



# India - Sustainability and the Tourism Rankings

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## Abstract

Sustainable tourism leads to environmental protection, community development, and the improvement of livelihood of the local residents of a place. This has been a prime concern of the Government of India in every five-year plan and national tourism policy undertaken. Sustainability is essential for the country's prosperity, growth and development. The present research study is a review of current research literature and policy frameworks of the Indian tourism industry in terms of sustainability. The research analyzes the Indian tourism global ranking and the 'environmental sustainability' rankings of the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index. The study is based on secondary data analysis including analysis of five-year plans of Indian planning processes, national tourism policies and the global tourism rankings of the Indian tourism industry obtained from a Travel and Tourism Competitive Index provided by World Economic Forum. Based on the secondary data analysis, the study highlights a paradoxical situation of 'sustainability and the tourism rankings' for the Indian tourism industry.

**Keywords:** Competitiveness, India, policy planning, sustainability, tourism industry

## Introduction

The Tourism industry has grown larger in size as international tourist arrivals have improved from 528 million in 2005 to 1322 million in 2017. Resources are however the same, and with a rise in tourism, scarcity is increasing and countries compete on scarce resources for their tourism industry to be strong (Murphy and Price, 2005). Common resources are shared by the host community and the tourists and this leads to declines in economic wellbeing, environmental degradation, social injustices and tourists' dissatisfaction from a destination. Thus, strong policy legislation is required to control the negative effects of common pools resource utilization on the tourism industry (Briassoulis, 2002).

Tourism is an important sector for world economic growth. As organizations like UN and WTO are laying down the ethical standards to be applicable worldwide this is even more critical (Lansing and Vries, 2007). Apart from the positive aspects of the tourism industry in terms of income and employment generation, mass tourism also has negative impacts like loss of cultural value and environmental disturbances (Budeanu, 2005).

Technical advancements, developments, urbanization and industrialization has led to ecological disturbances. The tourists' entry into natural areas sometimes leads to displacement of natural habitats, deterioration of heritage like cultural loss and monumental depletion by the overcrowding effect. Miller (2000) argued that environmental concerns influence the tourists' decision making and viewed tour operators as a source of information about environmental sustainability of the destination. Scott (2011) argued that understanding the importance of climate change is essential in the tourism industry and there should be a long term vision of tourism sustainability with stakeholder participation. Therefore, there is a



need to apply the model of sustainable development in the tourism industry. Tourism sustainability needs to be accountable on a global and local basis (Lu and Nepal, 2009).

Sustainable tourism is a sub-branch of sustainable development, which gained prime importance after the Our Common Future, also known as the Brundtland Report in recognition of former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland's role as Chair of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), and this was published in 1987 by the United Nations. The report highlighted environmental and natural concerns; however, community participation was downplayed, even though, it is an essential component of sustainable tourism. A host community needs be informed about the positive aspects of tourism so as to overcome the difficulties faced by them such as a "lack of knowledge, skills, and self-belief". It is important that a host community must understand-what is sustainable tourism and the benefits deriving out of it; then only can an active participation be achieved (Cole, 2007). Sustainable tourism is grounded in the interrelationship of tourism, environment and the residents of the place (Liu, 2003). Community involvement (Richard and Hall, 2002) and stakeholders participation (Waligo et al. 2013) are essential elements of sustainable tourism as they are tied with the basic principle of sustainable development. Sustainable tourism development indicators should be identified in a clear way based on the destination characteristics and monitored on a continuous basis to ensure sustainable development for an area (Ward and Butler 2002; Weaver and Lawton 1999). Critical indicators of sustainable tourism are population, peace, prosperity, pollution and protection (Buckley, 2012). Buckley suggested that rather than self-responsibility there is need for legislation for sustainable development in the tourism industry. Weaver and Lawton (1999) suggested that unsustainable tourism activities must be replaced by sustainable tourism activities through mass tourism and alternative tourism activities. Thus, Sustainable tourism can be rationalized as the "assurance of renewable economic, social and cultural benefits to the community and its environment" (Richard and Hall, 2002).

Sustainable tourism has been extensively covered by the researchers worldwide, but there is confusion on the terms- 'sustainable tourism' and 'sustainable development'. Every kind of tourism can be regarded as sustainable tourism. It is mainly associated with the future and conservation. More research studies are needed to provide a scale to define sustainable tourism and its impact on human and ecological environments (Butler, 1999). Sustainable tourism has been largely defined but the concept still remains debatable as the universal adoption of the term is not possible (Scott, 2011; Hardy et al. 2012).

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) has been in charge of the drive to lead a Sustainable Tourism Programme (STP) to ensure the practices of sustainability and sustainable development for tourism industry are realized. The organization defines sustainable tourism as "Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities". Sustainable consumption and production of tourism is among the core areas of STP, and other areas include stakeholders' collaboration, application of sustainable tourism guidelines to the tourist destinations, organizations and the tourists and lastly enhancing the investments and finance for tourism sustainability. The WTO's sustainable tourism framework highlights the role of governments of the different countries, who are the policy makers in reality for the sustainable tourism to be realized. Seeking the participation from the locals and the tourists alike is a major and thus challenging task for the policy makers paving the way to sustainable tourism. Countries are adopting the model of sustainable tourism to achieve sustainability and maintain viability for their respective tourism industries and they should learn from each other.



## **Motivation for the Present Research Study**

It was apparent from the literature review that studies are mainly oriented towards defining the term sustainable tourism and dealing with the negative effects on the tourism industry. The researchers demand a strong legislative approach in order to curb the situation of environmental imbalances. Therefore, the study analysed the legislative framework for sustainability of the Indian tourism industry in terms of five-year plans and national tourism policies. Thus, the research analyses one of the parameters of an index 'environmental sustainability' in detail, along with overall tourism ranking for the last decade of the Indian tourism industry. Strategic actions have also been suggested to achieve sustainability for the Indian tourism industry.

