

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE SOUTH PACIFIC

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*Nations of the South Pacific face a number of major challenges with respect to sustainable tourism development. Much of the literature presents overtly pessimistic conceptualisations of South Pacific nations as environmentally vulnerable and economically dependent. This paper argues that the narrative concerning sustainable tourism development in the South Pacific is incomplete and the predominant narrative viewing the South Pacific nations as economically and environmentally vulnerable is too simplistic. Additionally, this paper challenges the narrative that high or mass levels of tourism within the South Pacific cannot be sustainable. Based on experience derived from operational experience and consultancy, this paper provides insights into the challenges and possibilities for sustainable tourism development in the South Pacific.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Much of the literature concerning small island states and sustainable tourism development is written by Western scholars who take a pessimistic or ‘fatalistic’ position (Campling, 2006). The principal narrative of many articles is that developing nations are blighted by

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economic and environmental vulnerability and sustainability is a largely unattainable dream (Scheyvens & Momsen, 2008). These themes are important warnings to the governments of developing nations, but do not recognise the potential of nations to chart self-determined futures for their own people (Scheyvens & Momsen, 2008). In this way, the narrative concerning sustainable tourism development within developing nations remains incomplete. More concerning is that, by suggesting that developing nations are unable to achieve sustainable tourism development, local people may become disheartened and not seek to determine appropriate paths to achieve sustainability. Through conversations with South Pacific National Governmental Organisations and tourism operators, a review of policy papers presented by various governments of the South Pacific, and the expertise of this paper's primary author, this paper aims to provide a more holistic narrative of the challenges, achievements and possibilities for sustainable tourism development in the region. While it is particularly difficult to generalise the findings between different regions, this paper argues that many of the challenges of South Pacific nations are shared by other developing nations. This paper does not purport to be all-encompassing and neither does it attempt to draw any definitive conclusions about the presence or absence of sustainable tourism, but rather seeks to identify issues for further investigation.

Sustainability is a concept that is complex and open to interpretation. This paper adopts the understanding of 'sustainability' adopted by the United Nations Environment Programme (2004) as it recognises that sustainable tourism refers to much more than simply a physical environment (Ryan, 2001).

The United Nations stated that sustainability refers to the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance must be established between these dimensions to guarantee long-term sustainability. This requires tourism development to meet three key criteria:

- 1) Tourism development must make optimal use of environmental resources, maintain essential ecological processes and help conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.
- 2) Tourism development must respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.
- 3) Tourism development must ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders

that are fairly distributed, including stable employment, income generation and social services to host communities, and contribute to poverty alleviation (Dodds and Butler, 2010).

The discussion within this paper is built upon years of involvement with the South Pacific nations and tourism operations, both direct and indirect. The primary researcher is himself a Solomon Islander and it is hoped this paper explores sustainable tourism development from a perspective grounded in cultural realities. In this way, this paper supports the argument that tourism must be explored from the perspective of the culture that is being experienced (Lanfant, 1993).

## **THE SOUTH PACIFIC**

Any meaningful discussion of tourism in the South Pacific consider a region's broader geographic, historic, economic and socio cultural characteristics. These constitute an external environment that determines whether sustainable tourism can be achieved and whether such tourism has any relevance (Weaver, 2001). Another purpose of this review is to emphasize the status of the South Pacific as a highly complex region which displays considerable internal diversity.

Physically, the South Pacific region can be divided into Polynesia and Micronesia on the one hand and Melanesia on the other. The first two sub-regions are characterized by extreme insularity, comprising small island entities separated by enormous expanses of ocean. In contrast, Melanesia comprises large islands clustered within relatively compressed archipelagos that account for 97.9 per cent (542 230 square kilometres) of all land in the study region (GVB, 1997). Melanesia is also distinguished within the South Pacific for its variety of landforms, relatively undisturbed habitat, and high levels of biodiversity. The entire study region is susceptible to cyclones, while seismic and volcanic activity are characteristic of plate boundary areas such as Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Tonga.

