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Sustainable Tourism Development in Armenia

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Abstract

In the last two decades sustainability has become a central matter in tourism, giving rise to more proactive development strategies from destination management organizations, to more responsible attitudes from the tourism industry, as well as increased awareness and concerns from consumers, particularly in developed countries. However, in developing countries, sustainability with regard to tourism is still an emerging issue. This paper addresses the process of sustainable tourism assessment in developing countries, namely which indicators can be put into practice in order to help tourism organizations and tourism businesses to meet sustainability requirements and to gain the confidence of tourism markets. Results of the research will be summarized in order to identify the set of indicators to measure and monitor tourism sustainable development that can be applied to developing countries, with a special reference to Armenia.

Key Words: Sustainable tourism development, sustainability metric, Armenia

Introduction

With many communities now dependent on tourism for their economic livelihood, long-term sustainability through a local, multi-stakeholder process is becoming a key issue for destination management (Dodds 2012). With the publication of 'Our Common Future' by the World Commission on the Environment and Development's (WCED) in the late 1980s (WCED 1987) which was considering sustainable development as an environmental management concept, a growing proportion of the tourism research literature has focused on the principles and practice of sustainable tourism development. 'The term sustainable tourism has come to represent and encompass a set of principles, policy prescriptions, and management methods' (Hunter 1997:850). However, the principles of sustainable tourism development appear to have been established by developed countries without taking into account conditions in the developing world (Tosun 2001). The main purpose of this article is to discuss the process of tourism development in developing countries in the terms of sustainability with special reference to Armenia.

One of the aspects that characterise many developing countries is the lack of information and written material both with regard to development indicators in general, and with regard to sustainability and tourism issues in particular. In fact, almost every kind of information is treated as confidential. As such, attempts to understand tourism sustainability and its assessment, in developing countries, are likely to be difficult, if not impossible. For that reason, the article may reflect in part assertions based upon the author's observation. A major conclusion is that in fact sustainable tourism development is extremely hard to achieve in developing countries first because of the absence of a universal list of indicators, together with the difficulty in aggregating the considerable amounts of information required; and secondly without the collaboration of the

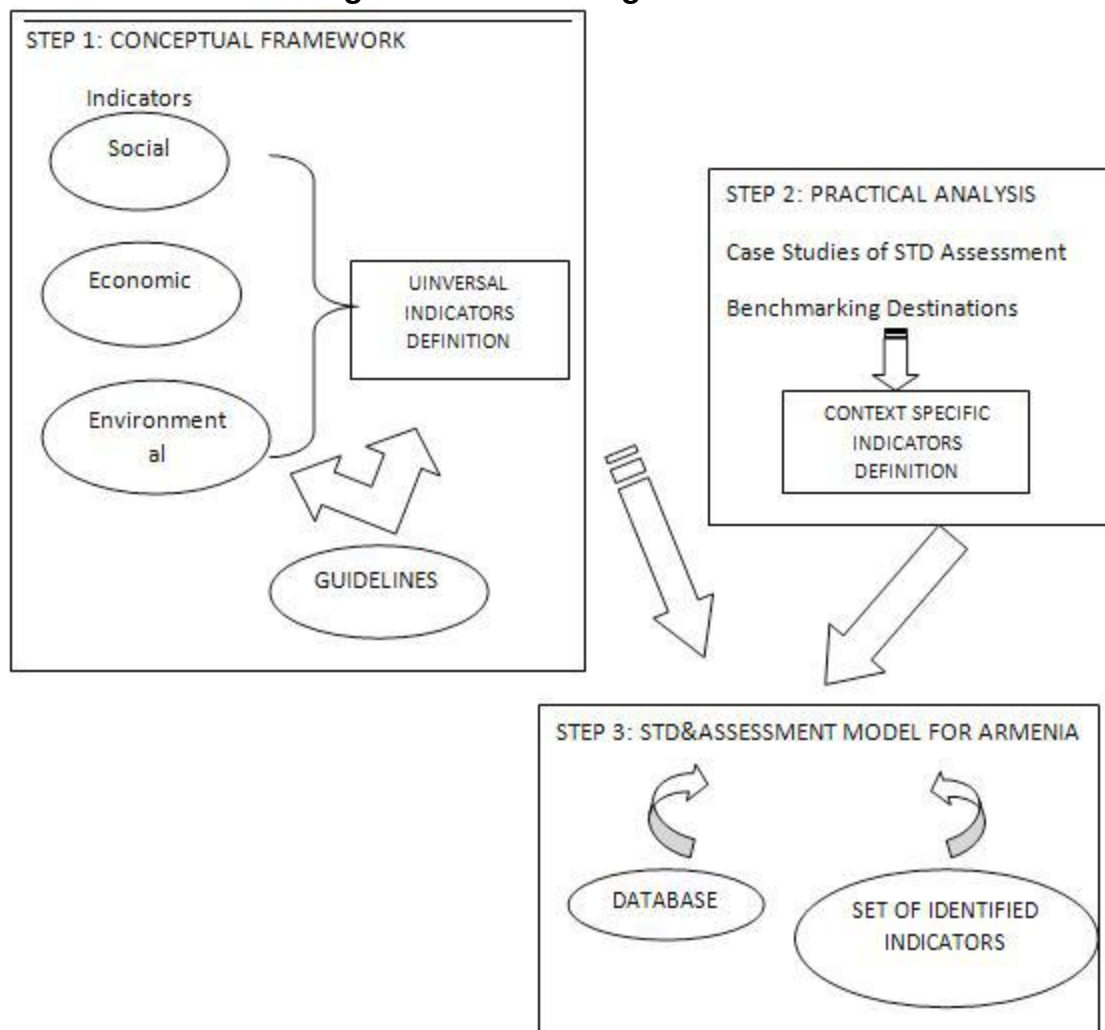
international tour operators and donor agencies such as the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Methodology