## **Literature Review**

### **Sustainable Tourism: An International Perspective**

Forsyth (1997) explained environmental regulations from the two archetypes; self-responsibility and legislation by the authorities. The analysis revealed that self-responsibility initiatives for environmental regulations are ineffective and there is a need for mandatory regulations by the tourism organizations, which needs to be imposed on the companies operating in the tourism industry. The study suggested that there is a need for the coordinated approach among the tourism system of governance and different participants of the tourism industry, for environmental protection leading towards sustainable tourism.

Hunter (1997) cited that there are no specific patterns to define sustainable tourism; however, the author defined the concept of sustainable development based on four different paradigms. First, sustainable development through tourism imperatives, which explains the application of sustainability to tourism industry with the economic, environmental and social implications. Secondly, sustainable development through product-led tourism, explaining the development and sustenance of the new tourism products through public-private partnerships. The third dimension is sustainable development through the environment-led tourism. It explains the environmental protection through regulations and managing eco-tourism activities. Lastly the study defined sustainable development through neotenous tourism activities, where tourism should be discouraged at the cost of ecological imbalances.

Sharpley (2000) identified sustainable tourism differently from its parental paradigm of sustainable development. It was later defined as the development activities in terms of economics and upliftment of social classes of the society, and sustainable tourism was defined as the tourism activities mainly concerned with the environmental protection and ecological improvements. However, the study also concluded the opposite fact that the development of tourism over a period of time brings socio-economic development or in other words, leads to sustainable development.

Hassan (2000) identified the competitiveness determinants for the tourist destinations in light of their environmental sustainability. The determinants are comparative advantage, demand orientation, industry structure, environmental commitment. Hassan defined comparative advantage as macro and micro environmental factors critical to destination competitiveness including climate, culture, location, culture, history, heritage, safety and security, nature, infrastructure, access to information, environmental quality, leisure activities, global information network, global and regional alliances. Demand orientation is defined as the responsiveness of the destination to the changing needs of the market (tourists). Industry structure referred to the existence and non-existence of the organizations like banks, health service, tourism suppliers etc., which could impact the destination competitiveness. The



author defined environmental commitment as the destinations commitment to environmental sustainability.

Hardy and Beeton (2002) assert that sustainable tourism has been associated with environment and economic development over a long period of time. However, it needs to be associated with the community development as well. Community involvement is required for sustainable tourism development. Choi and Sirakaya (2005) emphasized the role of a host community for sustainable tourism and developed a sustainable tourism attitude scale measuring the attitude of residents towards a sustainable tourism for a destination. Through exploratory factor analysis, seven factors were identified. The factors are 'environmental sustainability', 'social costs', 'economic benefits', 'community participation', 'long term planning', 'visitor satisfaction' and 'community centred economy'.

Kasim (2006) highlighted that tourism negatively impacts upon the physical and social environments. The study focused on the role of the hospitality industry and called for joint participation involving government organizations, non-governmental organizations, and community participation for maintaining the sustainability of the tourism industry.

Boers and Cottrell (2007) presented a model of sustainable tourism infrastructure planning (STIP) through inclusion of Geographical Information Systems. The study was conducted for the Sinharaja Forest Reserve in Sri Lanka. Three phases of STIP suggested in the model are: first phase is 'visitor segmentation'; identification of different segments based on behavioural patterns and preferences. The second phase is 'zoning'; classifying the land areas based on the utilization and management of carrying capacity. The third phase is 'transportation network planning'. The accessibility of the visitors to the place is important. Zoning and transportation is based on a geographical information system. The study was constructed on the trail developments and is somewhat different in nature and its application is very limited.

Pomering et al. (2011) identified the marketing mix elements for sustainable tourism. The traditional seven P's of marketing mix: product, price, place, promotion, participants (people), process and physical evidence has been extended to partnership, packaging and programming. Partnership is defined as partnership between different travel organizations so as to achieve a whole objective of sustainability; packaging refers to bundle pricing of different tourism requirements like transportation, accommodation etc. Programming has been associated with the special events; however, it increases the burden on the tourist destination and brings with it lot of challenges like waste management and managing carrying capacity.

Focusing on the concept of host community involvement for sustainable tourism, Lee (2012) validated the relationship of community attachment and community involvement significantly influencing the host community support for sustainable tourism and perceived benefits act as a moderating variable. However, an insignificant relationship was observed amid community attachment and involvement with the perceived costs. The study suggested that the destination marketer must develop strategies, which should increase the perceived benefits for the host community including employment opportunities to the locals.

### **Taxonomical Research on Sustainable Tourism**

Lu and Nepal (2009) presented a taxonomical paper analysing the publications of the Journal of Sustainable Tourism. The paper identified that the journal has significantly contributed in the field of sustainable tourism as empirical and qualitative research studies have been published in the journal over the period of time; apart, there has been more focus on stakeholders' participation. The study identified that the researches from developing countries are poorly represented and there is less change in methodologies for writing a research papers. The journal was regarded as multidisciplinary in comparison to interdisciplinary.



Zolfani et al. (2015) presented the literature review paper on sustainable tourism frameworks and applications. 132 journal articles from 47 reputed journals were selected for the review purpose. The paper identified 14 categories of sustainable tourism, which are 'paradigm', 'sustainable tourism development', 'market research and economics', 'policy making', 'infrastructure', 'modelling and planning', 'rural tourism', 'environment and crisis management', 'ecosystem and eco-tourism', 'climate change', 'ecology', 'culture and heritage', 'human resource management', and 'energy and material saving'. The study considered policy planning by the government and community participation as an important constituent of sustainable tourism.

Ruhanen et al. (2015) conducted a bibliometric examination of the researches in the area of sustainable tourism. Four leading journals were selected for the study purpose; the journals are *Annals of Tourism Research*, *Journal of Travel Research*, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* and *Tourism Management*. 492 papers were selected for the study purpose. The study concluded that a lot of work has been carried out in the field of sustainable tourism research over the last 25 years and the concept is maturing now.

