

# Between Sustainability and Resilience: planning destination management of coastal areas in South Island, New Zealand

ASIF HUSSAIN \* [Asif.Hussain@lincolnuni.ac.nz]

MARIE HALEY \*\* [marie@theseventhgeneration.co.nz]

FRANCESC FUSTÉ-FORNÉ \*\*\* [francesc.fusteforne@udg.edu]

**Abstract** | This research approaches destination management in coastal territories from a holistic and sustainable approach, based on the understanding of sustainability as an issue that must consider economic, host, visitors and natural environments. Special attention is drawn towards the need for a holistic Destination Management Plan with a focus on sustainability by incorporating resilience into tourism management. In particular, tourism destination management is discussed in the context of the South Island, New Zealand. This descriptive study contributes to sustainable tourism development in the region, taking into account its pure landscapes, fragile infrastructure and its environmental dependence. The paper argues that the durability of the tourism sector is reliant upon the inter-related economic, host, visitor and environmental sustainability landscapes.

**Keywords** | Local community, regional development, sustainable tourism, New Zealand

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\* **PhD in Tourism and Development** from Lincoln University, New Zealand, **Founder and Research Associate** at Sustainability and Resilience Institute New Zealand

\*\* **Director**, The Seventh Generation, Akaroa, New Zealand

\*\*\* **PhD in Tourism, Law and Business** from the University of Girona, **Professor and Researcher** in the Department of Business, Faculty of Tourism, University of Girona, Catalonia, Spain.

## 1. Introduction, objective and method

Coordination and cooperation between stakeholders in a destination is the prerequisite to the sustainable tourism industry. A Destination Management Plan (DMP) is required to identify areas of synergy for collaboration in any tourist destination to access future investment (Pearce, 2016). Thus, the destination management plan can be used as a process for engaging visitors in a destination (Minguzzi, 2006) to ensure sustainable and resilient tourism. To achieve the desired outcome a robust collaboration approach is required between relevant agencies and stakeholders (Morrison, 2013). In particular, in a tourism destination, “the role of councils is complemented by the work of regional tourist organisations (RTOs), economic development agencies and macro-regional marketing alliances” (Pearce, 2015, p. 1).

Tourism management in a destination is complex (Zahra & Ryan, 2007), and it requires close coordination between all the elements that compound a destination, including attractions, amenities, accessibility, marketing and pricing (Pearce, 2016). The coordination and sustainability of these elements are crucial to identify risks related to the industry (Bošković, Saftić, & Trošt, 2010). In this sense, tourism research shows that cooperation with joint management between various institutions and organisations is vital to prioritise cost-effective solutions and thus plan memorable tourism experiences (Bošković, Saftić, & Trošt, 2010). This coordination also helps to attract visitors and ensure resource allocation in the management of a destination (Laesser & Beritelli, 2013). The approach not only allows destinations to be sustainable and resilient in terms of global shocks such as a pandemic to ensure that destinations are resilient in the changing tourism market.

Each tourist destination is unique and offers different visitor profiles and experiences. At the same time, each destination has unique inherent limitations, risks and considerations such as natu-

ral disaster risk and accessibility which is why it is vital to analyse the livelihood capital and assets of a destination in a geographical sense (Hussain, 2019). Tourism, being a ubiquitous industry, requires a holistic understanding of each specific place for tourism management, policy formulation, implementation and management of both the macro and micro-level interventions.

### 1.1. Objective

Within this context, the objective of this research is to discuss destination management in New Zealand South Island – the largest of the two major islands with an area of 50,437 km<sup>2</sup> (StatsNZ, 2000) – to approach, from a broader sustainable perspective, a destination management narrative where resilience is implemented through stakeholders’ cooperation and tourism development.

### 1.2. Method

A case study design is adopted (Yin, 2009) to analyse and interpret (see Tamayo, 1998) the context of New Zealand. In particular, from descriptive research based on secondary sources and previously published work (Brown & Rodgers, 2014), results discuss ‘how’ and ‘why’ destination management is featured in coastal territories from a sustainable approach.