The differences between Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia extend to both cultural and human geography. However, the lack of land in these sub-regions results in population densities higher than those of Melanesia and consequently a higher degree of human-induced environmental degradation both on land and sea. Ethnically, each of the sub-regions is associated with a separate indigenous racial group after which each region is named, while allowing for a significant degree of intermixture and acculturation as a result of ongoing historical contact, particularly in transitional border islands. Pre-European elements of these cultures

remain robust because the South Pacific was one of the last regions to be incorporated into the global capitalist economy. This is especially true with regard to language and communal land tenure systems, although other attributes have been profoundly changed during the past 150 years of European contact and subsequent acculturation. Nevertheless Fiji and New Caledonia are the only two entities where non-indigenous groups are roughly comparable in population to indigenous people. As a region, the South Pacific is characterized by high fertility rates and, despite high rates of out-migration, there remains a steady population increase and added pressure on natural resources (McKnight, 1995).

Politically, the South Pacific has the highest concentration of dependent political units (i.e., ten), indicating that this region is also the last to experience the de-colonization process. Melanesia has no remaining dependencies, but is characterized by a high level of political instability, as evidenced by recent upheavals in the Solomons and Fiji. Bertram and Watters (1985) characterize the South Pacific as a region where the MIRAB syndrome (i.e., migration, remittances, aid, and bureaucracy) is prevalent, reflecting a reliance upon a narrow range of economic activities, and subsequently severe trade deficits and dramatic fluctuations in economic performance. The MIRAB syndrome is most apparent on small outlying atolls (Krause, 1995), but is evident in Melanesia despite that sub-region's much greater endowment of natural resources. In terms of per capita GNP, many South Pacific states rank among the world's poorest, with Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Kiribati, Samoa, the Marshall Islands and Micronesia all being below US\$2600 following adjustments for purchasing power parity (Weaver, 1998).

## **PACIFIC ISLAND TOURISM**

The basic tourist product offered by these small islands states can be split into natural, cultural and historical segments. The natural attractions of the region form the heart of tourism resources base. They include year round salubrious climate, relatively unspoiled beaches and reefs and in case of PNG and Solomon Islands, lush and verdant terrains. The distinctive cultures of the nation's constitute the second major resource. Traditional ceremonies, unique handicrafts and the extended families and intricate village-based social structures of the islands offer a fascinating contrast to the everyday lives of the majority of visitors. Additionally the Second World War has provided a range of interesting historic battle and dive sites in the Marianas, Kiribati, Solomons and PNG.

The Polynesian Islands of the Western Samoa, Tonga, Cooks Islands, and Tahiti offer the 'typical' 'South Pacific holidays based around sun, sea, sand and palm trees. Niue on the other hand presents visitors with stunning arrays of caves and chasms. The Melanesian destinations of Vanuatu, New Caledonia, Solomons Islands and PNG offer the same with added cultural attractions, and a series of stunning land based physical attractions including live volcanoes. The Micronesian Islands of Federated States of Micronesia, Northern Mariana Island, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Marshall Islands, Nauru and Palau cater for visitors seeking game fishing, scuba diving and snorkeling ( SPTO Marketing report 2006-10). Tourism has been contributing significantly to the development of Pacific Island countries and revenue from international visitors has become an essential source of foreign exchange, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1** Importance of tourism in selected Pacific island countries and areas