### **Sustainable Tourism: Indian Perspective**

In an Indian context, Kapoor (2011) presented an example of community based tourism for the world famous heritage sites- the Khajuraho Temple located in Chhatarpur district of Madhya Pradesh. It was found that local people were benefitting in terms of socio-cultural development, education, technological awareness and improvement in economic structure of the region on the account of tourism activities. The research study suggested that tourism brings educational, cultural, social and political value for the local community.

Thryambakam (2013) provided excellent real insights of community participation for the development of tourism in the Maredumilli district of Andhra Pradesh. It was found that in this region, a community based eco-tourism model is followed, where community partnering with the forestry department takes care of ecotourism activities. Profit is even shared by the forestry department and the local community. By this model, the local community gets economic benefits and also takes care of the environment ensuring sustainable tourism for the place.

Uniyal and Sharma (2013) defined sustainable tourism as a tourism activity that aims for conservation of resources and enhancing the value of local customs, cultures and traditions. The study regarded sustainable tourism as a tool of poverty reduction and negating the negative effects on local culture and environment. This study called for the joint participation of various stakeholders of tourism industry and suggested suitable measures for every stakeholder. The various stakeholders identified in the study are local communities, environmentalists, organizations and government. The study provided a framework of sustainable tourism and called these vice-principles of sustainable tourism. These principles include 'Visitor Satisfaction', 'Industry Profitability', 'Community Acceptance' and 'Environmental Protection'.

Manoj (2008) studied the aspects of sustainable tourism in India from a global perspective analysing the scenario of the Indian state 'Kerala'-God's Own Country. The adverse impact of tourism on the environment identified in the research study are pressure on the natural environment including landscape, water bodies, local resources etc., harm to natural habitats of wildlife and loss of biodiversity, pollution, and global warming. The study regarded eco-tourism as a 'rescuer' for all environmental problems that are caused due to tourism activities. Some of the strategies suggested for sustainable tourism in the state of Kerala include a public-private partnership model, infrastructural development, managing the carrying capacity, ease of immigration facilities, grant of Special Economic Zone status and benefits in taxation policies for tourism projects, cooperation from local people and involvement of technology and



focusing on core tourism products of Kerala mainly medical tourism and health tourism. The suggested measures have already been in consideration under the ministerial planning process for their further development, but the study did not provide new avenues of sustainable tourism development.

Mamhoori and Nasim (2013) highlighted the participation of tour operators for sustainable tourism development in an Indian context. Sustainable tourism was regarded as a tourism that leads to improvement in quality of life of the locals, the preservation of natural environment for future and maintaining the ecological balance ensuring cultural integrity and providing a good quality experience for the tourists.

Bhutia (2015) examined the key aspects of sustainable tourism development in India specific to West Bengal. The identified areas are environmental degradation, inadequate infrastructural development in the state and exceeding carrying capacity which hinders the way forward for tourism. The study provided measures for sustainable tourism growth in the region, which are participation of locals, public-private partnerships, increasing awareness about the sustainable tourism, integrated human resource development, increasing forest cover, providing training courses for the people working in tourism industry and carrying out research activities on sustainable tourism including seminars, workshops and conferences.

Wang and Lalrinawma (2016) highlighted the role of local communities and local areas for sustainable tourism development. The study regarded rural areas as an integral part of modern tourism experience as visitors expect to experience the local life of a place. The study presented the case of Assam Tourism Department in the development of adventure tourism facilities within the state. The department outsourced the research activity that resulted in a satisfactory solution in the form of 'hotspots' identification for adventure tourism, monitoring of the marketing environment and providing greater visibility to potential markets through tour operators. The study suggested timely research and a strong policy framework as important aspects for achieving sustainability in the tourism industry with the inclusion of rural areas in tourism development.

SK and Jain (2017) draw on the similarity between green tourism and sustainable tourism to explain their relationship. Green tourism aims towards conservation of natural resources and improvement in the livelihood of locals. While, on the other hand, sustainable tourism was defined as a tourism activity that takes care of conservation and preservation of a country's traditional and cultural resources. Sustainable tourism was regarded as tourism activity covering various facets of the tourism industry. The challenges for sustainable tourism identified in the study includes preservation of country's resources (natural and cultural), minimizing the negative effect of tourism on the tourist destinations, management of seasonality in tourism industry, reducing the effects of tourism related transportation and bringing improvements in the lives of locals so that they can lead a good quality life based on sustainable tourism activities.

Mathew and Sreejesh (2017) examined the impact of sustainable responsible tourism on destination sustainability and quality of life of a community at a tourist destination. The study was conducted in Indian settings in the tourism state of Kerala and data were collected from the three different tourists' destinations in Kerala- Kovalam, Kumarakom and Thekkady. Through confirmatory factor analysis, the study concluded that perceived responsible sustainable tourism in terms of economic, social, cultural and environmental responsibility significantly influences perceived destination sustainability. Perceived destination sustainability was found to be impacting upon the quality of life of local residents in terms of material well-being, community well-being, emotional well-being, health and safety well-being, and quality of life in general. Material well-being was defined in terms of income and employment, cost of living and basic necessities and real estate taxes. Community well-being was related to people, tourism services and facilities, community life and environment.



Emotional well-being was related to leisure time, cultural exchanges and the preservation of cultural resources including spiritual and pilgrimage service. Health and safety well-being was defined in terms of air quality level, water quality level, safety, accidents and crime rate and issues related to cleanliness. Quality of life in general was defined in terms of locals perception towards a life as a whole and the way they spend their life and their overall feeling about the life.

