Looking from a local lens: Inbound tour operators and sustainable tourism in Kenya

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Few empirical studies on sustainable tourism take into account the perspective of developing countries' actors. This is even the case in debates about the need to adapt sustainability's definitions to the context of developing countries. The present study aims at giving a voice to developing countries' actors by describing how inbound tour operators (ITOs) in Kenya conceive sustainable tourism and their role in promoting it. ITOs were reached through the two official Kenyan category associations for tour operators and through Ecotourism Kenya. Both a survey and in-depth interviews were used to gather data. Results suggest that Kenyan ITOs are familiar with the current definition of sustainability as being constituted of an economic, a social and an environmental dimension. Contrary to expectations, respondents weight their responsibility towards the natural environment at least as highly as their social responsibility. In the end, it is the business long-term survival that dictates this choice: respondents are aware that tourists expect to find in Kenya a flourishing natural environment. Kenyan ITOs are on the whole keenly aware of their role in promoting sustainability to tourist, staff and the community. They experience as a major challenge the lack of institutional pressure from the government. Though this is a common complaint of organisations in developing countries, it is interesting in a Kenyan context where the Government has deployed several policy initiatives on sustainable tourism. A major limitation of this study is the limited sample. Only category associations' members were sampled, leaving ITOs that operate in the informal economy unheard.

Keywords: sustainable tourism development, corporate social responsibility, inbound tour operators, Kenya

Introduction

Sustainable tourism is considered a suitable avenue for deprived areas to develop economically and socially, while respecting the natural and cultural heritage (Heymann & Ehmer, 2009; United Nations World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2003, 2004). For developing countries, this assumption has been challenged on two grounds. On the one hand it has been observed that sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) are concepts devised in developed countries that need to be adapted to the specific context of developing countries (Blowfield & Fynas, 2005; Prieto-Carrón, Lund-Thomsen, Chan, Muro & Bhushan, 2006; Fox, 2004; Visser, 2008). On the other hand it has been contended that there is insufficient evidence to claim that sustainable tourism leads to a more balanced form of development in these countries.

There is indeed a general lack of empirical research on the nature and extent of CSR in developing countries (Visser, 2008; Vives, 2008). Moreover, researchers tend to focus on high impact industries, such as agriculture or mining, where multi-national corporations are well represented. Other sectors – such as tourism – and the role of small, locally owned businesses are left virtually unexplored (Visser, 2008).

This paper aims to shed some light on the discussion about how applicable the concept of sustainability is to developing countries by bringing to the debate the perspective of actors working for locally owned businesses in tourism. Its main objective is to describe how inbound tour operators (ITOs) in Kenya conceive sustainable tourism and what their role is in promoting it.

The paper has the following structure. The literature review identifies the main issues for the empirical study by discussing sustainable development and CSR in general and in developing countries in particular; the role of tour operators in sustainable tourism and the situation in Kenya. The research method section illustrates the choice for a mixed methodology and discusses issues connected with sampling. Next the results are presented and discussed under subheadings that refer back to the main issues described in the literature review, namely corporate social responsibility and sustainable tourism; the role of ITOs, behaviour and intentions; the drivers for ITOs to engage in sustainable tourism and the challenges they face in doing this. A conclusions and recommendations section closes the paper.

Literature review

This section discusses the literature on sustainability and CSR in developing countries and identifies the main issues for the empirical study: the role of inbound tour operators in the tourism chain, Kenya as a tourism destination, and the role that ITOs are expected to play in Kenyan sustainable tourism policy.

Sustainability, CSR and developing countries

Sustainability and CSR voice the need to care for social

development and environmental protection while seeking economic growth and profit (Cavagnaro & Curiel, 2012). Social development implies a more equitable distribution of wealth among countries and within countries. On this basis it has been argued that economically and socially deprived areas – including so called 'developing countries' from the South – should embrace sustainability and CSR as guiding principles for their development (Heymann & Ehmer, 2009). This view has been opposed on the ground that sustainability and CSR are concepts devised in developed countries (the so-called North) and so it should not be expected that these will fit the needs of developing countries' actors (Blowfield & Fynas, 2005; Prieto-Carrón, Lund-Thomsen, Chan, Muro & Bhushan, 2006; Fox, 2004; Visser, 2008). Several developing countries suffer from a lack of legislation, weak enforcement of existing laws, major market failures, and excruciating social issues. Against this backdrop it has been proposed that, alongside profitability, businesses operating in developing countries should give precedence to philanthropic activities above other considerations of social responsibility (Visser, 2008).

In a similar vein, it has been observed that social development and environmental protection are often not complementary but antagonistic dimensions. Consider, for example, the design of natural parks and animal reserves in developing countries. In several countries this development took place in colonial times without considering the needs and rights of the original inhabitants. Today the conflict between human and animal rights is still deeply felt by many people in developing countries, especially in Africa (Manyara & Jones, 2007). Their understandable doubts about the real merits of environmental protection challenge the basic assumption of sustainable development, i.e. that socioeconomic development and natural protection can be reconciled both in developing and developed countries (Butcher, 2011).

Summarising, authors such as Visser (2008) and Butcher (2011) state that in developing countries the socio-economic dimension of sustainability should take precedence on its environmental dimension so that poverty is eradicated first. However, sustainable development and CSR in its classic definition (WCED, 1987; II Earth Summit, 1997; Elkington, 1998) require value creation on its economic, social and environmental dimension simultaneously and globally. Therefore, if some countries focus only or primarily on one dimension, then sustainability cannot be achieved, either in those countries or globally.