## 2. Context: A Focus on Sustainability and Resilience

The broader concept of sustainability is defined in terms of “development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland, 1987, p. 43). To ensure sustainability, it is

essential to capture all components of livelihood that contribute towards sustainability (Allison & Ellis, 2001; Krantz, 2001) including physical, institutional, human, financial, social and natural capitals<sup>1</sup> (DFID, 1999; Hussain, 2019; Shen, 2009).

Sustainable tourism is defined as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the economy, the environment and host communities” (UNWTO, 2019). It is therefore argued that “tourism has the potential to contribute, directly or indirectly to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development [Sustainable Development Goals]” (UNWTO, 2018). However, Hussain (2019) argues that tourism sustainability cannot be achieved without incorporating resilience, which would generate risks in a tourism economy in the long run.

Resilience is the ability of a system to maintain a healthy structure of socio-ecological systems measured in terms of the degree of connectedness of any community (Bahadur, Lovell, Wilkinson, & Tanner, 2015; Bradtmöller, Grimm, & Riel-Salvatore, 2017; Pelletier, Hickey, Bothi, & Mude, 2016). Resilience is essential to ensure long-term sustainability (Béné, Newsham, Davies, Ulrichs, & Godfrey-Wood, 2014) and it is an important ingredient to maintain the healthy structure of social and ecological systems (Béné *et al.*, 2014; Bradtmöller *et al.*, 2017; Walker *et al.*, 2006). Here, Hussain (2019) argues that resilience is often overlooked as a key aspect of sustainability and must be incorporated into tourism management. Resources need to be utilised in a way that reduces stress and shocks on resources utilisation to achieve resilience in the long run. The resilience of a community is measured in terms of the degree of connectedness and the potential to withstand shocks (Bradtmöller *et al.*, 2017).

In this context, there is a strong need to incor-

porate resilience into tourism development (Lew, 2014), and the failure to do so misrepresents sustainability (Espiner, Stewart, & Lama, 2017). The resilience of destination communities and businesses engaged in tourism will determine the long-term sustainability of any tourism destination (Biggs, 2011; Simmons, Wilson, Doscher, & Hutchinson, 2017). For example, earthquakes in Christchurch and Kaikoura are prime examples of shocks that have had severe impacts upon the tourism industry, both locally and nationally over a long period (Simmons *et al.*, 2017).

Similarly, New Zealand has experienced tourism growth since the 1990s and is expected to rise to five million in the next four years (2024). However, because of the COVID-19 and prolonged restrictions in movements, New Zealand is facing a significant decline in international tourists (Barua, 2021; Wilson, Barnard, & Baker, 2020). The result is shocking to many tour operators in New Zealand as there are no domestic tourists either because of travel restrictions as the global pandemic has brought life to a standstill.

In this regard, the resilience of a destination is determined by the overall resilience and adaptability of its stakeholders, which is primarily ensured by the institutional resilience and management of the local, regional and national governments. GNS [Geological and Nuclear Sciences Limited] scientists warn that “there’s a 30% chance of the next [mega-thrust earthquake] happening within 50 years” (Cochran, 2017). This would demonstrate the urgency that necessary steps are taken to ensure the resilience of the New Zealand South Island tourist economy, infrastructure and host communities (Hussain, 2021).

Community resilience is needed to ensure adaptation and growth if disaster strikes. Several examples show resilience in the Canterbury region in the post-earthquake recovery period (Simmons *et al.*,

<sup>1</sup>Physical (basic infrastructure facilities and access to tourism market), Institutional (participation in decision making in tourism context and benefit sharing), Human (skills and employment opportunities), Financial (financial resources and benefits from tourism industry), Social (social inclusion, and culture) and Natural Capital (natural resource base in tourism context) (DFID, 1999; Hussain, 2019; Hussain, Fisher, & Espiner, 2017).

2017). These emerged as community-based initiatives that have led to a positive impact for both host communities and visitors, such as Gap Filler (Fusté-Forné, 2017). For instance, the diversion of Cruise ships to Akaroa from Lyttleton after the earthquake in 2011 has driven an expansion of the tourist economy in Akaroa. However, the economic diversification, congestion and pressure on infrastructure are now generating diverse opinions and levels of discontent within the Akaroa community (Hussain, 2014). Because of the tourism downturn due to Covid-19 many tourism enterprises including Ngāi Tahu Tourism, one of the biggest tour operator in New Zealand, has announced to close business of foreseeable future (RadioNZ, 2020). In a statement, Ngāi Tahu said: "the impacts of Covid-19 and the related moves made to protect New Zealanders' health have taken a significant toll on the tourism industry, from which Ngāi Tahu Tourism has not been immune" (RadioNZ, 2020).