### **Research Openings from the Literature Review**

The critical review of existing literature highlighted that sustainable tourism is mainly associated with the conservation and preservation of place's natural and cultural resources via a coordinated approach based on the stakeholders' participation primarily the host community. The different service providers of the tourism industry such as inter alia hoteliers, tour operators and tourism organizations have been considered as the stakeholders of the tourism industry. A public-private partnership has been suggested. Researches in the Indian context have highlighted the practices of sustainable tourism at different tourist destinations. Few of the studies have analysed the trends of sustainable tourism researches. The review identified that the researchers are calling for imposed legislation from the tourism organization for environmental sustainability issues. There is a lack of research studies analysing the legislations and policy framework in light of sustainability initiatives for the tourism industry specific to one particular place, and measuring the performance of the place in travel and tourism rankings provided by World Economic Forum. Therefore, the present research study is analysing the Indian tourism industry policy framework in terms of sustainability via the five-year planning process and national tourism policies. The study is hopefully, providing an analysis of sustainable tourism efforts and the tourism rankings of the Indian tourism industry. Environmental sustainability parameters of the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index have also been analysed since the inception of the index.

### **Analysis of Five-Year Plans in India: A Sustainable Tourism Perspective**

**The First Five-Year plan** was made for the time period of March 1951 to April 1956. The development captured the essence of the plan. Community development and agriculture were one of the core areas of the plan. Rs. 90 crores were allotted for community development. Tourism was not given prime importance as some other development tasks were priorities at that time. However, development of transportation facilities is one of the priorities of the plan. The plan focused on the development of roads, highways, shipping, aviation and the development of railways.

**The Second Five-Year plan** began in the year 1956, focusing on industrialization apart from agriculture. The economic development of the country was retarded at that time; thus, industrialization was prioritized to uplift rural India through exploration of opportunities and spreading the benefits to the weaker sections of the society. The tourism industry also became a part of the planning process under the Second Five-Year plan as the budget of Rs. 3.36 crores were allotted to tourism industry development; both state-wise and centrally. Infrastructural development and transportation were also emphasized for the progress of the tourism industry.

**The Third Five-Year plan** focused on development, aiming to provide equal opportunity to the Indian masses to lead a good life. The major objective of the plan was to build a strong foundation for the sustained economic growth. It was the beginning of true tourism development activities in the country. A Winter Sports Complex was established in Gulmarg in Kashmir. ITDC (Indian Tourism Development Corporation) in 1966, with the purpose of promotion and development of tourism in the country.



In the **Fourth plan** (1969-74), Rs. 36 crores were allotted as the budget expenditure for the tourism industry. Development and improvement in tourist facilities at the tourist destinations were part of the plan with the objective of increasing tourist traffic. Emphasis was laid on the development of infrastructure especially in the hospitality industry. The ITDC focused on the development of hotels, motels and cottages. The ITDC was given importance to strengthen the branding and positioning of the tourism industry. It was also responsible for the promotion and development of the Indian tourism industry. The plan emphasized the improvement of environmental quality and preservation and conservation of natural resources.

**The Fifth Five-Year plan** focused on the development and improvement of tourist facilities at the tourist destinations. Infrastructure development continued to gain prime importance for the development of the tourism industry. Rs. 23.62 crores were allocated for the development of the tourism department programs. In addition, Rs. 17.62 crores were allocated to ITDC. The undertakings of tourism department included loans to private sector hotel construction, development of tourist spots at Kovalam, Goa, Gulmarg, Kullu and Manali. Development of hotels, motels, bungalows, tourist lodge in forests and cottages were on the agenda of the ITDC. For the states region, Rs. 33.21 crores were allocated for the development of the tourism industry.

**The Sixth Five-Year plan**, significantly focused in attaining efficiency in utilization of resources to ensure productivity. Government focused on proper utilization of energy resources and its conservation. The Sixth five-year plan was a significant landmark for the progress of tourism in India. During the plan, in the year 1982, first 'National Tourism Policy' of India was announced. Rs. 72 crores were allocated to tourism industry development. The focus was on the development of tourism circuits maximising the benefits of tourism. Along with the development, for the first time, the need was felt for marketing and promotion of Indian tourist destinations in overseas markets.

The **Seventh Five-Year plan** (1985-89) aimed at sustainability of resources as production involves utilization of natural resources. The plan emphasized the need of increasing the efficiency in production but not at the cost of exploitation of the natural resources. "Eco-development Task Forces consisting of ex-servicemen were deployed for activities such as revegetation of degraded areas, soil conservation work, eradication of weeds, etc." This plan focused on the different aspects of environmental protection like resources conservation, eco developments and increases of research drives for environmental protection. Improving life quality and providing employment remained prime agenda items on this plan. The Government established the National Committee on Tourism in the year 1986 to check the social and economic importance of tourism in India and to accelerate the growth and development of tourism in India.

In 1992, the **Eighth Five-Year plan** (1992-97) was formulated. A Protectionist strategy was made focusing on the protection of natural resources from degradation and strict laws were enforced under this policy against environmental depletion and efforts were made to increase public awareness towards environmental protection. A National Action Plan were formulated for tourism in 1992. The key aspects of the plan included the development of tourist areas, developing accommodation facilities, diversification of tourism products and conservation of national heritage. The hilly areas, desert land, North-Eastern region and Western Ghats were to be developed as the tourist destination as an outcome of the plan.

In the **Ninth Five-Year plan** (1997-2002), the National Development Council aimed at sustainability of the environment through the participation of people from different societal levels including scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward classes and through women empowerment. The plan focused on the development of the required infrastructure for tourism including transportation and accommodation and safety of tourists at the different tourist destinations. Providing a pleasant experience to the tourists through a tranquil





environment, security, and providing basic infrastructural facilities constituted the core part of the plan. The plan aimed at conservation and preservation of monuments and other heritage sites and the promoting of the cultural heritage of India like crafts, dance forms, etc. The key areas of the plan included the development and promotion of different tourism products like indigenous and natural health tourism, rural tourism, pilgrimage tourism, adventure tourism, and heritage tourism. Development of tourism in the North-East region in standings of eco-tourism and adventure tourism was given great attention. Residents were encouraged to provide low cost accommodation facilities to the tourists.

