



UNWTO Network of Observatories (INSTO)

Advancing the Measurement of Sustainable Tourism Development

Open Consultation Meeting

UNWTO Headquarters, Madrid, Spain, 7 - 8 June 2016

Main Takeaways

The *Open Consultation Meeting on Advancing the Measurement of Sustainable Tourism Development* aimed at supporting destinations in measuring tourism performance and enhancing comparability and relevance through the exchange of experiences. The following takeaways of the meeting provide guidance to continue fostering the establishment of tourism observatories with the ultimate goal to enhance sustainable tourism development:

1. Sustainability is a process which requires continuous improvement and advancement.
2. Regular and timely measurement of tourism performance is essential to provide the required evidence for effective decision making in destinations. Data monitoring and analysis are key elements of policy implementation which allow for regular and timely policy adjustment to address gaps between actual performance and intended targets.
3. Regular and timely measurement also contributes to a better understanding of the sustainable development impacts of tourism as well as its links with other sectors. It empowers tourism stakeholders to effectively prioritise measures and the allocation of resources for policy implementation and supports a competitive position of the sector vis à vis other economic activities.
4. The definition of key performance indicators shall be guided by the need for concrete information to ensure the sustainable development of destinations. It is of particular importance that tourism managers have aligned objectives, strategies and action plans towards sustainable development, while the use of indicators helps to better understand tourism performance in concrete contexts.

5. The formal integration of multidisciplinary local stakeholders and their needs into tourism measurement processes reinforces their long-term commitment towards tourism monitoring while ensuring transparency and the objectivity of the information. Their formal engagement allows for well-coordinated processes, facilitates guidance of actions and allows for knowledge transfer, which in turn results in enhanced access to existing data and reports.
6. The promoted image of a destination must be in line with its desired identity as defined by local stakeholders. Destinations are demand driven and need to create a strong identity as part of their recognisable brand. A well-defined identity allows improving communication tools as well as experimenting with traditional and non-traditional marketing instruments for promoting sustainability through multiple tourism products and activities.
7. Despite the variety of currently existing measurement frameworks, a majority of them provide only partial understanding of sustainability and therefore only partial evidence to support management and policy decisions.
8. Sustainability is context-sensitive and therefore indicators have to reflect the destinations' priorities and needs. Measurement should ensure comparability among destinations and across levels, whenever possible. However, destinations require monitoring systems that use destination-specific indicators which correspond to their local requirements, context and subjective elements of perception, particularly with regards to the socio-cultural dimension.
9. The collection of data and cooperation between stakeholders to address the issues related to the environmental and socio-cultural dimensions of tourism performance are still greatly limited. Mainly economic views on tourism development continue to prevail among different stakeholders groups.
10. The socio-cultural dimension is considered to be the most important, yet still extremely complex to measure when compared with the economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability.
11. There is a growing importance of subjective and qualitative data and its context-based interpretation that enables to include more intangible and qualitative information in sustainability measurement. Comparability remains important but at the same time there is a great need for indicators that reflect context and culture.
12. Sufficient primary, disaggregated and heterogeneous data generated at different frequencies is necessary for different types of analysis in order to ensure that the data represents the real phenomenon, and actual rather than intended tourism behaviours. However, the access to available private and public data and measurement methodologies remain one of the main challenges for tourism stakeholders.
13. Official statistics and non-traditional data have to complement each other to generate a sound understanding of tourism at a destination. To address destination needs, innovative methods of analysis such as social media reputation, geospatial data mapping, booking and credit card spending patterns or mobile device information on flows, have potential to provide relevant information to support policy making and the continuity of tourism monitoring.

14. Observatories must become an integral and desired part of destination management and policy making processes in order to better support sustainable development. Tourism observatories provide a clear implementation framework, which allows all stakeholders to actively and regularly engage in measuring tourism impacts. They provide a clear structure and functioning model to better understand and manage the resources at the destination, thus ensuring that tourism contributes to the sustainable development of destinations.
15. A network of tourism observatories creates and provides a vital platform for the exchange of good practices at local, regional and global levels, promoting synergies across destinations. Tourism observatories are also in a position to offer additional services to local stakeholders, such as benchmarking and other research projects, which in turn contribute to generate additional funding sources for the continuous operation of the observatories.
16. While the volume, variety and formats, and velocity of data have increased exponentially in the past years, the ability to analyse this data has nearly not changed. Therefore, there is an immense need to overcome the analysis gap by using business intelligence methods to analyse data in context in order to enable timely data use for planning, prediction and comparison purposes in order to reinvent destinations in the digital age.
17. Though the majority of live and big data is not structured data, the fact that the majority of it is geo-referenced opens enormous, previously unknown opportunities for tourism observatories.
18. By increasing the return on investment of existing data and its exploitation, tourism destinations can be successful in modelling tourists' decisions and reinventing destinations tourism portfolio accordingly. Moreover, modelling provides opportunities to reduce tourism pressure and undesired impacts on destination environment and culture.