### 3. Results: Managing Tourism in New Zealand South Island

The overall sustainability of the tourism sector is reliant upon the management of inter-related economic, host, visitor and environmental sustainability. A robust and growing tourism industry is reliant on visitors' desire to travel, which is maintained by reputation and valued experience (Hussain, 2019). Tourism growth is also reliant upon environmental sustainability, particularly the perception and mitigation of climate change as a global issue, as well as the experience of New Zealand in alignment with its 100% Pure brand. The infrastructure, destinations and activities made available by host communities also impact visitor experience discouraging travel and ultimately slowing the economic growth of the tourist market. Thus, all aspects of tourism sustainability must be ad-

ressed to grow the tourism economy in a holistic and interconnected sustainable manner. This section discusses the case of New Zealand South Island from its economic, host communities, visitors and environmental dimensions.

#### 3.1. Economic Sustainability

Tourism New Zealand has been promoting (TNZ, 2018) '100% Pure New Zealand' since 1999. In 2018, New Zealand welcomed 3.79m visitors (average spend \$3800), and it is expected that visitor numbers will reach up to 5.1m by 2024 (TNZ, 2018). The Tourism 2025 Planning Framework of New Zealand aspires to grow tourism revenue to \$41 billion by 2025 and is well on track (T2025, 2019). The figures may seem impressive, but they can also come with a cost. According to a 2018 Tourism New Zealand Report, the major concerns to the New Zealand visitor economy is "infrastructure, accommodation shortages, environmental damage, freedom camping, traffic congestion and road safety" (TNZ, 2018).

Despite two decades of global business and marketing, the tourism seasonality factor has remained a significant concern in terms of providing income security to tourism affiliated businesses (TNZ, 2018). To date, seasonal and regional dispersal of the New Zealand visitor economy has remained a strategic priority (TNZ, 2018). While this issue is crucial to maintain an economic sustainable development beyond the figures themselves, at the same time both public and private tourism sectors need to consider the effects of external factors such as the recent coronavirus outbreak.

#### 3.2. Host Communities Sustainability

The tourism industry contributes to New Zealand foreign earning but can also have a "significantly adverse impact on host destinations and

communities" (Shone, Horn, Moran, & Simmons, 2005, p. 85). Tourism development literature suggests that the careful consideration of a tourism destination plan must be guided by how host communities react to the impacts of tourism (Pearce, Moscardo, & Ross, 1996). To mitigate the negative effects of tourism on host communities, there is a need to identify the critical issues and bring forward creative solutions through a destination management process. This enables the participation of stakeholders ensuring the social license to operate while identifying priorities to utilise available resources to leverage and facilitate future investment and to ensure the economic, social (both visitor and host) and environmental sustainability of the tourism industry.

Host communities can be strengthened by a solid institutional leadership in tourism management with goals aligned to the New Zealand Regional Growth Fund and the UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals. These would aim to accelerate regional development by improving resilience and by diversifying the regional economy, increasing regional productivity, and creating more and better-paying jobs leading to sustainable economic growth. Furthermore, special attention should be paid to positive social outcomes derived from social inclusion and participation, and by enabling Māori aspirations in all aspects of the economy, also tourism.

In this sense, the spread of tourism inflow throughout the year will result in the dispersed involvement and engagement of host communities with the tourism industry (Butler, 1980). On the contrary, increase visitation in a tourist season may result in congestion and annoyance at the tourist destination (Butler, 1980). Once a destination reaches its maximum capacity, it may become out of fashion, and this would threaten its whole sustainability. In designing a destination management plan, it should be kept in mind not to overuse the resources of an existing destination. In this sense, it is necessary to create capacity through, for example,

smart design and technology, while developing alternative tourist resources through the local-based investment so that a tourist destination can remain in fashion for a long timeframe.