**The Tenth Five-Year plan (2002-07)** was introduced in the year 2002, in the same year; second National Tourism Policy was formulated and 'Incredible India' campaign was launched. The year 2002, was the transition year for the Indian tourism industry. Tourism was prioritized for tapping the unexplored and huge potential of tourism in India. Plans were made for the development of underdeveloped areas having great potential for tourism. Tourism was considered more than a mere source of foreign exchange earning to a tool of employment generation and poverty reduction. The focus in the tenth plan was on public-private partnerships for the creation of world-class infrastructure and innovative tourism products. Domestic tourism was considered as a basis for viable and sustainable tourism. the government pursues the state governments to participate in order to achieve the socio-economic objectives and to make tourism contribute to national development. State governments were required to maintain the balance between tourism development and environmental protection; they were to ensure that there is no harm to the environment because of tourism in a particular region. The role of local people was also considered important for long-term sustainability. The plan aimed to prevent India's beaches, forest areas and sanctuaries from environmental degradation because of the excess carrying capacity and once again sustainability was emphasized. The environmental deterioration of hill areas due to excess carrying capacity was acknowledged in the plan. The plan was regarded as "public and legislative support" and was seen as a basic requirement for the sustainable development of the tourism industry.

**The Eleventh Five-Year plan (2007-2012)** regarded tourism as a multi-sectoral activity initiating the country's growth and development in terms of socio-economic improvement. The significance of the tourism industry was marked with national integration and conservation and preservation of natural resources, monumental heritage, culture and traditional art forms of the country. The plan aimed at participation of state governments for tourism development and a public-private partnerships model was also suggested. The ministry pursued local peoples participation in tourism development activities so as to spread social-economic benefits to backward and rural areas. For sustainable tourism, the ministry planned enhancements in basic facilities at the National Parks, site management and visitor management. Some of the key aspect of sustainability and environment protection included afforestation, joint forest management (participation of forest department and locals), control of water pollution and air pollution, and conservation of lakes and rivers.

Faster, More Inclusive and Sustainable Growth was the core theme of the **Twelfth Five-Year plan**. The plan called out for establishing Sustainable Tourism Criteria for India (STCI), which would apparently indicate certification mechanisms, tourism capacity building, and governance mechanisms for sustainable tourism. The plan clearly stated that socio-economic well-being should not cause damage to the country's cultural, physical and environmental heritage. The plan anticipated the need of stakeholders' participation including the private sector, local people, and different government authorities for tourism development ensuring the sustainability. The development of the tourism infrastructure was primarily assigned to the public sector.

**The National Tourism Policy 1982:** The major policy objective was to preserve and conserve the natural and cultural heritage resources of the country. Policy apparently indicated the



negative effects of tourism like plundering of natural resources, disturbance to ecological environment, weakening of the traditional and cultural ethos of the nation and secret selling of valuable antiques. The ministry called for maintaining the balance between development and conservation of country's resources and suggested appropriate measures in terms of educating the people and increasing their awareness towards the conservation and preservation of cultural and natural heritage.

**The National Tourism Policy of 2002:** In this policy, Sustainability was regarded as the guiding star of the policy document. The policy aimed to make tourism a 'smokeless' industry by ensuring that no one is exploiting the natural resources to have short term gains. Exceeding tourists' carrying capacity at the destination should never be ignored. The policy aimed to utilize the relationship between cultural assets and the tourism industry for environmental upgrading, monuments' protection and protection of the areas around the monuments. The protection of the environment and the heritage sites were considered as essential for the tourism industry.

**The National Tourism Policy of 2015:** In terms of sustainable tourism, the policy planned to develop and promote India as a safe and welcoming sustainable tourism destination. The policy aimed at inter-ministerial coordination and coordination between the public and private sectors. The policy aims to benefit local communities living in natural environments. Another objective of the policy is to create safe, secure, clean and thus hygienic tourism environment. Progress of infrastructural development has always been a prime concern in policymaking. The major objective of the policy is to "position India as a global brand and preferred tourism destination in overseas markets".

## **Research Methodology**

The research began with the review of research literature. Research studies specific to sustainability and tourism policy planning were thoroughly reviewed. The literature review included studies from an international perspective and also the Indian perspective grounded on the concept of sustainable tourism. Gaps suggested that there is a lack of research studies comparing the policy planning framework and rankings of Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index provided by World Economic Forum for any country. Thus, to fill the gap, the review of policy frameworks in terms of National Tourism Policies and Five Year plans was conducted. After that, the analysis of overall tourism rankings of the Indian tourism industry and environmental sustainability rankings was presented. The analysis presented a surprising finding that sustainability has gained significant attention in the planning process; however there is a continuous decline in the environmental sustainability rankings provided by the competitiveness index. Thus, the paper concludes with suggesting that there be more effective marketing strategies to progress up the environmental sustainability rankings of the Indian tourism industry. The last section of the paper concludes with the findings followed by a brief discussion.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index: Analysing India's Performance in Terms of Sustainability**

A Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index was introduced in the year 2007 by the World Economic Forum. The competitiveness index proposed 13 key competitiveness pillars to measure a country's competitiveness in terms of travel and tourism. The key pillars are 'policy rules and regulations', 'environmental regulation', 'safety and security', 'health and hygiene',



'prioritization of travel and tourism', 'airport transport infrastructure', 'ground transport infrastructure', 'tourism Infrastructure', 'ICT infrastructure', 'price competitiveness in T&T industry', 'human resources', 'national and tourism perception'; and 'natural and cultural resources'. Since 2007, an index has been given for the year 2008, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015 and 2017. The key pillars remained the same till 2013; a change was introduced in the year 2015. The 13 pillars of competitiveness index was extended to 14 pillars of travel and tourism competitiveness.

