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Introduction

To start this book, let's open with a simple question: when you think of the word complex or complexity, do you tingle with excitement at a web of interactions that all play a part in forming a whole? Or do you groan with dismay at having to understand a messy system in front of you?

Hopefully it is the former, as the focus of this book, sustainability, requires us to engage with complexity, in ways that we are typically not used to in the West with our focus on KISS (Keep It Simple Stupid). Sustainability is going to require a whole new way of thinking. In this first edition on this book, I invited you to think of sustainability as three juggling balls – representing people, planet and profit, where your job is to keep those three balls flowing through the air, always in motion, never resting. This metaphor addresses the dynamic nature of sustainability: as in the art of juggling you'll need focus (what am I trying to achieve?), skill (what resources, knowledge and experience do I have at my disposal?) and practice to keep all three balls moving gracefully through the air. In this second edition, I have added a focus on complexity, because ultimately, sustainability comes down to a set of decisions in response to your environment, one that is complex and changing.



The first aim of this book is to help you focus within a complex environment, decide what you want to achieve in terms of sustainability. And maybe to start with, you will only be able to keep two of those balls in the air, perhaps even only one. The second aim of this book is to highlight the types of resources and knowledge that you'll need to keep those balls in the air. This may include environmental impact assessments and indicators, an awareness of policy and regulations, or techniques to successfully engage with community. Finally, the third aim of this book is demonstrate how you practice these things. We'll do this by looking at actual businesses and how they manage to keep two or three balls in the air at any one time.

The structure of this book is geared towards understanding how an individual makes decisions that move towards or away from sustainability practices within a given set of influencers. These will be the focus of Part 2: Managing for Sustainability and Part 3: The Future of Sustainable Tourism. First, however, we must understand what sustainability means in a tourism context, why it has proven so difficult to implement, and what both positive and negative outcomes of sustainable tourism might look like. Combined with the chapter on ethics, this will give you a lens through which to view the implementation of sustainability.

Key words and concepts

- Sustainability
- Three pillars of people, place and profit
- Sustainable tourism
- Brundtland report
- Sequence of tourism platforms
- UNEP and UNWTO
- Sustainable Development Goals
- One Planet Programme
- Tourism master plans
- Ecotourism
- Complexity
- Planetary boundaries

1.1 The concept of sustainability

To begin, let's consider how we should think about the broader concept of sustainability.

Sustainability, when stripped right back to its bare bones, is about relationships. Relationships to people (social sustainability), planet (environmental sustainability) and profit (economic sustainability).

But what does that mean? It's your relationships with your employees, your customers, your dependents and family. It's your suppliers, local producers, the community who share the same space and resources as you. It's the people who set the rules for what you can and can't do. It's also the people who look to you for leadership, as a role model to set the best example of what might be. It's how you treat those close to you, as well as those who may seem different for their gender, age, education, religion, race, and ability.

It's also the environment in which you live. The landscape, both biotic (living) and abiotic (non-living). It's how you change the habitat around you, by using rocks and wood as construction material, clearing the landscape to build tourism infrastructure, using water for cleaning and production, lighting up spaces that were previously dark. It's how you dispose of your waste material, on land, in water and in the air. It's the other creatures that share your space – those that may need the same resources as you. It's both direct and indirect, through your suppliers, as well as the practices that you encourage or discourage at your site.

Finally, it's your wallet, your banker, your shareholders, your dependents, your supply chain, your employees. It's also your financial security, your level of comfort, your ability to take care of the unexpected, to cope with a rainy day. It's your dreams... of what might be and how to get there.

Ultimately these are all facets of the same thing: your ability to function well, both now and in the future. And in the next section, we will get to the official definitions of sustainability and how they align with this fuzzier concept of sustainability. Intermingled with this, it's your sense of your place within a complex web of other beings, some of whom will have competing needs, as well as rules