Interestingly, though, doubts about the universal applicability of sustainability have mainly been raised by academics from the North and are scarcely supported by empirical research. Whether actors from the South share these doubts is therefore largely unknown. To further the debate, it is therefore essential to incorporate the Southern perspective in it by engaging actors from specific developing countries and industries (Blowfield & Fynas, 2005; Prieto-Carrón et al., 2006; Fox, 2004; Visser, 2008). The major question to be answered in this context is how local businesses, especially SMEs, view the nature and extent of sustainable development and CSR (Blowfield & Finas, 2005; Visser, 2008). This is then the first issue of investigation that will be considered in the present study.

Inbound tour operators
The general tendency in research on CSR in developing countries is to focus on "high profile incidents or branded companies and a few select countries" (Visser, 2008, p. 493). The focus on branded companies and Multi National Corporations (MNCs) is understandable but would not serve the scope of this research. It is understandable because, MNC headquarters are usually in a developed country, where there might be an interest for their international operations. This is particularly the case when an MNC is involved in high impact and visible industries such as mining (e.g. Kapelus, 2002), and petrochemicals (e.g. Acutt, Medina-Ross & O'Riordan, 2004).

Focussing on MNCs, though, would not serve the scope of this research, i.e. to integrate a Southern perspective in the debate on the applicability of sustainability and CSR as usually understood for developing countries. MNC headquarters are usually located in a developed country and it may be safely supposed that their understanding of sustainability and CSR reflect the perspective of these countries. Accordingly this research focuses on local SMEs, operating in those sectors where MNC are less represented, such as tourism (Blowfiedl & Finas, 2005; Visser, 2008).

In the tourism value chain, tour operators provide the essential link between supply and demand. They liaise with several organisations to design packages and sell them to tourists at a single price (Khairat & Maher, 2012; Tepelus, 2005). As such, they are key to achieving sustainable tourism in many ways. They can, for example, direct tourist flows, influence the attitude of tourism stakeholders, including their guests, towards sustainability and shape local communities (Sigala, 2008).

The essential role of tour operators in promoting sustainable tourism is widely recognised. For example, one of the major initiatives aimed at improving the sustainability of the tourism sector, the Tour Operators Initiative (TOI), has specifically been designed for tour operators. TOI was developed by the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the UNWTO already in 2000 (Holden, 2008; Font & Cochrane, 2005). This initiative has a worldwide scope and encourages tour operators to integrate environmental, cultural and social considerations in the design of tourism packages and in their own operations (Font & Cochrane, 2005; Khairat & Maher, 2012).

All these factors have led to some research on sustainable tour operating practices. The studies are mainly focused on outbound tour operators, though (e.g. Khairat & Maher, 2012). Outbound tour operators (OTOs) tend to be based in tourist source countries, have extended knowledge of the market, are usually an MNC serving a wide range of destinations, and have high bargaining power. Inbound tour operators (ITOs), on the contrary, are based at the destination, have expert knowledge of the destination and its attractions, are mostly locally owned SMEs, manage an extended local network, and are characterised by low bargaining power (Akama & Kieti, 2007; Budeanu, 2005; Mayaka & King, 2002). Being imbedded in the destination and being responsible for putting together local tourism packages, ITOs are key to promoting and achieving sustainable tourism at the source. Nevertheless, research on ITOs in general and in developing countries in particular is almost non-existent. The present study aims to close this gap by focusing on ITOs in Kenya. The first issue for investigation identified above, i.e. how

local businesses, especially SMEs, view the nature and extent of sustainable development and CSR, will therefore be explored from the perspective of ITOs in Kenya.

Kenya as a tourism destination

Kenya offers an interesting context for studying sustainable tourism because it is a popular African destination renowned for its diverse natural and cultural attractions (Akama, 2000). Moreover, tourism is a key economic activity in Kenya contributing 10% to GDP and providing over 500 000 jobs across the formal and informal sectors (GoK-MoT, 2006). In 2007, for example, Kenya attracted 1.8 million international tourists and generated 654 million euros in revenue (Mayaka & Prasad, 2012). Finally, tourism is a key priority in the Kenyan government's long-term plans and policies: it is one of the pillars of *Vision 2030* which aims to make Kenya a newly industrialising, middle income country providing high quality of life for all citizens by the year 2030 (GoK, 2007, p. 10).

Looking briefly at the development of tourism as an industry in Kenya, it is clear that since the 1980s Kenya has been known as a mass tourism destination characterised by a high volume of tourists and low economic value as a result of all-inclusive packages sold by OTOs in Kenya's key source markets. Increased insecurity due to the Gulf War and civil unrest led to a downward spiral of Kenya's tourism in the 1990s. Recovery has been slow and was only briefly achieved in the years between 2004 and 2008. Riots following the 2008 political elections resulted in plummeting tourist arrivals (Mayaka & Prasad, 2012; UN, 2012).

In its efforts to reverse this negative trend, the Kenyan government developed a comprehensive national tourism policy in 2008 founded on the principles of sustainable tourism (GoK-MoT, 2008). In 1992 Kenya had already adopted Local Agenda 21 and in 1996 it established a dedicated association for the promotion of responsible and sustainable tourism, Ecotourism Kenya. During the past few years, Ecotourism Kenya has developed several initiatives, including the first ever Eco-rating scheme in Africa, the annual Eco-warrior Awards and the annual Ecotourism Conferences where tourism stakeholders discuss progress, challenges and future plans. In 2003, the Global Code on Child Sex Exploitation was also adopted.