Newly defined pillars are 'business environment', 'safety and security', 'health and hygiene', 'human resources and labour market', 'ICT Readiness', 'prioritization of travel and tourism', 'international openness', 'price competitiveness', '**environmental sustainability**', 'air transport infrastructure', 'ground and port infrastructure', 'tourist service infrastructure', 'natural resources'; 'cultural resources and business travel'.

**Sustainability** has been defined as one of the key pillars of the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index. The next section of the paper compares the global ranks of India on the 14 pillars of competitiveness for the year 2015 and 2017. The last two indexes were chosen because they were revised and updated in the year 2015, as 13 pillars were extended to 14 new pillars of competitiveness. There are different sub-criteria for environmental sustainability, which have also been compared for the two years.

Year	2015	2017
<b>Overall Rank</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Competitiveness Pillars</b>	<b>Global Rank</b>	<b>Global Rank</b>
1. Business Environment	107	89
2. Safety and Security	129	114
3. Health and Hygiene	106	104
4. Human Resources and Labour Market	111	87
5. ICT Readiness	114	112
6. Prioritization of Travel and Tourism	96	104
7. International Openness	69	55
8. Price Competitiveness	8	10
<b>9. Environmental Sustainability</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>134</b>
10. Air Transport Infrastructure	35	32
11. Ground and Port Infrastructure	50	29
12. Tourist Service Infrastructure	109	110
13. Natural Resources	17	24
14. Cultural Resources and Business Travel	10	9

Table 1: Global ranks of competitiveness pillars for the year 2015 & 2017

Source: Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2015 and Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2017

Table 1 compares the global rankings of India for the years 2015 and 2017 in terms of the competitiveness pillars of the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index provided by World Economic Forum.

It can be inferred from table 1 that infrastructural development, price competitiveness and country's richness in cultural and natural resources are responsible for its improved overall global ranking in the competitiveness Index. The rankings for the said parameters are in the top 50 list. Price competitiveness is ranked 10 for the year 2017; however, it has slipped 2 places; an effort must be there to restore its position. Air transport infrastructure has improved three places and ranked 32 for the year 2017 and similarly ground and port infrastructure has significantly improved in rankings from 50 to 29 in 2017.

Rankings for natural resources is 24 for the year 2017, which has slipped 7 places in comparison to the year 2015. Still, it is in the top 30 list; therefore, continuous efforts should be made for improving the rankings. For the fourteenth pillar, the ranking for the year 2017 is 9, which has improved 1 place. The global rankings for the discussed parameters are able to



make it through the top 50 list, giving a boost to the country's overall rankings, which is 40 for the year 2017.

Much infrastructural development has taken place in India post liberalization, because of privatization and this has also encouraged public-private partnerships. In terms of natural and cultural resources these are the country's wealth and heritage, which are naturally occurring in the country. Thus, minimizing the government's role in improving tourism competitiveness as other parameters are low scoring, and need to be closely monitored jointly by the Tourism Ministry and the Government of India so as to improve their rankings in the said index. Focusing on the sustainability aspects, the global ranking of India in terms of 'environmental sustainability' has moved up 5 places from 139 to 134. However, it is still far behind and has been explained in detail in the next section.

<i>Environmental Sustainability</i>	
<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Rank</b>
1. Stringency of environmental regulations	51
2. Enforcement of environmental regulations	43
3. Sustainability of travel and tourism industry development	78
4. Particulate matter (2.5) concentration $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$	135
5. Environmental treaty ratification 0–27 (best)	31
6. Baseline water stress 5–0 (best)	106
7. Threatened species % total species	126
8. Forest cover change % change	34
9. Wastewater treatment %	93
10. Coastal shelf fishing pressure tonnes/km <sup>2</sup>	86

Table 2: Sustainability indicator ranks of India in Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index 2017  
 Source: Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2017

Table 2 represents the different indicators of the ninth pillar of an index. Out of 10 indicators, India lies in top 50, only in three of the indicators, which are 'enforcement of environmental regulations' (43), 'environmental treaty ratification' (31) and 'forest cover change % change' (34). Global rankings in top 50 is a good sign for environmental sustainability in Indian context. However, six other indicators reflect a different viewpoint. India is far behind in other indicators including 'sustainability of travel and tourism industry development' (78), 'particulate matter (2.5) concentration  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ' (135), 'baseline water stress 5–0 (best)' (106), 'threatened species % total species' (126), 'wastewater treatment %' (93), 'coastal shelf fishing pressure tonnes/km<sup>2</sup>' (86). However, for one of the indicators, India is near to top 50 as it lies at number 51 for 'stringency of environmental regulations'. The authors consider the '*Sustainability of travel and tourism development*' as an important issue. The Indian tourism industry has been growing and development is on its way as India has moved to place 40 in the competitiveness index. However, growth and development needs to be sustained.

The development should be accelerated in such a way that that country's resources (tourism, natural and cultural) are conserved and by ensuring optimum utilization of resources without any over-exploitation by anyone in any form. Development must ensure sustainability in every aspect of the tourism industry. However, 'Sustainability of travel and tourism development' global ranking for Indian tourism industry is at 78 for the year 2017, which is distressing for the Indian Tourism Ministry. The concerned authority needs to monitor the sustainability aspects of the tourism industry development very carefully as sustainability is a key resource for the future generations. Without sustainability, the growth and development will be short lived, and it will turn out to be a major obstacle for the tourism development going forward.

India's global ranking in travel and tourism competitiveness index (2007-17) in terms of environmental sustainability has fallen very badly, which is explained in the next section through analysing table 3 and figure 1.



