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Environmental Impacts of Tourism

Introduction

The environment is made up of both natural and human features. Human settlements set in the countryside may contain a large number of attractions for tourists. Often the natural environment is referred to as the physical environment. The natural or physical environment includes the landscape, particular features such as rivers, rock outcrops, beaches and also plants and animals (or flora and fauna), many of which are tourist attractions and have been discussed in Chapter 3. This chapter is concerned with the impact of tourism on the environment.

Key perspectives

The environment is being increasingly recognized as the major resource for tourism. It has been noted that tourism depends ultimately upon the environment, as it is a major tourism attraction itself, or is the context in which tourism activity takes place (Holden, 2008). However, tourism–environment relationships are complex. There is a mutual dependence between the two, which has been described as symbiotic (Budowski, 1976). Williams (1998) explains this relationship as one in which tourism benefits from being in a good quality environment and this same environment should benefit from measures aimed at protecting and maintaining its value as a tourist resource. Whether or not the relationship is beneficial, what is clear is that the environment is affected by tourism and the environment also has effects on tourism.

As we have seen in Chapter 6, Hall and Page (2014) refer to the limitations of the use of the term tourism impact, when it is considered as just a one-way process. Hence, it is the existence of a two-way process between tourism and the environment that makes the relationship so important in any discussion of the geography of tourism and the case study at the end of this chapter, focusing on the Norfolk Broads, provides more details on the complexity of this relationship.

In the post Second World War period and especially since the beginning of mass tourism in the 1960s, it has become clear that the relationship between tourism and

the environment has become unbalanced, meaning that in the past 60 or so years, tourism has become a major cause of environmental damage to the environment, rather than a force for enhancement and protection.

Despite a general awareness of the impacts of tourism on the environment, there is very limited in-depth knowledge and long-term understanding of these impacts due to a number of factors:

- Research into the environmental consequences of tourism tends to be reactive (in other words after a problem has occurred), so there is a lack of baseline information to compare with and then monitor any changes.
- It is often not easy to separate the environmental impacts that are attributed to tourism from other commercial/industrial activity and even non-human induced natural environmental changes.
- It can be difficult to separate changes made by tourists from those made by locals.
- The impacts of tourism may occur over a long period and can be cumulative and incremental rather than being evident through a sudden change.
- Spatial displacement of impacts is relatively common in tourism; for example, aircraft emissions contribute to climate change, but the effects are felt in locations distant from the place of emissions.

(after Holden, 2016).

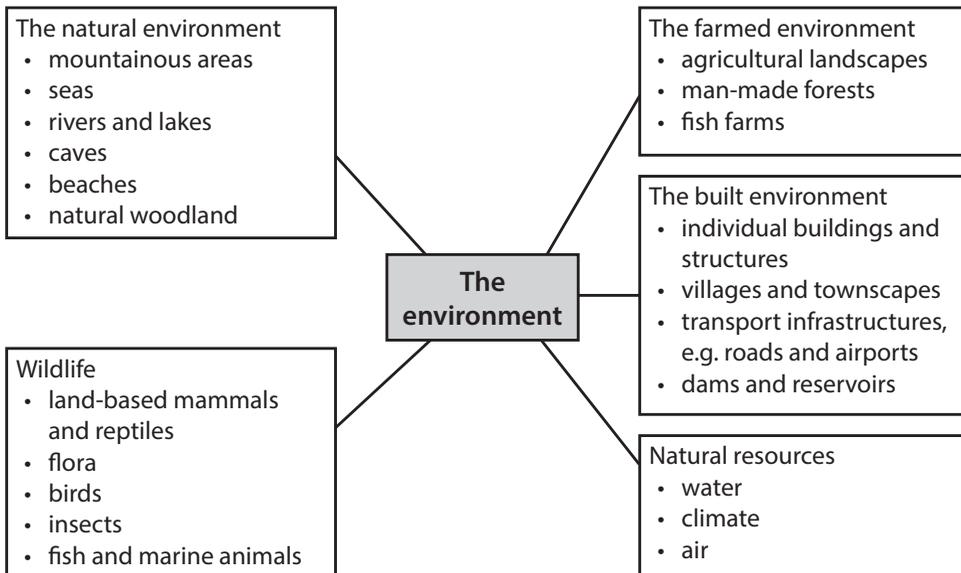


Figure 7.1: The scope of the environment (source: Swarbrooke, 1999)

The term *environment* is often assumed to mean no more than the physical or natural features of a landscape. However, as Figure 7.1 shows, according to Swarbrooke (1999), there are five aspects of the environment. These are: the natural