Each tourist destination needs to be portrayed in a way that encourages visitation in the off-season to experience its authenticity, that is, the broad identity of cultural and natural landmarks. In the off-season, the interaction of tourists with locals may act as a tourist attraction by itself. Niche markets, such as food tourism, may provide a way to interact with local culture, explore the nature of culinary heritages and discover the local sense of place through food (Fusté-Forné, 2016). This may provide all-year-round sustainable tourism that contributes to the effective regional development of other primary industries.

Furthermore, indigenous Māori culture is ranked highly in the New Zealand tourist experience and is an international point of difference (T2025, 2019). "A lot of people do not realise what a thirst there is for something genuine, cultural, spiritual and an experience people do not forget because of its real and obvious connection to the land and relevance to our humanity" as noted by Potae (NZHerald, 2017). In 2008, 361,000 overseas tourists reported visiting a Māori tourism experience. This number has grown exponentially with more than 50 per cent of 3.7 million overseas tourists engaging in Māori tourism experiences in 2017 (Mahuta, 2018).

Honouring the Treaty of Waitangi is much more than championing successful Māori business but it is about meeting the obligations under the Treaty and accessing the unique cultural aspects that will create sustainable tourism, sustainable communities, a sustainable environment and towards the Tourism Strategy 2025 goal of the target of \$41 billion in revenue from tourism by 2025 (TNZ, 2018).

### 3.3. Visitor Sustainability

The positive visitor experience is vital to ensure re-visits and create visitor loyalty (Chen & Chen, 2010). To sustain visitors in the long run, it is crucial to enhance the capabilities of existing destinations and capitalise on infrastructure development to identify the scope for additional visitor attractions. Development based research suggests that the economic return on investment for infrastructure development is between 30-40% (Canning & Bennathan, 2000; Estache, Briceno, & Shafik, 2004) which makes infrastructure development crucial for the successful delivery of economic sustainability. To ensure tourist and host sustainability, infrastructure must be improved continuously. While New Zealand counts on a small population across a long narrow island, regional governments need to leveraged investment to somehow facilitate infrastructure development – for example, as a response to earthquakes as major disruptions – to ensure that tourism is New Zealand's top export earner is resilient with sustainable growth.

Tourism destinations in the South Island have spread apart, and visitor travel to most destinations is by road. For instance, the closest major tourist destinations from Christchurch are Kaikoura, the West Coast and Tekapo. All these destinations are approximately 200 km away and require a travel time of three hours on often narrow winding New Zealand roads. Roads are considered to be the most significant components of tourism systems and are responsible for connecting tourists to and within destinations (Force, 2003; Khadaroo & Seetanah, 2008). Tourism research shows that tourists demand efficient and modern transport infrastructure when they visit a destination (Khadaroo & Seetanah, 2007; Prideaux, 2000). Safe transport infrastructure creates a positive tourism experience, and roads can be an attraction in themselves while travelling to a destination (Hussain, 2019). New Zealand roads offer a scenic journey (Fusté-Forné, 2018; Viles & Rosier, 2001).

Furthermore, transport infrastructure (roads) facilitate the flow of goods and services and leads to further regional economic development (Ghosh & De, 1998; Kumaraswamy & Zhang, 2001).

### 3.4. Environmental Sustainability

The South Island of New Zealand is heavily dependent upon the natural environment and world-class scenic beauty. New Zealand has the highest economic dependence on the situation in the OECD (Swaffield, 2010). In this context, environmental sustainability emerges as a crucial issue in the frame of sustainable development.

Climate change is perhaps the most significant global risk to the New Zealand (tourist) economy. New Zealand is a peripheral destination that is largely reliant on air travel to deliver tourists. New Zealand is at a considerable distance for international travellers, and even the growing market of Asia is a 12-14-hour flight away. Besides, most internal travel is heavily dependent upon polluting transportation such as cruise ships, private or rental car (Archer, Cooper, & Ruhanen, 2005; Davenport & Davenport, 2006; Gössling, 2002). New Zealand, as a whole, needs to mitigate the perception of high carbon tourism. Thus, most travel in New Zealand is reliant upon cars; many backpackers buy cheap vehicles and self-drive around the country as the public transportation service may be expensive, infrequent and mostly unconnected to other transportation options at destinations. Well-planned and managed tourist transportation services would allow for the reduction of 'dirty travel' and would lessen the demand for infrastructure.