Year/Headings	2007	2008	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017
Environmental Regulation	41	-----N/A-----					
Environmental Sustainability		71	74	107	107	139	134

Table 3: India's Ranking (2007-17) in terms of Environmental Sustainability in TTCI  
 Source: Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2015 and Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report (2007-2017)

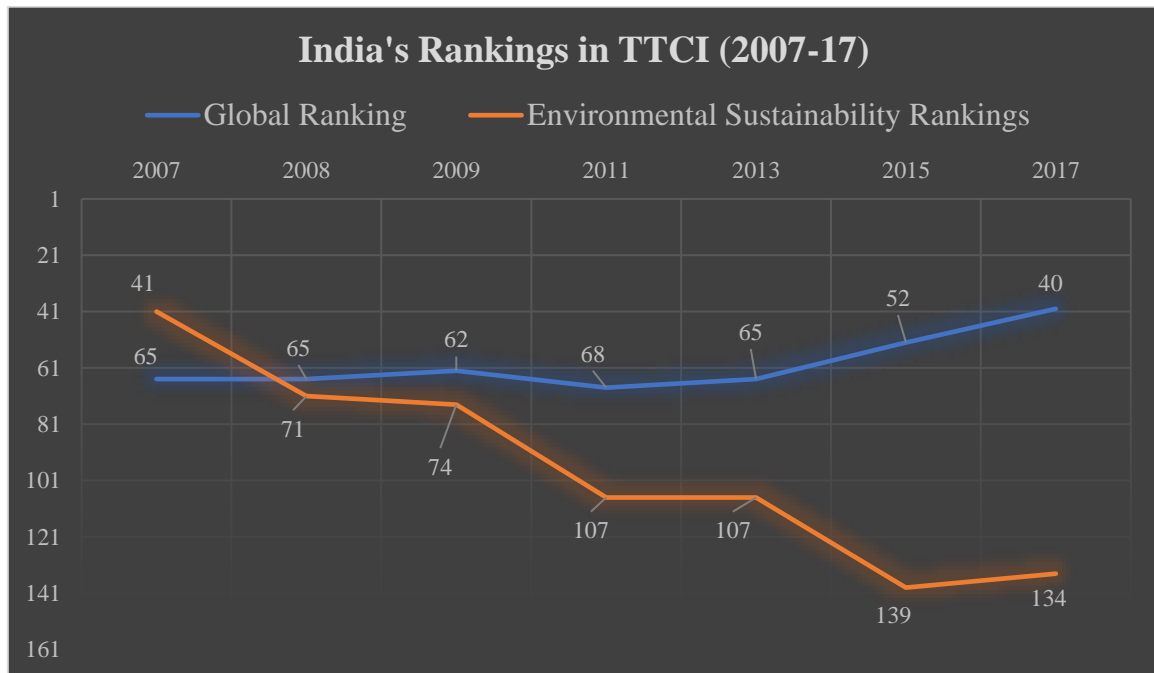


Figure1: India's Ranking in Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (2007-17)  
 Source: Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2015 and Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report (2007-2017)

Figure 1 explains the global rankings of India in the competitiveness index the last 10 years. The overall rankings of India have shown a significant improvement over the ten years; as in the year 2007 it was 65 and in the year 2017 it rose up to 40<sup>th</sup> place. Ranking showed a stagnation from the year 2007 to 2013; however, rankings jumped 13 places for the year 2015 up to 52. The growing trend continued as rankings moved to 40 in the year 2017. The overall tourism rankings represents a good scenario for the Indian tourism industry. Infrastructural development and cultural and natural resources can be considered as the major contributors in the overall tourism rankings as these competitiveness pillars lie in top 50 (refer table 1). Post liberalization (after 1991) because of privatization, infrastructural development took place through public-private partnership models and India is bestowed with abundant natural and cultural resources. The Indian tourism industry had great achievement in terms of global tourism rankings but that needs to be sustained in the long run. Sustainability primarily 'environmental sustainability' is a key area of competitiveness. Table 3 and figure 1 indicates a different scenario. The global rankings of the Indian tourism industry in terms of 'environmental sustainability' has been on a continuous downward spiral since the inception of an index in the year 2007. Sustainability rankings have fallen drastically to 139 in the year 2015, in comparison to 41 in the year 2007. However, they has improved five places in the year 2017 and moved to 134. To improve the sustainability rankings, the government should closely monitor the parameters of 'environmental sustainability' as depicted in table 2. Table 2 is clearly indicating the areas, where India needs to improve in terms of 'environmental sustainability'.



Sustainability has always been in consideration in the five-year planning process and the national tourism policies. The Indian tourism policy planning highlights that sustainable development and sustainable tourism has been given due consideration and largely accentuated during the twelfth five-year plan. In addition, the overall global tourism rankings of the Indian tourism industry has improved as it has moved to place 40 in the year 2017. Sustainability thus comprises an important component of competitiveness. A close examination of the index reveals a different scenario in which the Indian tourism global rankings in terms of 'environmental sustainability' has fallen drastically over the decade from rank 41 in 2007 to 134 in the year 2017. This needs an immediate attention of the policy makers and the Indian Tourism Ministry. India is lagging behind in the sustainability aspect which needs to be monitored closely and continuously. The Tourism Ministry needs to review its policies based on sustainable tourism and identify the weak points responsible for lowering India in the rankings and corrective actions should be taken. A new framework for the development of sustainable tourism in the country is essentially, and this could significantly affect global tourism rankings and it can be asserted here, that without sustainability, the present growth and development loses its relevance entirely.