Countries and areas	1997				1998				1999			
	Arrivals (Thousands)	Tourism receipts (Millions of US dollars)	Exports (Millions of US dollars)	GNP (Millions of US dollars)	Arrivals (Thousands)	Tourism receipts (Millions of US dollars)	Exports (Millions of US dollars)	GNP (Millions of US dollars)	Arrivals (Thousands)	Tourism receipts (Millions of US dollars)	Exports (Millions of US dollars)	GNP (Millions of US dollars)
Cook Islands	50	35	3	..	49	34	4	..	56	39	4	..
Fiji	372	297	590	2 007	389	244	..	1 775	424	275	..	1 771
French Polynesia	201	345	224	4 040	211	354	..	..	236	..	..	..
Guam	1 382	2 818	..	3 000	1 137	2 361	..	3 303	1 162	1 908	..	..
Kiribati	..	2	9	95	3	2	8	101	2	2	..	81
Marshall Islands	6	3	..	97	6	3	..	96	5	4	..	100
New Caledonia	139	117	527	..	129	110	..	..	147	..	..	..
Niue	2.0	1.5	..	..	2	1.1	..	..	3.3	..	..	..
Northern Mariana Islands	695	..	..	..	490	..	..	..	502	..	..	..
Palau	74	..	..	160	64	..	..	..	55	..	..	..
Papua New Guinea	66	71	2 160	4 549	67	75	1 775	4 088	67	76	1 880	3 748
Samoa	68	37	15	195	78	38	15	181	85	42	20	181
Solomon Islands	16	7	173	339	13	7	126	325	21	6	..	320
Tonga	29	16	10	174	35	8	8	173	44	9	12	172
Tuvalu	1	0.3	..	..	1	0.2	..	..	..	..	..	..
Vanuatu	81	46	35	238	78	52	34	231	96	56	..	221

Source: WTO, *Compendium of Tourism Statistics, 2001 Edition*.

Note: Two dots indicate that data are not available.

During the 1990s, Pacific Island countries have experienced varying tourism growth rates. In some it has become the leading economic sector, while in others it represents one of the few areas with economic growth potential. For instance, in Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, New Caledonia, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu, tourism features among the major sources of foreign exchange. In the Federate States of Micronesia, tourism, with agriculture and fishing, is one of the main priorities for economic development.

In practice, the main challenge for policy makers is to plan and manage tourism that meets the needs of stakeholders with divergent interests. A common understanding is required of the balance between present and future benefits, of how to minimize negative impacts, and the interrelationship between human activities and the natural environment. Multi-stakeholders participation in open and transparent processes is therefore critical in achieving sustainable development.

The generally narrow economic base usually means that there is a high level of dependence on outside sources for goods, services, and infrastructure related to the tourism industry. The active participation of local communities in tourism policy-making, planning, management and monitoring can help obtain support at the local level and appropriate distribution of the socio-economic benefits, and ensure that negative impacts are monitored and minimized.

As seen in Table 2, at a regional level, the South Pacific is over-represented as an inbound tourist destination, with 0.13 per cent of the world's population, but 0.5 percent of all international stop-overs (ENEP, 2004).

In the South Pacific mass tourism has not yet developed, but there are facilities in Fiji and French Polynesia which together account for some 50% of the region's arrivals (Harrison, 2004). Additionally the East South Pacific small destinations of Guam and the Northern Marianas (the island of Saipan, specifically) account for almost 30 per cent of all stay-overs, and this figure increases to over 80 per cent with the addition of Fiji and French Polynesia (UNEP, 2004). Consequently tourist arrivals in the remaining South Pacific destinations indicate a more incipient level of tourism development, and much is based on return visits by former residents who tend to stay in local residences and spend less money. Interrelated factors that have contributed to this situation include isolation, the lack of infrastructure and accommodation, the scarcity of freehold land, and absence of interest among potential investors.

**Table 2** Visitor arrivals by Purpose

Country	Year	Arrivals	Business	Conference	Holiday	Visiting Friends and Relatives	Education and Training	Volunteers and Church Activities	Other	Employment
American Samoa	2006	30268	4643	n/a	6972	12861	n/a	n/a	n/a	5792
Cook Islands	2007	97019	2764	938	79775	10254	n/a	n/a	2937	351
Fiji	2004	502765	21491	12808	387775	43285	4228	n/a	33178	n/a
French Polynesia	2007	218241	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
FSM	2006	19136	4529	n/a	13345	n/a	n/a	626	636	n/a
Guam	2004	1120676	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Kiribati	2006	2004	1020	n/a	157	384	n/a	n/a	443	n/a
Northern Mariana Islands	2004	589244	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Marshall Islands	2007	6959	2218	n/a	2060	718	n/a	n/a	1963	n/a
Nauru	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
New Caledonia	2007	103363	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Niue	2005	2793	664	n/a	1236	591	n/a	n/a	302	n/a
Palau	2006	86375	4134	n/a	78155	n/a	n/a	n/a	389	3697
PNG	2007	104122	38633	2320	27198	5926	2244	n/a	5008	22793
Pitcairn	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Samoa	2006	115882	11579	n/a	40943	44122	n/a	n/a	19238	n/a
Solomon Islands	2007	13748	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Tokelau	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Tonga	2004	41208	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Tuvalu	2007	1130	136	n/a	256	622	n/a	n/a	116	n/a
Vanuatu	2007	81345	10838	n/a	63325	6162	n/a	n/a	1020	n/a
Wallis and Futuna	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source: [www.spc.int/prism/country](http://www.spc.int/prism/country) (Secretariat of the Pacific Community 2010)