The choice by the Kenyan government for sustainable tourism is consistent with research showing that sustainability and CSR "may also be seen as an enabler for companies in developing countries trying to access markets in the developed world" (Visser, 2008, p. 485). Nevertheless, it should be noted that the most recent policy document *Vision 2030* by the Kenyan Government is focused on growth, and sees eco-tourism and cultural tourism only as niche markets (GoK, 2012).

The role of ITOs in Kenya

The Kenyan Government expects tourism organisations to play a pivotal role in implementing the sustainable tourism policy. Activities mentioned are: involving local communities through joint partnerships, developing and promoting a kind of tourism that is socially, culturally and environmentally acceptable, and adopting, where appropriate, an eco-rating system (GoK-MoT, 2006). This expectation leads to a second issue for investigation: whether ITOs in Kenya recognise that they have a role in implementing and promoting sustainable tourism. Linking back to the discussion above on the general role of tour

operators in promoting sustainable tourism, this also means understanding which type of activities they deploy towards their employees, guests and the surrounding community.

Kenya's tourism industry presents few national players and a wide array of small, regional, seasonal businesses offering products and services of varying quality. It can therefore be characterised as highly fragmented. In an effort to regulate the tourism industry, in 2009 the Kenyan government passed policies that make it mandatory for organisations to be members of trade associations. The role of trade associations in the implementation of sustainable tourism includes encouraging the adoption and implementation of mandatory codes of conduct for members, and other forms of self-regulation. While these initiatives are noteworthy, they are still mainly directed towards some specific sectors within the industry (such as accommodation and local communities) while the tour operation sector, despite its vital role, is barely mentioned. Like other destinations in developing countries, Kenya is highly dependent on tour operators and so there is a clear need to involve them more actively in the sustainability agenda (Akama, 2000). This leads to a third issue for this research: whether ITOs in Kenya feel supported by the government and by category associations when engaging in sustainability.

It has been argued that there are still many social and environmental challenges that are left unmet and impede a sustainable development of the tourism industry in Kenya (Mayaka & Prasad, 2012; UN, 2012). It has, for example, been observed that further development of CSR in Kenya is impeded by a lack of external pressure. Both the government and the industry associations lack the institutional capacity to exert pressure on companies, while there is almost no demand for sustainable products or services by local customers. Pressure from international partners in the chain is also low, especially for SMEs (Kivuitu, Yambayamba & Fox, 2005). In the absence of these drivers, other factors could support the implementation of CSR, such as cultural motives and the need to address governance gaps and to respond to a political, social or economic crisis (WBCSD, 2000; Visser, 2008; Vives, 2008). Whether or not this also holds true for ITOs in Kenya is the fourth and last issue for investigation in this study.

In summary, the main issues for investigation are ITOs' understanding of the nature and extent of sustainable development and CSR; the role they see for themselves in implementing and promoting sustainable tourism, including the activities they deploy; which drivers led them to engage in sustainable tourism; and which challenges impede them from doing so. The information gathered will be used to shed some light on the debate about the need to contextualise sustainability for developing countries.

Research methods

The aim of the present study is to shed some light on the debate about the applicability to developing countries of the classic definition of sustainability as value creation on environmental, social and economic dimensions. Its main objective is to inform this debate with the perspective of local actors from a less well-researched sector, in this case tourism and Kenyan inbound tour operators (ITOs).

Through the literature review the following issues for investigation have been identified:

• ITOs' understanding of the nature and extent of sustainable development and CSR
• How ITOs conceive their role in implementing and promoting sustainable tourism in Kenya, including the activities they deploy
• Which drivers do they think led them to engage in sustainable tourism, and
• Which challenges impede them from doing so.

The issues identified revolve around the meaning and significance that local actors attach to their own behaviour in relation to sustainable tourism (Scheyvens & Storey, 2003; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe, 2006). The preferred instrument to uncover meanings is face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews. In-depth interviews allow the respondents to explain their views and thus yield richer results than a questionnaire-based interview, which tends to be rigid and to provide shallow information (Bryman, 2012; Veal, 1997).

While qualitative techniques are versatile, they lack the benefits of quantitative techniques such as the ability to reach a broad sample in a short time to acquire a more precise picture of the population (Mayaka & King, 2002). To achieve the main objective of this research, it is indeed important to reach a larger number of respondents than would be possible with in-depth interviews. Therefore, to harness the potential of both techniques in the context of this study, a mixed-method approach was chosen where a questionnaire and face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were used as instruments. These two instruments were integrated using a circular set-up where similar questions were proposed to the survey respondents and the interviewees. This may represent an innovative approach to the study of sustainable tourism in developing countries.

In Kenya, there are approximately 2 238 ITOs, ranging from microenterprises (fewer than 10 employees) to MNCs (> 250 employees), (interview with KATO, April 2010). The exact number, size and ownership structure of Kenyan ITOs, though, is unclear. This point is important, because the extent to which smaller enterprises engage in sustainable tourism is influenced by their size, ownership and financial capability, alongside awareness and knowledge (Lepoutre & Heene, 2006; Wijk & Persoon, 2006; Tepelus, 2005).

It is estimated that the majority of Kenyan ITOs operate only seasonally, are short-lived or might be considered part of the informal economy (interview with KATO, April 2010). Seasonally operating ITOs do not tend to join one of the two existing tour operator associations in Kenya (KATO and KALTO). Consequently, these two associations with their 318 members represent only 13.4% of the estimated number of tour operators in Kenya. Nevertheless, these members fit the general definition of inbound tour operators given in the literature review and are considered by KATO and KALTO to be representative of all tour operators in Kenya (interview with KATO, April 2010). Finally, basic data needed for research purposes – such as contact details – are known only for ITOs that are members of a category association. The population for the questionnaire is thus considered to be the 318 members of the two Kenyan tour operators' associations.