### **Strategic Actions for Sustainable Tourism Development**

- The Indian Tourism Ministry must focus on the parameters of 'environmental sustainability' of the travel and tourism competitive index. Table 3 clearly indicates that the Indian tourism rankings on the competitiveness pillar of 'environmental sustainability' have fallen drastically over the period of ten years; from 41 in the year 2007 to 134 in 2017. Thus, there is a need for immediate attention towards the sustainability in an Indian context as has been discussed since the initiation of the planning process. The ministry should focus on the different parameters of environmental sustainability as depicted in table 2. Monitoring the parameters of 'environmental sustainability' (refer table 2) is essentially required so as to achieve the full potential of the tourism industry. Improved rankings of sustainability will directly contribute in the country's overall global tourism ranking, and India can reach the top 10 tourist destinations worldwide in the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index.
- The present study suggests that sustainability should not be linked only with the environmental aspects, and it should be associated with every domain of tourism growth and development. The new identified areas of sustainability in the tourism industry are employment generation, sustainability in tourism economic environment, new product development, heritage conservation and preservation and stability in tourism rankings moving towards improvement.
- The Indian Tourism Ministry must clearly define the parameters which come under sustainable development for tourism industry. Specific policies need to be developed for flora and fauna, monuments and other tourism products. Every tourism market offering needs a distinct policy framework that needs to be monitored and controlled closely.
- Apart from policy making there is a strong need for a stringent legislative framework, which would clearly state the penalties and punishments for any and all violations of tourism sustainability. The fear of punishment will restrict the people causing harm to the environment and sustainability for other paradigms as well.
- The policy planning is a preliminary work for sustainable tourism, however policy planning is not sufficient enough in itself and it is required to be converted into actions. Indian tourism policy planning has witnessed adequate attention towards the sustainability, however, rankings reflects a different scenario. Thus, there is a need to put effective plans into action. Environmental sustainability of the Indian tourism industry is in a dire need of attention and it needs quick, effective and efficient actions by the destination marketing organizations.
- The Indian tourism planning framework has been fantastically framed. Albeit, the rankings depicted a different scenario of downward movement. With sound policies,



such a result is astounding. It means that something is in the execution process. Thus, there is an urgent requirement to carry out marketing research activities for continuous evaluation and control of the policy implementation so that the problems can be identified and corrective actions can be taken. Through research activities the reasons for lower rankings on 'environmental sustainability' parameter can be found and any loopholes in the execution process can be prevented from occurring in the future.

- Pollution has become a major cause of worry for the Indian government as it is badly affecting the population and generating life-threatening diseases. The government should take preventative actions as in the long run this is going to affect environmental sustainability with the rise in global warming.
- The Ministry should include host community and other stakeholders of the tourism industry for sustainable tourism development. The participation of local residents is essential and it can be achieved when some rewards are paid to the local community through participation as highlighted by Thryambakam (2013).
- The study calls for a joint participation not only of the stakeholders, but of the different nations to tackle the issue of sustainability worldwide. One platform should exist where all the nations (neighbouring countries on a common landmass) must work together to achieve sustainable development for the tourism industry and other spheres of life.
- World organizations of good repute like the UNWTO, WTTC, WEF must help the developing countries to achieve the sustainable tourism development that is required.

## Discussion and Conclusions

Sustainability is a key for country's prosperity and essential for future generations. In the tourism industry, it is mainly associated with the environment, including conservation and preservation of natural resources, maintaining the ecological balance as tourism activities are causing harm to the environment in terms of deforestation, soil erosion, natural habitat displacement, air pollution, and water pollution. Even the Competitiveness Index associates sustainability with environment. The present study has been undertaken, so as to draw the attention of the Indian tourism policy makers towards the declining country's environmental sustainability rankings despite improvement in overall global tourism rankings.

Overall, the tourism rankings of the Indian tourism industry have been improving at a fast pace on account of infrastructural developments and the country's rich cultural and natural resources and monumental heritage. Sustainability cannot be counted as an input in the country's tourism growth and development, as its rankings presented a different scenario. However, every country aims for sustainable development including sustainability in the tourism industry, which has been linked with a concept of sustainable tourism to a large extent. Thus, sustainability becomes a cause of worry for the Government of India, as it has been emphasized since the country stabilized itself after the 1948 independence and over this long period of time, negative results are obtained in terms of the poor rankings on the notion of 'environmental sustainability'.

Thus, this research stresses the presence of sustainability in the tourism industry because of the involvement of the natural resources. This study is descriptive in nature as it is specific to the Indian tourism industry. The study began with a review of research literature. The literature was primarily based on international research studies specific to the Indian tourism industry and also on taxonomical researches. It was identified that sustainability leads to community development. This is also evident in the various Five-Year plans and National Tourism policies. The Government of India regards sustainable tourism as an essential for the tourism industry, which leads to host community development through infrastructural developments, employment generation and poverty reduction. Thus, the present research study is based on secondary data analysis including the review of relevant literature, analysis of five-year plans and national tourism policies. The 'boat appears to be sailing with the wind', as policy documentation has been effectively done by the Indian government and India is also improving



in the global tourism rankings. However, a close examination of an index presented a different scenario. The Indian tourism industry has witnessed a major downfall in environmental sustainability rankings over the past decade.

The rankings have fallen from 41 to 134 from 2007 to 2017. There emerges a paradoxical situation of “sustainability and the tourism rankings” for the Indian Tourism Ministry. This raises the future research question - Is India improving its tourism at the cost of environmental sustainability? Solving the question, the study has suggested some measures for the development of sustainable tourism. The researchers consider this study to be a highlighter of the paradox of “sustainability and tourism rankings”. The study seeks actions from the ‘maestros’ of the Indian tourism industry to ‘turn the wheel around’ and improve the Indian tourism rankings in terms of environmental sustainability and in global tourism ranking, which would directly lead to improvements in overall global tourism rankings on the competitiveness index. India is improving in overall global tourism rankings on the basis of its richness in cultural and natural resources and infrastructural developments that have taken place post-liberalization because of public-private partnerships. India has the potential to make it to the top 10 list of the competitiveness index and that push needs to be provided by sustainability.

The present research study suffers from some limitations. First, it is only a qualitative research initiative. Secondly, it is based on the secondary data analysis. Insights from the Ministerial perspective would have showed the path to solve the paradox of “sustainability and the tourism rankings”. The study has been successful in identifying and presenting the paradoxical situation to the Indian Tourism Ministry in terms of “environmental sustainability and the tourism rankings”. Thus, it becomes a future research area of the present study to carry out a research study to know more about this problem based on the insights from a Ministerial perspective.

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