Given the economic context, it is not surprising that South Pacific states and dependencies have been paying increased attention to tourism as a vehicle for achieving sustained economic development and it has been standard practice to uncritically endorse the sector as a panacea for economic ills.

## **DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY**

Since the early 1990's, virtually all South Pacific destinations have declared a commitment to sustainable tourism. Many planners and academics still adhere to the view that this is the only means for attaining sustainable tourism development, yet, by disassociating scale from sustainability, the knowledge-based platform holds that alternative tourism cannot be seen as the panacea to the development issues facing developing countries (Cater, 1993).

It has been argued that conventional mass tourism confers sustainability-related advantages of scale not possible in alternative tourism (see Clarke 1997). The South Pacific has emerged as a focal point of this critique, with references to tourism as a 'new kind of sugar' and a 'pleasure plantation' (Finney and Watson, 1975). Moreover ecotourism has been equated with sustainable tourism. Explicit within this view is that mass tourism was inherently bad and small-scale alternative tourism (i.e., tourism deliberately structured to contrast with conventional mass tourism) inherently good for small underdeveloped Pacific Islands. This perspective is challenged by an alternative view that espouses a less normative and more pragmatic perspective. From this platform, mass tourism and alternative tourism can both be either sustainable or unsustainable, depending on the circumstances that pertain to any particular destination (Weaver, 2000). This view is supported by the United Nations Environment Programme (2004) who argued that sustainable tourism development guidelines and management practices apply to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, including mass tourism and the various niche tourism segments.

Milne (1992) argues that the actual number of tourists arriving in a destination will also influence socio-cultural and environmental systems. On islands with limited populations, growing tourist flows exhibit the highest ratio of visitors to local populace. A prime example of this is the Cook Islands with over 97,000 visitors and population of less than 12,000. This is exaggerated by tourists tending to congregate in certain areas (usually urban centres or resort complexes). Thus, the true ratio of

tourists to spatially proximate locals is increased considerably within such areas.

In following Milne's argument, Weaver (2002) presented and classified four possible categories of tourist flow and ratio of visits to local population for destination, namely:

- a) Low Traffic/ Low ratio (LL)
- b) Low Traffic / High ratio (LH)
- c) High Traffic and Low ratio (HL)
- d) High Traffic and High Ratio (HH)

For classification and discussion purposes, 'intensity' is construed as a variable that arises from different combinations of absolute and relative criteria. The total number of inbound stay-over arrivals represents the former while the latter is represented by the stay-over/resident ratio. Of course, these are not perfect criteria since, amongst other reasons, returning former residents (who comprise a high proportion of stay-over arrivals in destinations such as Western Samoa, Tonga Cooks Islands and Niue) are likely to stay in 'local' areas and blend into the local community, thereby not contributing to an obvious intensification effect.

Rankings of the listed destinations revealed 'gaps' in the data that provide a logical basis for separating 'high' from 'low' intensity destinations. In both lists, the gap occurred between French Polynesia (218,241 arrivals and a ratio of 0.79) and New Caledonia (103 800 and 0.53) (UNEP, 2004).