In order to meet the final objective of this paper, i.e. “to assess the process of tourism sustainable development in Armenia”, the following research questions are formulated:

- What is the current stage of tourism development in Armenia?
- What was the path of evolution of the paradigm of sustainable development and tourism sustainable development?
- What kind of indicators can be used in order to monitor and assess the process of tourism development in accordance with sustainability guidelines?
- What specific indicators are needed to draw a scheme for sustainable tourism development and monitoring in Armenia?

Figure 1. Methodological Plan



The methodology used for this paper is mostly based on secondary data. Therefore, to fully answer the research questions the following steps were considered. STEP 1 aims to identify the conceptual framework and the existing literature on sustainable development, tourism sustainability, sustainability assessment and metrics as well as to identify all the known indicators considered to be of relevance to economic, environmental and social

perspectives of tourism sustainable development and accordance to the guidelines provided by the UNWTO.

STEP 2 it is supposed to define the set of context specific indicators by benchmarking and cross-relating different case studies undertaken in the field of sustainable tourism development and assessment.

Finally STEP 3 is designed to recommend a sustainable tourism development and assessment model for Armenia using the available tourism-related database and already identified indicators.

Sustainable development and tourism sustainability

Social and environmental issues in the tourism field were considered for the first time by tourism researchers almost four decades ago (Allen et al 1988; Cater 1987; Liu & Var 1986; Brougham & Butler 1981; Smith 1977; Turner & Ash 1975; Young 1973). However, the specific term 'sustainable tourism' started being in use barely two decades ago (May 1991; Nash & Butler, 1990).

The concept of sustainable tourism, like sustainable development suffers from limitations, derived from the ambiguity, or lack of consensus in its definition.

However, sustainable tourism development most certainly should be considered as an adaptive paradigm (Hunter, 1997) which aims at contributing to objectives of sustainable development and development in general by determining special principles in the light of its parental concepts.

In this context Hall (1998) describes sustainable development as an 'essentially disputed concept' which is trying to review the conflicting value positions in terms of the environment.

The most commonly used definition of sustainable development is still the one given in the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED 1987) considering sustainable development as '... a process to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

At the core of sustainable development is the need to consider 'three pillars' together: society, the economy and the environment. Even though the Brudtland Commission presented a two-pillar model reflecting environment and development concerns, the 'three-pillar' or 'triple bottom line' (TBL) model separates development issues into social and economic factors, emphasising that 'material gains are not sufficient measures or preservers of human well-being' (Gibson 2001:7). For the purposes of this article, the TBL can be considered an interpretation of sustainability that places equal importance on environmental, social and economic considerations in decision-making. Thus, sustainable development does not focus solely on environmental issues. More broadly, it encompasses the three general policy areas.