The questionnaire explores the four issues that emerged from the literature review and gathers data on the size and ownership

structure of the ITOs as well. Open and closed (5 Likert-type scale) questions were designed based on the literature described in the literature review section. Examples of questions are given in the results section with reference to the literature on which they are based (the questionnaire will be sent to interested researchers on request by the corresponding author).

After a pilot that confirmed the general soundness of the instrument, the questionnaire was sent by post or e-mail to senior managers of all 318 members of the two existing tour operator associations in Kenya. The response rate for the questionnaire was 19.8% (n = 63). This figure could seem quite low but considering the context of the study and its explorative character can be deemed acceptable.

Tables 1 and 2 show the size and ownership structure of the ITOs that responded to the questionnaire.

Four fifths of the sampled ITOs (80.3%) consist of microenterprises (1–9 employees) of which 50.8% count 3–5 employees and 14.3% only one employee. One fifth (19.7%) is represented by small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and a few larger companies. The largest ITO surveyed has 225 permanent employees.

The vast majority of the sampled ITOs (87.3%) are locally owned, while a minority (12.7%) are owned in partnership by a local and a foreign company. None of the sampled ITOs surveyed are fully foreign owned. In terms of their size and ownership structure, the 63 ITOs do not diverge from the population of 318 enterprises that consist of 80% micro and 89% locally owned enterprises (data provided by KATO, April 2012). These figures serve to validate the sample with respect to size and ownership.

It can be argued that the figure on ownership shows that MNCs do not control the ITO sector in Kenya. This supports the choice of ITOs as the focus of a study, like the present one, that aims at enriching the debate on the need to contextualise sustainability with the voice of developing countries' actors. It should be also noted that the homogeneity of the sample (and the population) does not support a statistical analysis on the influence of ownership and size on the issues explored.

The small number of respondents, though, requires reflection on self-selection of the sample. The question may be asked whether only ITOs that are interested in sustainability have answered the questionnaire. Though this cannot be excluded, the variety of answers to the question concerning a definition

Table 1: Number of permanent employees

	Number	Percentage	Valid %
Fewer than 10 employees	49	77.8	80.3
Between 10 and 250 employees	12	19.0	19.7
Total (no missing value)	61	96.8	100.0
Missing	2	3.2	
Total	63	100.0	

Table 2: Ownership

	Number	Percentage	Valid %
Local	55	87.3	87.3
Joint partnership between a Kenyan and a foreigner	8	12.7	12.7
Total	63	100.0	

of sustainability (as it will be shown in the result section) is such that it may be safely stated that the respondents are surely not all equally informed about and interested in sustainability.

Once the questionnaire data were gathered and analysed, face-to-face, in-depth interviews were set up with 10 tour operators (16% of the survey's sample population), who were not only members of one of the two associations but also of Ecotourism Kenya. The aim of the interviews was to probe more deeply into the four issues for investigation by listening to ITOs already engaged in and thus more experienced in sustainable tourism. Using systematic random sampling, 10 companies were selected from the Ecotourism Kenya tour operator database. The companies selected were therefore compared to the sample population to ensure that they were representative of it in terms of size and income, as both are considered determining factors for joining sustainable practices (Lepoutre & Heene, 2006; Wijk & Persoon, 2006; Tepelus, 2005). No adjustments were required.

The interviews lasted on average one hour, were tape-recorded, transcribed, coded and then analysed according to the various themes enshrined in the research's aim.

All participants were informed about the purpose of the research, that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the research at any point. They were assured that utmost confidentiality would be maintained and anonymity guaranteed. Therefore no information was requested that might help to identify respondents such as their names, contact details, and name of the organisation they work for.

Results and discussion

Results are presented and discussed in subsections addressing the issues of investigations identified in the literature review. The section on CSR and sustainable tourism explores ITOs' understanding of the nature and extent of sustainable development and CSR; the section on role, behaviour and intentions focuses on how ITOs conceive their role in implementing and promoting sustainable tourism in Kenya, including the activities they deploy; the last section on challenges and motivations discuss the drivers that led ITOs to engage in sustainable tourism; and the challenges that impede them from doing so.

Corporate social responsibility and sustainable tourism

As observed in the literature review, it has been doubted whether developing countries' actors could and should aim at creating value simultaneously on the economic, social and environmental dimension of sustainability instead of concentrating on its socio-economic dimension alone. To further this debate it is vital to gain a better understanding of how locally owned and operated businesses in developing countries understand CSR in general and sustainable tourism in particular. Both in the survey and in the in-depth interviews this theme was addressed.

An open question asked survey respondents to describe their understanding of CSR. Almost 40% of respondents (38.1%) described CSR with reference to its environmental, social and economic dimensions in line with Elkington's Triple Bottom Line definition (1998). Almost one quarter of respondents (23.8%) refer to two dimensions and one fifth (20.6%) to only one dimension. Interestingly, in the last two

cases it is the environmental dimension that is mostly referred to. The remaining 17.5% of respondents chooses a definition closer to that of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED 1987) with a broad reference to businesses' responsibility towards society and the future.

Similarly, sustainable tourism is described either with reference to its economic, social and environmental dimensions (31.1% of respondents) or with reference to one (11.5%) or two (23%) of these dimensions, with an insistence on the environmental one. Slightly more than 10% of respondents chose a definition more similar to the WCED's (1987) by referring to benefits for the stakeholders and future generations. No respondent mentioned philanthropy.