Although all destinations have significant internal variations in tourism intensities, there are several reasons for basing classification on the entire state or dependency. Firstly, it is usually difficult to obtain even basic tourism data (except perhaps for accommodation) at the sub-national level. Secondly, it is not clear at what sub-national scale the classification should be made if this approach is adopted, since individual peripheral islands of a state may themselves display significant internal variations.

**Table 3** International stay-over arrivals in the South Pacific

Country	Year	Arrivals	Tourist residence ration	Intensity category	GDP
American Samoa	2006	30268	0.35	LL	
Cook Islands	2007	97019	2.43	LH	50%
Fiji	2004	502765	0.46	H L	13%
French Polynesia	2007	218241	0.79	HH	10%
FSM	2006	19136	na	Na	
Guam	2004	1120676	7.68	H H	
Kiribati	2006	2004	0.06	LL	15%
Northern Mariana Islands	2004	589244	7.36	HH	
Marshall Islands	2007	6959	na	Na	
Nauru	n/a	n/a	na	Na	
New Caledonia	2007	103363	0.53	L L	
Niue	2005	2793	1.06	L H	13%
Palau	2006	86375	3.55	L H	13%
PNG	2007	104122	0.10	L L	
Pitcairn	n/a	n/a	na	Na	
Samoa	2006	115882	0.35	L L	17.2%
Solomon Islands	2007	13748	0.03	L L	2.9%
Tokelau	n/a	n/a	na	Na	
Tonga	2004	41208	0.25	L L	14.4%
Tuvalu	2007	1130	na		
Vanuatu	2007	81345	0.28	L L	6.6%
Wallis and Futuna	n/a	n/a	na	Na	

*Adapted from: Weaver (2002( Perspective on sustainable tourism in the South Pacific. Table: 3 Source: www.spc.int/prism/country (Secretariat of the Pacific Community 2010)*

Thirdly, whatever the internal differences, all regions and people within a single state or dependency are commonly affected in some ways by the national tourism industry, though, for example, the freedom to move in order to obtain employment and the dissemination of benefits resulting from tourism revenues. Nonetheless, internal variations nevertheless will still be recognised and taken into account when options are discussed.

## **VISITOR ARRIVALS AND SUSTAINABLE ISSUES**

### **(LL) Destinations in the South Pacific**

Low intensity destinations account for a clear majority of South Pacific states and dependencies. For those with at least some level of tourism development, the evidence does not always point toward sustainable practice or outcomes. The colonial heritage of most islands and the concomitant positioning of 'local' expatriates in positions of influence have resulted in the marginalisation of indigenous people during the 'involvement' phase of the tourism cycle throughout Melanesia (Douglas, 1997). This trend was, and remains exacerbated by the lack of skilled locals in countries such as Tuvalu, Palau and the Solomons. The situation has improved somewhat in the post-independence era, though businesses owned by ni-Vanuatu (native people of Vanuatu) still accounted for less than 10 per cent of total revenue within Vanuatu's accommodation sector during the mid-1990s (Harrison, 2004).

However, the evidence from the LL destinations is complicated as urban areas are substantially over-represented as locations for tourist accommodation. On Fiji all hotels are located in the capital city of Suva and the international gateway of Nadi (Dahl, 1993), while almost two-thirds of registered accommodation in Papua New Guinea is found in the three largest urban centres of Port Moresby, Lae and Padang (PNG Tourism Promotion Authority 2009). This pattern is due to the prevalence of business-related tourism, the concentration of functions and services in urban areas, and the status of capital cities as international and internal gateways. Such concentrations, however, cannot automatically be considered as unsustainable. Unlike beach environments, urban areas already accommodate a broad array of high-density activity within a highly modified and relatively cosmopolitan environment that usually has the infrastructure to cope with this level of activity.

Substantial fluctuations in the level of tourist arrivals are often seen as conflicting with sustainability, yet characterize many LL destinations

simply because a small drop in arrivals can translate into a large percentage decrease when the overall visitor base numbers are low. Such variations are partly climate-related, but also reflect the large impacts exercised by specific events, such as a monopolistic airline's decision to reduce flight frequency. As a result, LL destinations tend to experienced high levels of vulnerability and uncertainty in their visitor flows for reasons other than seasonality. This obviously poses problems such as trying to maintain an optimum accommodation stock. Exacerbating this vulnerability is a common dependency on a small number of tourist markets.