Sustainable development (and its sequel sustainable tourism) could be understood differently by everyone, and is easily accepted by any group (Romeril 1994). According to some authors (Bramwell et al 1993; Mowforth et al 1998), this concept is seen as the development and intensification of tourism, while others understand this concept as an

alternative tourism and counteract to the development of mass tourism (E.g. Weaver 2006).

Despite the myriad of definitions they all have main features (either explicitly or implicitly), which are: 1) A desirable human condition: a society that people want to sustain because it meets their needs. 2) An enduring ecosystem condition: an ecosystem that maintains its capacity to support human life and others. 3) A balance between present and future generations; and within the present generation.

As for sustainable tourism development itself it should be accepted as 'all kinds of tourism developments that make a notable contribution to or, at least, do not contradict the maintenance of the principles of development in an indefinite time without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy their own needs and desire' (Tosun 1998:596). In this sense another definition given by Butler (1993:29) seems to be a significant contribution in unifying the concept of sustainable tourism development with its parental concepts. The definition states that: 'sustainable development in the context of tourism could be taken as: tourism which is developed and maintained in an area (community, environment) in such a manner and at such a scale that it remains viable over an indefinite period and does not degrade or alter the environment (human and physical) in which it exists to such a degree that it prohibits the successful development and well-being of other activities and processes'.

Respectively, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (1995) claims that sustainable tourism development is appropriate to all forms of development and management of tourist activities that respect the environment, protect for a long-term the natural and cultural resources, and are socially and economically acceptable and equitable.

Sustainable tourism development as derived from the main definition of the sustainable development itself is considered to be a development which: '...meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future'. Thus, sustainable tourism is seen as a guide by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in managing all resources, in such a way that economic, social, and aesthetic needs may be met, while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems thus satisfying current tourist and host community needs, while protecting and improving future opportunities' (UNWTO 2005).

The enumerated definitions, however, propose that tourism, even if sustainable, cannot be discussed outside of the context of the integrated development of all the activities being important for sustainable development in a particular area. Neither economic sustainability, nor ecological sustainability, nor tourism sustainability, nor any other can be discussed separately. Besides as claims the UNWTO sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary. Moreover, Angelevska-Najdeska & Rakicevik (2012) point that planning of sustainable tourism development seems the only way to successfully overcome the daily changes that occur in turbulent surrounding when it comes to prevention of disorder of tourism development. The concept of sustainable tourism development involves balanced

economic, social and cultural development without endangering the environment, which enables the maximisation of its potentials.

Sustainability Assessment and Metrics

Even though sustainability assessment is being increasingly viewed as an important tool to aid in the shift towards sustainability in tourism, little practical methodology has been developed. Moreover, some tourism academics even argue that sustainability in tourism is generally an aspiration or a goal, rather than a measurable or achievable objective (Middleton & Hawkins 1998). Miller (2001:361) however, provides an encouraging contribution stating that: 'Although it seems paradoxical to develop indicators for sustainable tourism when no satisfactory definition of the concept exists, the process of developing the indicators does help in determining the important tenets of the concept'. As Stoeckl et al (2004) suggest if one cannot measure sustainability; indicators can at least provide an indication of change although partial.

Sustainability assessment is often described as a process by which the implications of an initiative on sustainability are evaluated, where the initiative can be a proposed or existing policy, plan, programme, project, piece of legislation, or a current practice or activity. However, this generic definition covers a broad range of different processes, many of which have been described in the literature as "sustainability assessment" (Pope et al 2004).

Starting with the Brundtland report and the Rio Summit, researchers and universities, environmental organizations, think tanks and national governments have furthered the measurement of progress on sustainable development. Indicators have been developed to complement and augment the default measure of progress, gross domestic product (GDP), which is a measure of a country's overall official economic output in the formal sectors. These indicators aim to reflect a more deep perspective of what constitutes progress, and seek to refine the conceptualisation of wealth, capital, and development. Examples include the Human Development Index developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the gross national happiness indicator of Bhutan. Other measures focus more specifically on the state of the natural environment, including the WWF's Nature's Living Planet Index and the Happy Planet Index of the New Economics Foundation.

The Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2008) and the International Institute for Sustainable Development developed the Bellagio STAMP (Sustainability Assessment and Measurement Principles) as a set of guiding principles to review and evaluate progress towards sustainability under the OECD's Measuring the Progress of Societies program. This initiative involves UN organisations, national governments, and civil society organisations in the development of alternate measurements of human progress that more accurately account for social and environmental factors. Different countries have developed sustainable development indicators to supplement economic indicators.

Many companies report on sustainability, including through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reporting. More than 1,500 organisations from 60 countries have used the guidelines from the Global Reporting Initiative (which works in cooperation with the United Nations Global Compact) to produce sustainability reports. Over 1000 reports

were submitted to the initiative in 2008, a 46% increase from 2007 and 2008 (Global Reporting Initiative 2010).

Ross and Wall (1999) argue that there are very few practical assessments of the status of sustainable tourism at specific locations, is partly the absence of a standardized, evaluative criteria. Therefore, this study tries to develop a reasonable method to evaluate the sustainability of a touristic site.

Broadly speaking, an indicator is a measure, generally quantitative, that can be used to illustrate and communicate complex phenomena simply, including trends and progress over time (EEA 2005).

According to UNWTO (1996), the indicators measure the information and through which decisions makers could reduce the chances of making the wrong decisions. Although in theory it sounds elegant, the strategy for sustainable tourism based upon the indicators is complicated due to the selection process, the measurement, monitoring and evaluation of the set of relevant variables. Crabtree and Bayfield (1998:1) state that 'Indicators quantify change, identify processes and provide a framework for setting targets and monitoring performance'. Therefore 'Indicators provide critical information about current trends and conditions and help to track progress toward...goals' (Gahin et al 2003:662).

A critical analysis of existing research on sustainability assessment metrics that was conducted by UNWTO, European Environmental Agency (EEA), OECD as well as by the governments of France, Spain and United Kingdom, it becomes clear that all of them to some extent have used a similar set of indicators which are presented in the Table 1.

Table 1. Similar Indicators Used by Different Actions

1.	No. of beds in hotels and similar establishments
2.	No. of trips by means of transport
3.	Household consumption expenditure on tourism
4.	Tourism related employment (% in total employment)
5.	Tourism share in GDP
6.	Number of tourists overnight stays in different types of accommodations
7.	CO ₂ emissions from energy use in tourism facilities
8.	Water use by tourists, per person and day in relation to use by residential population
9.	Generation of municipal waste by tourists
10.	Discharge of sewage water due to tourism
11.	Areas used for specific leisure activities, e.g.: marinas, golf courses, ski areas etc., time series
12.	Areas covered by forest and other wooded land (%), time series
13.	Protected land and water areas (% of land area in tourist regions), time series
14.	Tourists exposed to noise in hotel and similar establishments
15.	Bathing Water Quality, time series
16.	Sewage water treatment plants - volumes of water treated - time series
17.	Percent of tourist business establishments participating in recognized environmental schemes

18. Expenditure to maintain/restore cultural and historical heritage
 19. Eco-labeled tourism facilities (as % of total)
 20. Existence of land use or development planning processes, specifically referring to tourism activities
-

Source 1. Adapted from European Commission 2006

Figure 2. Armenia on the map of the world



Tourism Development and Developing World

Akdag & Öter (2011) claim that in developing countries one of the prerequisites of economic development is to increase the export revenues. In these countries, a shift from traditional agricultural economy to an industry-based economy is a must. In this sense tourism industry can be considered as a revenue generator that contributes to the overall improvement of macroeconomic indicators.

Tourism development depends upon various ranges of over-related resources such as climatic conditions, topographic features, ecosystems and habitats, unlike other industries that are single resource-based (Burton 1995). Moreover, Lumsdon & Swift (1998) distinguish three core forms of tourism demonstration in developing countries, namely, nature-based (or eco-) tourism, coastal (or beach) tourism, and heritage (or cultural) tourism.