The insistence on the environmental dimension is remarkable, considering the pressing social issues present in many developing countries, including Kenya, and the expectation that companies would see it as their social responsibility to first and foremost address these social issues (Manyara & Jones, 2007; Visser, 2008; Vives, 2008). A suggestion for interpreting the environmental focus of the survey respondents comes from the in-depth interviews: Kenyan ITOs recognise their dependence on a sound natural environment for the survival of their business. Two quotes are exemplary here:

> They [ITOs] are involved directly with tourists and destinations hence they should contribute in maintaining the environment (interviewee no. 2).
>
> We [ITOs] are the biggest beneficiaries of sustaining our natural history because that is what we sell (interviewee no. 9).

Looking at the answers to questions about the definition of CSR and sustainable tourism, it may be concluded that, contrary to some suggestions (Visser, 2008) at least a large minority of ITOs in Kenya are comfortable with the classic definition of CSR and sustainable tourism as value creation on an economic, environmental and social dimension. This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that most respondents recognise the dependence of the economic dimension on the environmental dimension in the case of tourism and that none of them refers to philanthropy as their main CSR responsibility (Visser, 2008).

Role, behaviour and intentions

This section focuses on how ITOs conceive their role in implementing and promoting sustainable tourism in Kenya.

In the survey a question is posed concerning the types of activities implemented in the past twelve months (Table 3), and a second question is posed about the activities that the organisation intends to perform in the ensuing year (Table 4). The first question aims to discern ITOs' understanding of their role, and the breadth of their engagement. The second one explores the horizon of ITOs' engagement with sustainability. The activities listed were derived from literature on sustainable tourism best practices (e.g. Watkin, 2003; Tepelus, 2005; Wijk & Persoon, 2006). Indirectly, thus, the answers to these questions address the issue as to whether sustainable activities that are considered by researchers as proper to ITOs are recognised as such by local actors in developing countries.

Table 3 presents the activities that Kenyan ITOs have deployed in the twelve months before the survey. Some

interesting conclusions can be drawn from the table. To start with, all respondents but one are able to relate to the listed activities. In other words, these are recognised by Kenyan ITOs as fitting to their role. Moreover, a vast majority of respondents ticked activities concerned with the community (contribute to community projects: 74.2% of respondents) and with people's welfare (enhance employee welfare: 69.4%). All these activities are connected with the social or people dimension of sustainability. Environmental conservation comes directly afterwards (62.9%). It is interesting to comment on this outcome with reference to the definition of CSR and sustainable tourism discussed above. The definitions suggested a slight environmental bias that was interpreted with reference

Table 3: Activities implemented in the last 12 months

	N	Response percentage	Percentage of cases
Contribute to community projects	46	14.6	74.2
Enhance employee welfare	43	13.6	69.4
Contribute to environmental conservation	39	12.3	62.9
Promote facilities and attractions that practice sustainable tourism	39	12.3	62.9
Sensitise tourists and staff on sustainable practices	38	12.0	61.3
Work with local destination managers to promote sustainable tourism practices	31	9.8	50.0
Use more fuel-efficient vehicles	25	7.9	40.3
Reduce leakage of profits to overseas tour operators	22	7.0	35.5
Implement a sustainability policy	21	6.6	33.
Sign up against child sex tourism	11	3.5	17.7
None of the above	1	0.3	1.6
Total	316	100.0	509.7

Table 4: Activities that the company intends to do in next 12 months

	N	Response percentage	Percentage of cases
Contribute to community projects	38	11.7	64.4
Enhance employee welfare	38	11.7	64.4
Contribute to environmental conservation	36	11.0	61.0
Sign up against child sex tourism	35	10.7	59.3
Work with local destination managers to promote sustainable tourism practices.	35	10.7	59.3
Use more fuel-efficient vehicles	32	9.8	54.2
Promote facilities and attractions that practice sustainable tourism	32	9.8	54.2
Implement a sustainability policy	30	9.2	50.8
Sensitise tourists and staff on sustainable practices	30	9.2	50.8
Reduce leakage of profits to overseas tour operators	20	6.1	33.9
Total	326	100.0	552.5

of the dependence of ITOs business on a healthy natural environment. This bias, though, is qualified here: in listing sustainable activities Kenyan ITOs refer firstly to the social dimension of sustainability.

Finally, respondents are conscious of their role as champions of sustainable tourism towards other businesses (62.9% promote facilities and attractions that practice sustainable tourism); towards guests and staff (61.3%) and towards the local businesses (50%). This result confirms the essential role that local SMEs and microenterprises in the tourism industry play in promoting the sustainability agenda (Khairat & Maher, 2012; Sigala, 2008; Tepelus, 2005; WTO, 2002, 2004).

Results from the in-depth interviews corroborate the conclusion that ITOs are conscious of their role and the possibilities that their position in the chain gives them in promoting sustainable tourism. Typical in this respect is the following quote:

> The same tour operators are the ones who design itineraries, who stay with clients throughout their stay in Kenya, and deal with them directly; and we are the ones to spread the 'gospel' about sustainable tourism. It starts with us as tour operators (interviewee no. 8).

Interviewees also confirm ITOs' engagement in the activities listed in Table 3 and shed some light on the type of community activities in which they engage. Examples of activities deployed are participating in biogas projects (interviewee no. 1); carbon offset projects (interviewees no. 3 and 4); hiring locally (interviewees no. 1 and 4); designing and selling 'voluntourism' packages (interviewee no. 6) amongst others. Traditional philanthropic activities are also quoted: these are mostly directed towards children's education and assistance (interviewees no. 1, 2, 3, 5, 9 and 10) on one side and healthcare on the other (interviewees no. 9 and 10). Engagement in the community is not or at least not exclusively framed as a philanthropic activity, but as an outcome of the sustainable strategy of the organisation as highlighted in the following quote:

> We are developing our own structures within the organisation to ensure the operation is sustainable. We are introducing sustainable tourism principles in the whole organisation (interviewee no. 6).