### **Low traffic/high ratio (LH) destinations**

Low traffic/high ratio destinations receive small absolute numbers of tourists in relation to the threshold established above, but still produce relatively large tourist/resident ratios because of the small local population. The Cook Islands, Niue, Norfolk Island and Palau are the four South Pacific destinations that fall into this category. In all four cases, the tourist/resident ratio exceeds 1.0, and at least 10 per cent of GDP is represented by tourism (UNEP, 2004). The Cook Islands is one of the most tourism-dependent LH destinations and resembles a more intensively developed destination. External interests control just over half of accommodation rooms, with the proportion increasing to 58 percent on the main island of Rarotonga (UNEP, 2004).

### **High traffic/low ratio (HL) destination**

Fiji is the only South Pacific destination where a large absolute number of stay-over arrivals is offset by a low tourist/resident ratio, owing to the country's relatively large resident population. Such generalizations, however, mask the actual complexity of the Fijian tourism sector, which ranges from mass resort tourism along some coastal areas of Viti Levu to exclusive resort island tourism, urban tourism and village-based ecotourism.

The small, exclusive resorts, usually located on small offshore islands, are also complex with respect to their relationship with sustainability. The Turtle Island Resort offers a case in point. On the one hand, this resort caters to a very wealthy elite, is owned by an expatriate American millionaire, and requires its employees to remain isolated from their families for extended periods of time. However, the Resort has engaged in a major programme of vegetation rehabilitation on the island,

provides almost 100 jobs, and has a strategy to encourage Fijian participation at the managerial level. It also uses solar power to provide much of its power, and has established an eye clinic and other medical services for the residents of the adjacent islands (Harrison, 1997). In this case, the positive effects would seem to outweigh the negative, although no generalisations about exclusive isolated resorts should follow. A more serious issue for Fijian tourism as a whole is chronic political instability, for example, the 2006 coup by Bainimarama.

### **High traffic/high ratio (HH) destinations**

Guam and the Northern Marianas, have large absolute numbers of tourist visitors and high tourist/resident ratios arising from low resident populations. In several superficial respects both destinations conform to the more mature phases of the resort cycle. Market concentration in Guam, for example, is indicated by Japan's 75 per cent share of stay-overs, which increases to 89 per cent with the addition of Koreans (GVB, 1997). Foreign participation in the tourism sector, another indicator of maturity according to Butler (1980), is also very high in both destinations, with fifteen of thirty hotels (with 50 per cent of all rooms) in Guam having had Japanese general managers (GVB, 1997). The same situation pertained to seven of the ten largest hotels in the Northern Marianas (MVB, 1997).

Structurally, hotel size and room inventories are the largest within the study region. The average hotel size in Guam is 253 rooms, and the island provided 7601 rooms in 1997 (GVB, 1997). The Northern Marianas contained 3847 hotel rooms in 1997, virtually all located on Saipan (MVB, 1997).

Clearly, the current and potential intensity levels of tourism in the two HH destinations are impressive and of obvious concern to those wishing to develop a sustainable tourism industry, especially when other factors such as ownership and market concentration are taken into account. High concentrations of tourism facilities and large hotel complexes may compensate in some degree for obvious local stresses (high traffic, 'heat island' effect, induced housing development for hotel workers, etc.) in several ways. These include the provision of 'economies of scale' that allow for the effective management of waste, and the minimization of space required to house the tourist population. A strong tourism industry may also, in theory, possess lobbying capabilities that prevent competing resource stakeholders from undertaking activities that undermine the attractiveness of tourism resources.

