting the region can learn about the different traditions, customs, and ways of life of local communities, which in turn can foster respect and appreciation for cultural diversity.

Strengthening of national identity: Finally, projects like the Tren Maya can contribute to the strengthening of national identity by highlighting and celebrating Mexico's cultural and natural wealth. By promoting cultural values and the country's heritage, the project can help reinforce Mexico's image as a tourist.

However, authors such as Gasparello and Rodriguez (2021) consider that it is important for the project to be managed carefully and responsibly to minimize the negative impact on the environment and local communities as much as possible. This project is expected to be one of the most significant tourism experiments in the history of Mexico. If executed carefully, it has the potential to become one of the leading models for sustainable tourism worldwide.

6. Conclusions

In summary, the degradation of a tourist site due to overcrowding can have a negative long-term impact on the local economy. If tourists do not find an attractive environment and adequate quality of life, they are likely to avoid visiting that place in the future. Additionally, the degradation of the environment and pressure on local resources can harm the quality of life of the local population, thus affecting their economy in the short, medium, and long term.

It is agreed that the degradation of the tourist site can have a negative long-term impact, but if adequate measures are taken to mitigate the negative impacts, a balance can be achieved between income generation and the preservation of the tourist site. For example, sustainable tourism policies can be implemented to control overcrowding and protect the environment and local resources, such as the tourist carrying capacity already used by places like Venice in Italy.

Another important aspect considered in this analysis is that Mexico has a great wealth of cultural and natural resources (ranked fifth and second in the world, respectively, according to the WEF, 2021). These two axes are essential for tourism activity and economic development with a view to sustainability and new travel trends after the Covid19 pandemic, where tourists seek an environment with fewer crowds and greater contact with nature.

For future studies, it will be fundamental to regulate and analyze the careful and responsible management of tourism to avoid a decline in its value and conservation. The implementation of sustainable tourism practices can contribute economically and educationally to the preservation of these resources, as well as to the economic development and consolidation of local communities.

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