For these countries tourism is an important incentive for conservation (Gössling 1999). Most of the national parks in Africa, for instance, would no longer persist without tourism (Vorlaufer 1997). However, Zhang et al (1999) argue that the lack of natural resources faced by most developing countries enhances the vulnerability of these resources to tourism development activities in host destinations. And it is proved to be true as the proportion of money captured from international tourism by developing countries is generally low, with only 20–40% of the retail tourist price paid for a package tour remaining within the economy of the destination country due to the outflow resulting from imported services and goods, foreign ownership, etc. (Gössling 1999).

After the negative environmental and social impacts of tourism have been exhaustively discussed (e.g. Hunter & Green 1995; Urry, 1995) emerging economies started not perceiving tourism as a low-impact, non-consumptive development option. In line with the paradigm of sustainable tourism it is believed that negative effects can be avoided or minimised if tourism development is thoroughly planned and controlled.

Therefore, in striving to prevent disorderly tourism development, in order to successfully overcome the daily changes that occur in turbulent surrounding, planning of sustainable tourism development occurs as the only way to do it successfully.

This paper aims to present an adapted set of indicators that can be used to plan and pursue tourism sustainability and even though the model was developed considering peculiarities of Armenian reality yet, it can serve as an adaptive tool for other developing countries as well.

Tourism Development in Armenia

The Tourism and Travel Competitiveness Report (TTCR) shows that there is a significant positive correlations between a country's rankings and tourism arrivals as well as with tourism receipts. Therefore it is fairly important to study Armenian stance at this context. Moreover, having data that covers 140 countries a comparison between Armenia and neighboring countries, namely Georgia and Azerbaijan, can be performed

In the 2013 edition of the TTCR Armenia is ranked 79th moving up an impressive 11 positions since the last assessment.

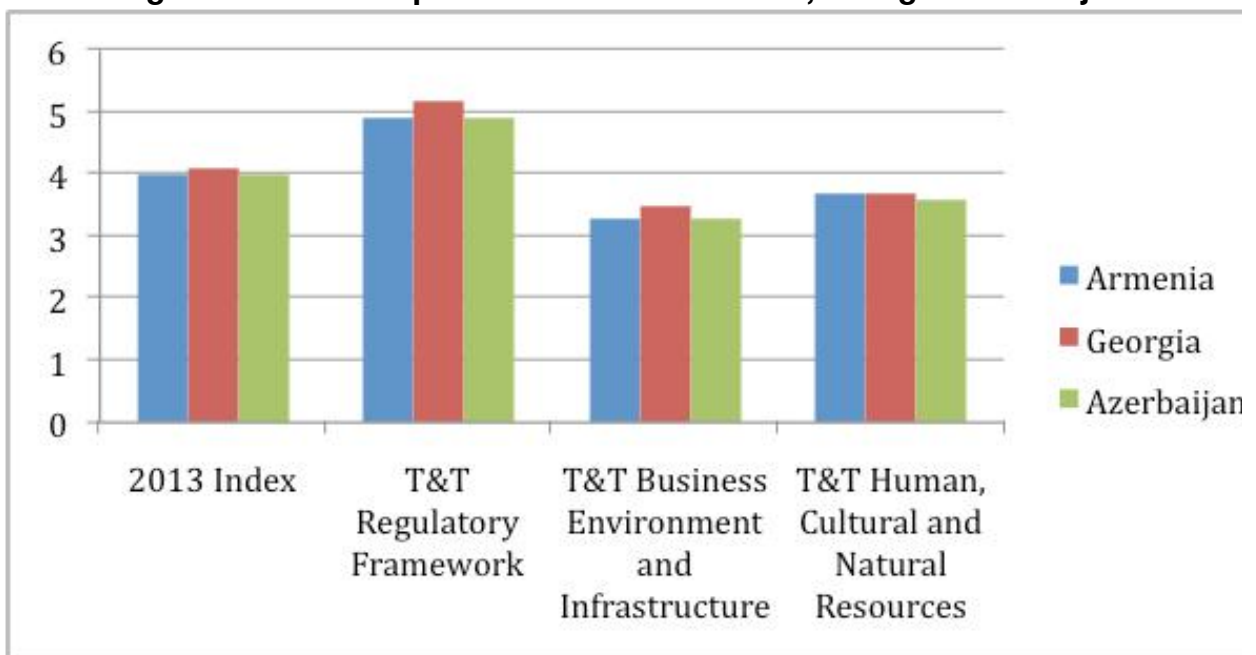
Table 2. Armenia: The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCR 2013)