## **SEEKING TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT**

The South Pacific tourism industry can be summarized as highly skewed, with most destinations being characterized by low visitor numbers and low tourist/resident ratios. Only two destinations exhibit the opposite tendency. Intensity, however, is clearly not a priori indicator of sustainability. Low visitation levels are inherently vulnerable to extreme fluctuation, and tourism, even in its incipient stages, is inevitably influenced in a negative way by the MIRAB syndrome and by longstanding patterns of dependency with 'mother' countries. Islands with low levels of tourism development, moreover, tend to possess rudimentary infrastructure that equates with low carrying capacity and subsequent threats to environmental sustainability despite small visitor intakes. That low intensity tourism does not automatically equate with sustainable tourism, should come as no surprise. The question of sustainability will always be mediated by the realities of the small island syndrome of underdevelopment and by a longstanding regional history of acculturation, socio-political instability, and environmental degradation.

### **TOURISM SUSTAINABLE DESTINATION PLANNING.**

#### **a) Deliberate 'Alternative' Tourism/ (DAT)**

Alternative tourism, as described above, was conceived in the early 1980s as a mode of tourism deliberately structured to contrast with the supposedly unsustainable characteristics of conventional mass tourism. Accordingly, it was ideally characterized among other things by small scale, local control, architecture that is congruent with the local culture and physical environment, and interactions with locals that are equitable and mutually supportive (Dernoi, 1981).

At the less intensive end of the spectrum, most South Pacific destinations resemble 'alternative tourism' in at least some respects, though patterns of ownership, imports, market concentration and seasonality more typical of intensive destinations have already been identified. Clearly, the resemblance to alternative tourism in most of these destinations is superficial, as there is seldom any regulatory environment in place to ensure that principles of local participation, environmental sustainability, etc., are followed. These places, essentially, are merely in the early stages of the (modified small island) destination life cycle, and accordingly can be described as circumstantial alternative

tourism (CAT) destinations (Weaver, 2001). Several scenarios are possible for CAT destinations:

- a) In most instances, they will retain the status quo because there is no demand for any further tourism-related development.
- b) A second possibility sees these destinations following the S-curve trajectory that characterizes the Butler-type destination life cycle.
- c) A third scenario is the 'instant resort' phenomenon, wherein the area is earmarked for planned large scale resort development. In both cases, a very rapid transition from LL status to LH or HH status is possible because of the small resident population.
- d) A fourth scenario entails the establishment of a regulatory environment that steers the destination toward the principles of alternative (and hence small scale sustainable) tourism as a deliberate alternative tourism strategy as is implicit in the planning of many South Pacific destinations.

### **b) Comprehensive Destination Alternative Tourism -DAT or (C-DAT) destinations.**

In the study region, emergent C-DAT destinations include the Federated Micronesian State of Pohnpei, whose apparent pursuit of an environmentally sound, ecotourism-style policy is, however, motivated by the lack of beaches capable of supporting mass tourism. Samoa is somewhat more evolved in the C-DAT direction, having already established such relevant mechanisms as the National Ecotourism Programme and the Samoan Ecotourism Network (Weaver, 1998).

### **REGIONAL DESTINATION ALTERNATIVE TOURISM (R-DAT)**

Several larger South Pacific destinations are initiating strategies that explicitly recognise a role for both mass tourism and deliberate alternative tourism. For example, Vanuatu's Tourist Development Master Plan emphasizes a hierarchical spatial structure of 'Primary' tourist destinations (international/regional gateway and port, larger volume of visitation) and 'Longer Term' tourist destinations. The latter are characterised by local or regional airports, limited infrastructure, small-

scale tourist facilities, retained local customs and village lifestyles, and controlled visitation to environmentally and culturally sensitive areas.

