

# 7

# Measures and Tools

## Introduction

The old adage says that “you can only manage what you can measure”. Yet, it is also perhaps true that in the tourism space, where the public and private domains collide, perhaps a little more imagination is required, and sustainable tourism management tools may be required to cover the intangible aspects of tourism as well as the more tangible aspects.

This is because the public domain, as highlighted in Chapter 2, holds places and spaces in the public trust – the places and spaces that we share with family and friends, that recharge and rejuvenate, that hold aesthetic, recreational, functional and emotional values for us, as residents of those spaces and places. Meanwhile, the private sector sees those same places and spaces as opportunities to generate a return on investment, often transforming them into economically productive areas through processes of urban regeneration or concessions on public land.

It is in this chapter on sustainable tourism management tools that the previous chapters on systems, impacts, governance and collaboration, as well as ethics and values, come together to deliver the ways in which we can track how well we are managing tourism for a Triple Bottom Line approach to sustainability, minimising the negative outcomes while maximising the positive outcomes of tourism, for multiple stakeholders and across multiple scales.

It is also in this chapter that we practice our various juggling techniques, and once we have learned how to keep the three balls up in the air, we will take a step back and look at how elegant this process can be when applied to the practice of tourism in Chapter 8.

For now, however, we want to focus on the number of tools available to us to track our progress towards sustainable tourism. These tools come in a range of formats – from measurement instruments to regulatory frameworks and voluntary tools. They can be directed at tourists, tourism businesses, tourism employees, and/or destinations and destination management or marketing organisations. This chapter will introduce you to the range of tools available to you, how they work and what they do, so that you can best select which

ones will work in any given context. Briefly, they can be grouped according to their main purpose, i.e.

- 1 **To measure levels of impact**, and changes (or potential changes) in impacts.
- 2 **Command and control**, whereby governments can exert strict control over development.
- 3 **Economic incentives**, that will influence behaviour and send signals through the market.
- 4 **Voluntary practices**, that showcase best practice to be adopted by stakeholders.
- 5 **Supporting mechanisms**, which will influence the development of sustainable tourism in other ways.

The remainder of this chapter will cover each of these areas separately, examining the general principles of each type of tool, what they look like in practice and how well they have served the needs of sustainability in tourism. It is important to note as well that they will often be used in ways that are, or at least should be, mutually reinforcing and complementary.

#### Key words and concepts

- |                                   |                              |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| ■ Visitor management tools        | ■ The green economy          |
| ■ Environmental Impact Assessment | ■ Demarketing                |
| ■ Limits of Acceptable Change     | ■ Eco-certification          |
| ■ Indicators                      | ■ Interpretation             |
| ■ Tipping points                  | ■ Soft management techniques |

## 7.1 Visitor impact measurement tools

While the notion of sustainable tourism covers the three pillars of sustainability, social, economic and environmental, its origins are very strongly embedded in concerns about the environmental impacts of the sector. This is still true today, with many of the arguments surrounding tourism's lack of sustainability focussing on its carbon footprint and GHG emissions associated with travel to destinations.

There is a significant number of visitor management tools that have been proposed in different areas of the world, for example:

- Visitor Impact Management (VIM)
- Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP)
- Visitor Activity Management Process (VAMP)
- Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS)
- Tourism Optimisation Management Model (TOMM)

This section will cover two main impact measurement tools and models that are relevant for tourism, Environmental Impact Assessments and Limits of Acceptable Change. Both of these systems rely on identifying and monitoring sustainability indicators and managing to those indicators in an adaptive manner, and often in conjunction with some sort of zoning plan.

### **Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs)**

EIAs are a key way of understanding the impacts of any future development on the environment, by exploring the relationship between specific human activities and the social, economic and environmental contexts in which they take place. An EIA provides a systematic way of evaluating the positive and negative impacts of any proposed development, with the aim of directing decision-making towards sustainability (Hughes & Morrison-Saunders, 2015).

EIAs are relevant to sustainable tourism management in three ways:

- 1 They specifically value economic, social and environmental contexts equally, and seek to maximise benefits at the same time as minimise negative impacts;
- 2 They expand the scope of consideration beyond the immediate development proposal, to take into account the interconnected, systems nature of any development;
- 3 They adopt a governance approach that includes a broader community of interest, including governments.

Most important is the holistic, systems approach adopted by EIAs: they focus on the complexities and interconnectedness of socio-ecological systems, moving from a single site to include the broader community and geographic region. Transferred to a sustainable tourism context, the EIA process would encourage sustainable tourism managers to move beyond the analysis of any one activity, attraction or destination to consider all parts of the tourism system. For example, the carbon footprint of flying *to* a destination would be captured when accounting for the environmental impacts of tourism *in* that destination.

Furthermore, managers must also focus on maximising the social, environmental and economic benefits of tourism, as well as minimising negative impacts. Again, this is best achieved through a systems approach that moves away from a traditional notion of achieving balance within the system and instead embraces the dynamic nature of tourism systems (e.g. the conditions at tourist-generating regions, changes in transport modes, efficiencies, etc., and conditions at the destination, to name only parts of the system). This also ties in with the concept of resilience, that is, the ability to recover quickly from challenges or crises, by considering the state of a system as a whole and the varied dynamics within that system. Thus, resilience refers to an iterative management process where continuous monitoring and learning are used to improve long-term management outcomes.