This reinforces the conclusion already reached in the previous section that ITOs do not primarily consider CSR and sustainable tourism as a philanthropic activity, but as part and parcel of their business's strategy and operations.

Interestingly, in discussing codes such as the Code against Child Sex Tourism, interviewees, though recognising that codes are an adequate first step towards a more sustainable form of tourism, doubt their efficiency either because of free-riding or because of lack of enforcement. This might explain the low importance given to signing for a Code against Child Sex Tourism by survey respondents.

That Kenyan ITOs do not consider their involvement with sustainable tourism as temporary is shown by their answer to the survey question about activities that they intend to develop in the following year (Table 4).

It is interesting to observe that, while the top three items in Table 4 are the same compared to the list of activities already deployed, the rest of the list shows some variance (see also Figure 1 below). The importance given to signing the Code against Child Sex Tourism and developing a sustainable policy

increases sharply. A possible explanation for this outcome could be the renewed efforts by the Kenyan government to promote the Code (interview with KATO, April 2010). In the light of a general lack of pressure from the Kenyan government (see next section) the emphasis placed on implementing sustainability policies should be interpreted with references to testimonies – such as the one from interviewee no. 6 quoted above: the insight is spreading among Kenyan ITOs that sustainability should be deeply imbedded in processes and procedures of the organisation and that it is not a set of separate (philanthropic) activities (Cavagnaro & Curiel, 2012).

In conclusion, Kenyan ITOs show a clear understanding of their role towards implementing sustainable tourism and in general they do not frame it as a philanthropic activity but as an activity that permeates the entire breadth of their operations. They recognise themselves in activities such as the ones listed in Figure 1 that are traditionally connected with sustainable tourism in developed countries as well.

Drivers and challenges

The last issue explored in this study concerns the reasons to engage (or not) with sustainable tourism, or in other words drivers and challenges.

Table 5 presents the answer to the (5 Likert-type) questions about reasons not to engage. These reasons may be considered as challenges in engaging in sustainable tourism. The listed challenges are taken from authors such as Tepelus (2005), Kivuitu, Yambayamba and Fox (2005) and Wijk and Persoon (2006).

First of all it should be noted that many of the challenges encountered by Kenyan ITOs – such as costs; lack of information and skills – are similar to the ones SMEs face in developing countries (Lepoutre & Heene, 2006). These challenges are corroborated by results from the in-depth interviews. The following quote testifies to challenges such as, respectively, high costs; desire for knowledge and lack of skills.

> Initial costs [of sustainable tourism measure such as training of employees on codes of conducts, authors' note] are high (interviewee no. 1).

You will talk to people and they don't understand, they think you are just playing the good boy. Although most issues on sustainability are common sense, common sense is not that common to everybody. Ignorance, lack of knowledge: these are seen collectively among suppliers, clients, staff, and the communities (interviewee no. 10).

The background of locals e.g. being pastoralists and then becoming accountants in the tourism facility as well as owning and managing lodges is quite a challenge (interviewee no. 5).

While the above-mentioned challenges are generally observed in SMEs engaging in sustainable tourism, the interviewees refer to two challenges that seem more specific to the context of developing countries: exploitation of communities and human-wildlife conflicts. In this context interviewees stress the need to build trust in the community to win over their first negative reaction towards sustainable

Table 5: Challenges of sustainable tourism

|	Strongly agree/agree	Disagree/ strongly disagree	Not sure
Lack of institutionalised efforts engaging tour operators	83.0	11.9	5.1
Lack of information on how tour operators can get involved	78.3	11.7	10.0
Lack of knowledge on how tour operators negatively impact the destination	74.1	22.4	3.4
The costs involved	73.4	18.3	8.3
General lack of interest among tour operators	70.0	16.7	13.3
Lack of skills for implementing sustainable practices	65.0	21.6	13.3
Lack of demand for sustainable tourism products	50.9	33.9	15.3
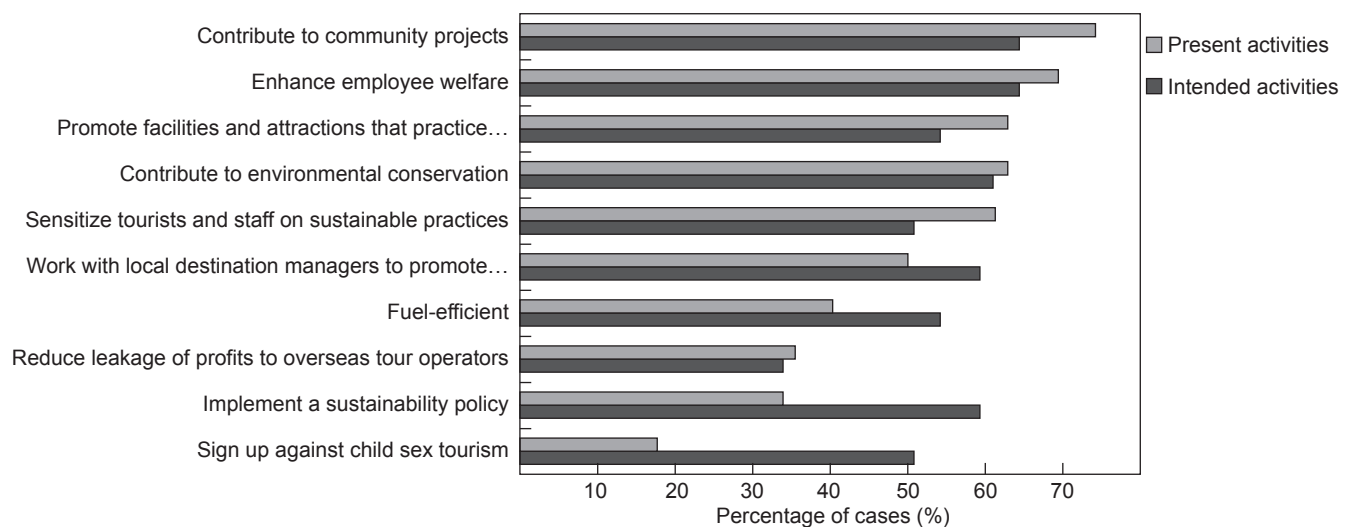
Figure 1: Comparison of deployed and intended activities