In Fiji, the R-DAT concept has long been implicit in an 'islands policy' that discourages large-scale tourism in the peripheral island locations. While 'tourist resort islands' (such as Turtle Island Resort) are one option, most of these areas are designated as 'local subsistence islands' where 'only small-scale development will be permitted' (Lockhart and Chandra, 1997: 308-9). In contrast, large-scale tourism is being fostered in certain districts of the main island, including the Coral Coast and Nadi.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Evidence from the diverse array of South Pacific tourist destinations suggests little or no correlation between scale of intensity and the presence of 'sustainable tourism'. Rather, the apparent presence or absence of sustainability is dependent upon the unique circumstances that pertain to any given destination and the management responses made to these circumstances. Accordingly, there is no basis for supposing that tourism in intensively developed Saipan or Guam is any less sustainable than the incipient sector that characterizes Tuvalu or the Wallis and Futuna Islands, where government, infrastructure and society in general are ill-equipped to cope with even a small increase in arrivals. Complicating the issue of sustainability is the possibility that a destination may indicate this trait in some characteristics but not others, thereby raising the question as to whether the destination is 'sustainable' in an overall sense. Moreover, a characteristic that appears unsustainable in itself may have sustainable consequences. For example, the concentration of tourism within a small area of Saipan (a characteristic of destination life cycle maturity that is usually regarded as negative) reduces the need for sprawling tourism facilities in other parts of the island. Concurrently, it offers conditions conducive to cost-effective and environmentally beneficial site hardening, such as the installation of tertiary sewage treatment that depends upon high volumes of waste production.

An equally important issue is whether the concept of sustainability, and concomitant planning options as described above, can be seriously considered from a single-sector perspective (Amposta, 2009, Romita, 2007; Karmakar, 2011). Various external environments over which tourism exercises little or no influence profoundly affect this sector in a direct or indirect way. Thus, while deliberate alternative tourism appears to be emerging in the Solomon Islands, any judgements about its

sustainability and longevity are rendered effectively meaningless by the civil war and rapacious logging practices that make most human activity in the Solomon Islands as a whole unsustainable. Adding to this uncertain environment, and especially relevant to atoll-dominated countries such as Tuvalu and Kiribati, is the looming threats of rising sea levels and more numerous cyclones due to global warming.

Whether sustainable mass tourism or deliberate alternative tourism is advocated for a particular South Pacific destination, the isolationist approach that typifies much planning and academic writing in the sector should be rejected. The existing or potential impacts of these external environments must be taken into account when considering and implementing the options described above. Indeed, it can be argued that external environments are an omnipresent theme that cannot be divorced from any considerations pertaining to sustainable tourism. In such a context, it is unlikely that any mode of tourism development, no matter how sustainable in itself, will serve on its own as a panacea for the persistent problems of South Pacific destinations.

It is inevitable that questions would be raised about how far tourism-an increasing popular tool for development should be or could 'sustainable' or how it could be fitted into a more comprehensive programme of sustainable development, especially in low traffic/low ratio destinations. At least, tourism in the Pacific islands seemed to be going green. In fact as critics have pointed out, some responses from within the tourism industry are little more than cynical attempts to capitalise on the latest political correctness, and others openly doubt that there are realistic alternatives to mass tourism (Harrison 2004).

Still at the regional level, concerns over the effects of mass tourism in Asia and the Pacific prompted the United Nations to issue guideline on the development of coastal. Others have concentrated more on the extent to which social sustainability can be maintained during tourism development. Examples are Ranks study on village- based tourism in Papuan New Guinea (Wyllie 1998).

As elsewhere, commitment to sustainable tourism development in the Pacific islands is not always translated into practice. National tourism organisations (NTOs) pay lip service to the concept but their success is often evaluated (by themselves and others) primarily through their ability to increase tourism numbers. At the local level, resorts claiming 'green' credentials still promote 'reef walking', and encourage guests to feed fish. In some respects, the lack of tourism development in many Pacific Islands is an advantage and islands states where mass tourism has not yet been introduced can still avoid its negative impacts.

In the meantime (lacking the facilities for large scale tourism), Pacific Islands can concentrate on implementing smaller scale ecotourism, guidelines for which have already been provided within the region (Harrison, 2003). It should no longer be necessary to argue a case for promoting sustainable tourism development in the Pacific islands. Properly planned and managed tourism can help economic diversification and reduce dependency on primary export crops and assist in the conservation of natural resources and bring benefits to local communities, including valuable skills in entrepreneurship (often through training). However if the ideal of sustainability tourism development is to be approached, it must be through increased awareness of issues involved and through partnership of government and private sector, and of local business.

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