Robust tourism management also encourages environmental sustainability, helping New Zealand meet climate change commitments. A shift in New Zealand to clean energy would boost the tourist perspective of their 'low' environmental travel costs. Electric vehicles and rental fleets, investment into renewable energy sources by local com-

munities and well-told stories of carbon sequestration by regenerating natural reserves such as Hīnewai Reserve (for Air New Zealand) would ensure tourists feel that they are part of the solution rather than part of the cause. This would also meet with the Pure New Zealand campaign by involving local people and businesses from a bottom-up process. In this sense, The New Zealand conservation story and environmental protection is a tourist attraction and has the potential to be a crucial sector of the tourist economy. Working alongside, the Department of Conservation, the Ministry of Primary Industries and the Ministry for the Environment would create a win-win situation for local South Island governments. Furthermore, by leveraging government funding and protecting the natural environment, New Zealand tourism can be made sustainable for sustainable tourism, and a sustainable world.

#### 4. Discussion and conclusion

The cooperation between stakeholders is the critical factor to 'sustain' a tourist destination. Stakeholders need to influence all aspects of management in any destination at micro and macro levels by enhancing visitor experiences and building resilient communities, businesses and environments. Consequently, there is a need for a systematic examination of popular destinations in the South Island by analysing physical, institutional, human, financial, social and natural capitals, and institutional arrangements, all of them being a precondition to efficient sustainability and resilience capacity building in a destination. Destination management needs a coordinated understanding of economic, host communities, visitors and environmental sustainability to fabricate sustainable and resilient tourism products. Tourism products and experiences in a destination are not viable without incorporating a balanced perspective of all these elements, as developed in Figure 1.

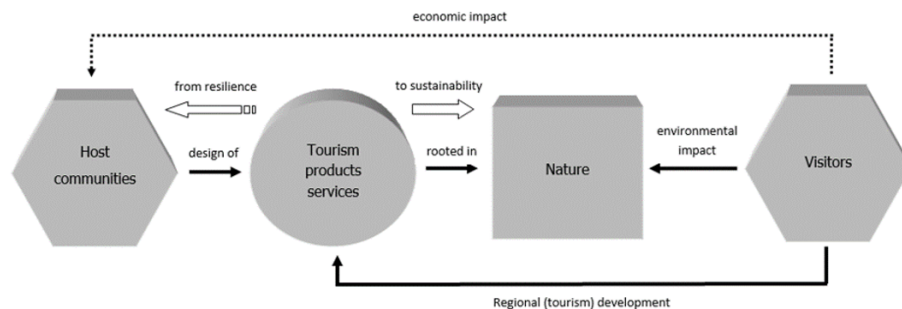


Figure 1 | Framework of sustainable tourism development in coastal territories

In this sense, a collaboration between various institutional agents ensures availability and access to multiple resources at a destination. This could be done by extensive consultation with stakeholders including community organisations (conservation groups, Māori, community groups), community board members or representatives, tourism enterprises (tour operators, information centres), local councils, and government agencies. This would

allow destination stakeholders to:

- a) Identify issues, opportunities, priorities and actions to meet the needs of residents and visitors' expectations.
- b) Create, manage and improve visitors experience by developing sustainable tourism products and services in a destination through stakeholder engagement.

This descriptive research contributes to the understanding of destination management as an ongoing process in which stakeholders and public and private agencies work together in active collaboration. The study provides an insight to mitigate current impacts while planning the future from a sustainable global perspective which considers both economic and natural sustainability, which pays attention to both locals and tourists, and which considers the Sustainable Development Goals defined by UNESCO. Because of the focus and limited nature of the research, it may serve destination managers in New Zealand South Island, both at local and regional levels, to develop sustainability from a holistic perspective. In this sense, the study highlights and stresses the importance of various elements to ensure a notion of multiple sustainability into their tourism management, which positively influences the land and its people. Added to this, outputs from this research may also serve in tourism development in other geographical contexts that also face a high environment dependence. Here, Hussain (2019) argues that resilience is often overlooked as a key aspect of sustainability and must be incorporated into tourism management. Resources need to be utilised in a way that it reduces stress and shocks on resources utilisation to achieve resilience in the long-run. The resilience of a community is measured in terms of the degree of connectedness and the potential to withstand shocks (Bradtmöller et al., 2017).

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