tourism and environmental protection (Manyara & Jones, 2007). Interviewee no. 1, for example, observes:

> Building trust and good relationship with communities is a challenge because before, the communities had been taken advantage of for a long time or they were underpaid. The managing director of [name organisation] lived with the community at the beginning in order to build trust. There are some difficult individuals in the community (sometimes the elite). Human/ wildlife conflicts is also a challenge (interviewee no. 1).

The lack of efforts by institutions in engaging tour operators in sustainable tourism is a challenge experienced by almost all survey respondents (94.9%). In general terms, this result is not surprising. It has been often observed that governments in developing countries lack the capacity to design, implement and enforce sustainability policies and regulations (Vives, 2008; Mayaka & Prasad, 2012). Yet, it is surprising in the specific Kenyan context, where the government has taken several initiatives towards sustainable tourism and where there is a category association (Ecotourism Kenya) dedicated to its promotion (GoK-MoT, 2008; GoK-MoT, 2006). The novelty of the sustainable tourism policy in Kenya, a lack of alignment between *Vision 2030* from 2007 and more recent (growth-oriented) policies – such as GoK, 2012 – and a general lack of policy enforcement may be called upon as possible explanations as to why respondents point towards a lack of institutional effort as the main challenge they are confronted with. For all three possible explanations (novelty; lack of consistency and lack of enforcement) evidence is found in the in-depth interviews. Interviewee no. 3, for example, clearly pointed to the novelty of the policy and institutions, and to a lack of clarity when observing that:

> There was no clear vision for tourism from the government's point of view in the tourism sector. Ecotourism Kenya is now recognised as an association that advocates for sustainable tourism. The [2007] tourism policy is very clear about sustainable tourism and I think it will get more limelight (interviewee no. 3).

Other interviewees clearly referred to a lack of enforcement by observing that only the government has the power to control policy implementation or financially support organisations and communities, and by suggesting that it does not avail itself of this power. The following two testimonies are representative of this:

> Most organisations and destinations in Kenya use responsible travel as a marketing gimmick but don't practice it at all. This makes it difficult for real responsible tour operators to compete and stand out. […]. It is only the government that has the capability to control such malpractices (interviewee no. 4).

> The relevant bodies should come up with policies e.g. for compensating local communities for the loss of livestock [killed by wild animals] […]. The government should see to it that a bigger part of the tourism revenues should be ploughed back into the daily management of parks e.g. improve on the roads leading to the park and inside the park and alternative routes should be provided when the roads in the parks are completely impassable during rainy season. This

> way there will be reduced cases of off-road driving (interviewee no. 10).

Going back to Table 5, it is also interesting to observe that only half of the respondents indicated that there is no demand for sustainable tourism products. It seems that, despite a generally low impact of chain partners on SMEs (Kivuitu, Yambayamba & Fox, 2005), their pressure is felt in Kenya by a substantial number of ITOs. This is corroborated by the in-depth interviews: 9 out of 10 interviewees observed that overseas partners are concerned about sustainable tourism and 8 out of 10 that promoting themselves as sustainable has brought an increase in tourists. The general feeling about whether chain partners ask about sustainability is well represented by the following statement:

> Oh yes, they do. They will ask and cross check. There is a special brand of business that we do who would never be with us if we were not engaged in sustainable tourism (up to the meter). Most customers come from North America and Europe (interviewee no. 9).

The insistence by the interviewees on overseas partners generates a question for further research: which markets do Kenyan ITOs, including the vast number who are not members of one of the category associations, service? It may be expected that the majority of ITOs in the informal economy cater for the domestic market and are therefore less open to pressure to choose a sustainable form of tourism.

In the absence of strong external motivation, internal motivation to engage in sustainable tourism unfortunately seems to be lacking, too: 70% of respondents signalled a lack of interest for sustainable tourism by ITOs. This finding, though, should be qualified. In-depth interviewees are strong in voicing their intrinsic motivation for joining sustainability. As interviewee no. 1 puts it: "*Ecotourism is a passion,*" while interviewee no. 3 adds: "*My personal desire is on empowering communities.*"

The reference to passion or to community development as reasons to engage with sustainability concurs with studies that have shown that several SME entrepreneurs in tourism and hospitality are not driven primarily by profit, but by a desire to improve their own or their family's quality of life (Lashley & Rowson, 2010). Yet the profit motive resonates vastly in the answers on motivations and benefits of sustainable tourism. For example, in answering an open question in the survey about the benefits of sustainable tourism, more than half of respondents pointed to the continuity of the business by ensuring its environmental resource base. This advantage points to the strong awareness of the dependence of Kenyan tourism on its pristine nature that was already noticed in discussing ITOs' understanding of CSR and sustainable tourism.