	Rank (out of 140)	Score (1-7)
2013 Index	79	4.0
2011 Index	90	3.8
2009 Index	91	3.7
2008 Index	89	3.6
T&T regulatory framework	51	4.9
Policy rules and regulations	46	4.7
Environmental sustainability	114	4.1
Safety and security	37	5.3
Health and hygiene	39	5.9
Prioritization of Travel & Tourism	73	4.3
T&T business environment and infrastructure	88	3.3
Air transport infrastructure	85	2.7
Ground transport infrastructure	94	3.1
Tourism infrastructure	80	3.4
ICT infrastructure	73	3.0

Price competitiveness in the T&T industry	80	4.4
T&T human, cultural, and natural resources	94	3.7
Human resources	44	5.1
Education and training	84	4.5
Availability of qualified labor	8	5.7
Affinity for Travel & Tourism	47	4.8
Natural resources	124	2.6
Cultural resources	81	2.1

Even though there was a huge upgrading in this year index when comparing to neighbor countries (See Figure 2.) Armenia still needs huge structural improvements.

Figure 3. TTCI Comparison Between Armenia, Georgia & Azerbaijan



Institutional Framework

Jenkins (1980) points that tourism can be an attractive option in the path to development. People from the richer nations tend to visit far-away places, thus affecting benefit generation from income redistribution and employment in a global level. Uncontrolled tourism can also cause long-term social problems. The author argues that the host-country governments must intervene to achieve the full benefits of tourism. Therefore tourism development process in Armenia at an institutional level, is next discussed.

The objectives of tourism development state policy are defined by the national law on 'tourism and tour operating', Tourism development initiatives identified in 2000, as well as by the Tourism development concept adopted on February 13, 2008 by the Ministry of Economy.

Setting tourism as its top priority in its efforts towards economic development, the Government of Armenia established the Armenian Tourism Development Agency (ATDA) in 2000 to act as its premier national tourism organization. Since the very moment of establishment ATDA has aimed to uncover all the wonders of this ancient land to world travelers and to bring its awe-inspiring history and culture, replete with exceptional sights, sounds, and tastes, to the attention of the world's tourism marketplace (ATDA 2000).

After the first steps on the way to tourism development planning a document named 'Armenia's Tourism Development Initiatives 2001-2003' was designed in the same year of 2000. The overall goal of the TDI was to increase employment and generate income for small and medium sized enterprises located not only in the capital city of Yerevan, but in the rural regions of the country as well (ATDA 2000). The main directions of TDI were Marketing; Visitor services; Visits by foreign operators and journalists; Handicrafts development and marketing; Training; Accommodation and B&B promotion; Cultural heritage promotion; Armenian cultural festival.

For the moment planned actions for tourism development are inscribed in 'Tourism Development Concept Paper', which represents the vision in two phases: firstly by 2020 and secondly, by 2030. The main objective of tourism state policy identified in TDCP are increasing the tourism contribution to the national economy, symmetric regional development, improvement of living standards and poverty reduction. These objectives are expected to be achieved through:

- Sustaining high levels of growth in the number of incoming and internal tourists.
- Increasing tourism generated income through offering higher value products and services, and
- Creating new job opportunities.

Tourism state policy defines 7 action principles, namely: Competitiveness; International Integration; Focus and Specialization; Cooperation; Sustainable Development; Tourism as a priority sector of economy; Nature and environmental protection. These principles are based on the following 16 values: 1) Authenticity; 2) Choice & Diversity; 3) Credibility; 4) Exclusivity; 5) Familiarity; 6) Hospitality; 7) Innovation; 8) Participation; 9) Planning; 10) Positive Impressions; 11) Prosperity; 12) Quality; 13) Regionalism; 14) Respect; 15) Safety; 16) Value for Money.

TDCP highlights the main obstacles and challenges of tourism development in Armenia and simultaneously outlines the possible solutions and activities needed to overcome them. For the future development the paper emphasizes 9 objectives, such as (Armenia's Tourism Development Concept Paper, 2008): Design new, competitive destinations, prioritize tourism sites and attractions in Armenia; Provide high quality surveys, prioritize target markets; Branding of the country as a destination, profiling individual tourist sites and their effective presentation and promotion in global (target) markets; Improve accessibility and transportation; Improve and develop infrastructure; Provide high quality services; Human resource development; Ensure public health and safety; Improve destination management, business and investment environment.

Table 3. Armenia: Tourism Resources Evaluation (CAPS, 2008)

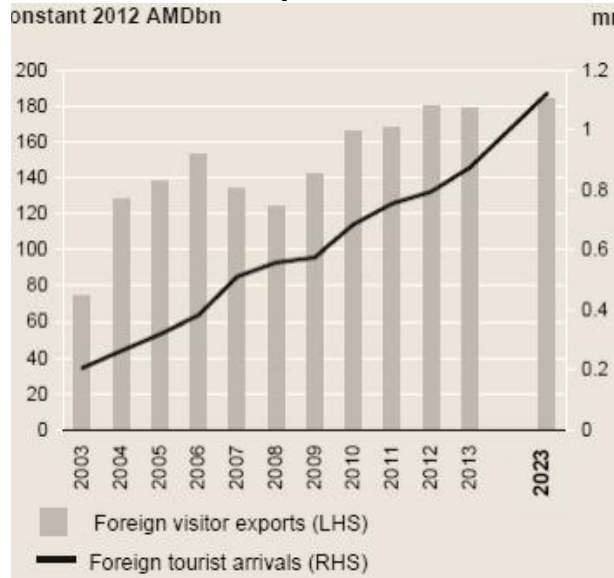
	Uniqueness/Scale/Quantity Significance		Diversity	Quality
Cultural Tourism	High	High	High	High
Religious Tourism	Very High	High	Medium	High
Nature Based Tourism	High	High	High	Medium
Spa and Wellness Tourism	Above Medium	Above Medium	Above Medium	High
Adventure Tourism	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Winter Tourism	High	High	Medium	Above Medium

Figure 4: Armenia: Tourist Attraction Map

The Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Armenia claims that tourism with its pace of development and with its results is one of the most dynamically developing branch of the country, which highlights statistical indicators recorded in this field in recent years.

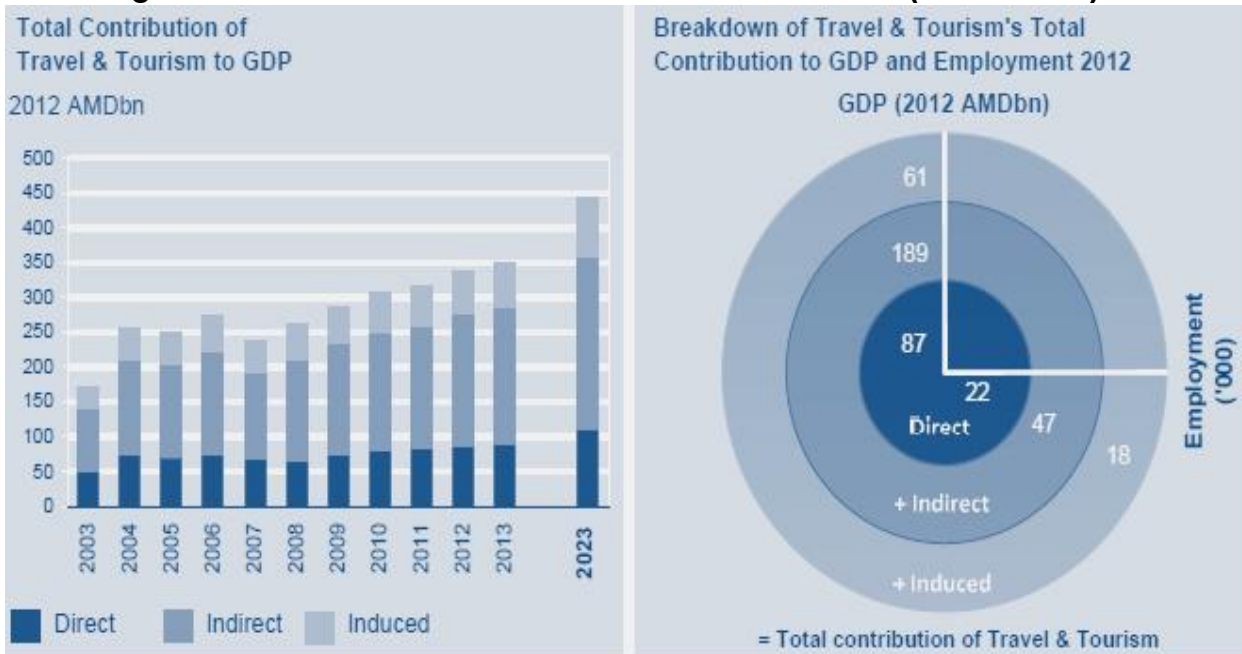
According to National Statistical Service the value for International tourism, number of arrivals in Armenia was 843,000 as of 2012. As the graph below shows, over the past 17 years this indicator reached a maximum value of 843,000 in 2009 and a minimum value of 12,000 in 1995.

Figure 5: Armenia: Visitor Exports & International Tourist Arrivals



Source 2 NSS

Figure 6. Armenia: Total Contribution of T&T to GDP (WTTC 2013)



Visitor exports are a key component of the direct contribution of Travel & Tourism. In 2012, Armenia generated AMD180.3bn in visitor exports. In 2013, this is expected to fall by 1.0%, and the country is expected to attract 874,000 international tourist arrivals. By 2023, international tourist arrivals are forecast to total 1,123,000, generating expenditure of AMD183.8bn, an increase of 0.3% pa (WTTC 2013).

Results

In order to evaluate the path of tourism development in the context of sustainability the need for basic database can't be underestimated. However, even though the development of tourism industry is stated to be a priority by the Armenian government the tradition of data collection on this field is rather weak. Unfortunately this phenomenon

seems to be characteristic to many developing countries as far as the main sources of database for these countries are still the ones provided by the international organisations such as UNWTO, World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), World Bank, OECD, etc.

Therefore, and because the process of sustainable tourism development assessment is dependent on information that is still not available, taking into account the lack of database on general tourism indices as well as the difficulty and resource consumption of this process the following eight indicators should be suggested as base for tourism development evaluation and monitoring (Table 4).

Table 4. Indicators of Tourism Sustainability Assessment in Armenia

1.	No. of beds in hotels and similar establishments
2.	Tourism related employment (% in total employment)
3.	Tourism share in GDP
4.	Number of tourists overnight stays in different types of accommodations
5.	Water use by tourist accommodation providing establishments
6.	Areas used for specific leisure activities, e.g.: marinas, golf courses, ski areas etc., time series
7.	Percent of tourist business establishments participating in recognized environmental schemes
8.	Expenditure and frequency of maintaining/restoring cultural and historical heritage

However, in order for some of these indicators to work as sustainability indicators further information needs to be collected and cross-compared.

Conclusions

In the last two decades sustainability has emerged as a force in the tourism industry, offering new directions and values for public policy. There have been a number of institutional initiatives in this respect, and they have shaped a framework for both theoretic and applied development, and have helped to extend the paradigm of sustainability as a general feature of contemporary tourism.

Sustainable tourism has been defined by the World Tourism Organization as ‘satisfying current tourist and host community needs, while protecting and improving future opportunities. It is seen as a guide in managing all resources, in such a way that economic, social, and aesthetic needs may be met, while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems’.

However, both sustainable development and tourism sustainability concepts are still maturing and even though there is not yet even a common understanding of tourism sustainability the process of sustainability assessment and indicator creation just ensure the efforts of a destination towards sustainability.

For developing countries the greatest challenge is not just developing tourism as a contribution to the national welfare but creating a sustainable tourism in order not to face the possible challenges and damages. By studying an example of sustainable tourism

development in a developed country it becomes possible to understand how important statistic information is, and that without it is difficult to consider sustainable tourism assessment. Taking into account the internal peculiarities of Armenia from the list of indicators proposed above for measuring tourism sustainability (20) it is suggested that a subset of eight should be adopted to understand tourism development in general, and as a first estimate about the effectiveness of actions taken by different stakeholders.

It is believed this paper has accomplished the objective of discussing sustainable tourism development and assessment in Armenia, although there is still work to be done with regard to the identification of the best set of indicators. One of the limitations of this work is not only the constant evolvement of both the conceptual framework and practical achievements in this field but also the lack of information on tourism development in Armenia, which stimulate an urgent need for future research.

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