During the in-depth interviews the benefits of engaging in sustainable tourism are discussed at length. Interviewees generally agree that sustainable tourism is beneficial to their companies. All mention intangible benefits such as improved image, free publicity, and better co-operation with partners in the chain and with communities. A tangible benefit, growth in terms of market share and profits, is often mentioned as well (interviewees no. 1, 2, 3, 4, 7 and 8). This is well illustrated in the quote below:

> I feel that sustainable tourism is good business, the company is reaping benefits now […]. We are doing a lot better even in the recession. Last year was the best

year we have ever had. We have received more clients, have received many awards, and our relation with local communities is better (interviewee no. 1).

In conclusion, Kenyan ITOs generally recognise themselves in the challenges faced worldwide by SMEs that engage with sustainability (such as a lack of resources and information) and in the benefits that it can bring (such as new markets and clients). There also seems to be transfer of CSR along the chain, though this may be limited only to those ITOs that operate on the international market. In front of limited external pressure, and alongside personal motivation, a powerful driver towards sustainable tourism is the awareness that ITOs' commercial success is intertwined with environmental protection and community development. Kenyan ITOs do face specific challenges, such as a lack of governmental support, getting the trust of the community and answering human-wildlife conflicts. Both the similarities and differences should be considered in the debate on contextualising sustainability to a developing country setting.

Conclusions, limitations and recommendations

The central aim of this paper is to offer a contribution to the debate about the applicability of the classic definition of sustainability as value creation on an environmental, social and economic dimension to developing countries. Its main objective is to inform this debate with the perspective of local actors from a less well-researched sector, in this case tourism and Kenyan ITOs.

To reach this objective the research focuses on four main issues for investigation, derived from the existing literature on sustainable tourism and the role of tour operators. These issues concern the nature, extent, benefits and challenges of sustainable tourism in developing countries. On all four issues the study is able to shed some new light.

First of all, the results suggest that respondents (both in the survey and in the in-depth interviews) seem comfortable with the three dimensions of CSR introduced by Elkington in 1998. There even seems to be a slight bias towards environmental sustainability, though in the CSR activities mentioned the social dimension receives ample attention. Moreover, none of the respondents propose that philanthropy is their main CSR, while there seems to be a growing understanding that sustainability needs to be embedded in policies and processes of the organisation, and not be considered as a separate sets of activities.

Secondly, this study shows that activities already performed or planned by Kenyan ITOs cover the spectrum traditionally connected with sustainable tourism. Also when it comes to the extent of CSR, there seems to be a convergence between the understanding of Kenyan ITOs and their counterparts in other countries.

A third interesting result is that major benefits are considered to be intangible, with a stress on better relationships with the communities. If this result is connected with the concern felt by Kenyan ITOs for protection of the natural environment, the thought-provoking conclusion is reached that sustainable tourism may indeed bridge the gap between the conservation and development agendas, a gap that has often proven irreconcilable in developing countries (WCED, 1987). More tangible benefits in terms of market growth and business

continuity are also mentioned, opening the possibility to qualify Butcher's (2011) statement that the socio-environmental agenda cannot be reconciled with the economic one. A quote from one of the in-depth interviews summarises the conclusion on this point.

If you look at ecotourism, it joins tourism, communities and conservation. You cannot conserve without realising the benefits of conserving (interviewee no. 10).

Furthermore, it has been shown that although the vast majority of respondents lament the lack of institutional pressure from the government (thus confirming that this is an issue in Kenya as Mayaka & Prasad, 2012, noticed), pressure from the demand side is building. Consequently, in the present study a transfer of sustainability across the tourism supply chain can be seen, both between ITOs and OTOs and between clients and ITOs. Yet, this is very probably limited to ITOs catering for the international (European and US) market.

Drawing these conclusions together it can be argued that the classic, "Northern" understanding of sustainability and CSR as value creation on an economic, social and environmental dimension is recognised and applied by developing countries' actors such as the Kenyan ITOs surveyed in this study. Though the study's results should not be interpreted as suggesting that no contextualisation is needed when applying sustainability to developing countries, it at least qualifies the statement from several literature sources that CSR is a Northern concept and so should not be expected to fit the needs of actors in developing countries (Blowfield & Fynas, 2005; Prieto-Carrón et al., 2006; Fox, 2004; Visser, 2008; Vives, 2008). We therefore contend that contextualisation should not be pursued at the level of the definition of sustainability and CSR or of the weight of their main dimension. It should be pursued at the level of implementation, by understanding the specific challenges that actors in developing countries are facing. An example encountered in this study on Kenyan ITOs concerns the human-wildlife conflict and the role of chain partners. More research is needed to reveal the challenges from the perspective of specific developing countries' actors.

The major limitation of this study is that only ITOs that are members of one of the two Kenyan category associations were sampled. This is understandable in an initial exploration, especially as at the time of the study no reliable information was available from the two associations on the size and ownership structure of their own members. Even though it is a clear limitation that ITOs that are not a member have not been approached, reaching this group of non-members that mostly operate in the sphere of the informal economy will not be easy. Nevertheless, a further study should attempt to sample their opinion as well. Replication of this study in Kenya is also recommended to assess whether the 2011 governmental policy and the renewed efforts from Ecotourism Kenya are having an impact on ITOs' engagement with sustainable tourism. There is also a need to probe deeper into the issue of pressure from chain partners, and whether ITOs catering mostly for foreign clients are feeling this pressure more than ITOs predominantly focused on the domestic market. Further insight is also needed into the business motives of the individual owner or manager to gain a better understanding of ITOs' motives for engaging in sustainable tourism. The reasons why owners of Kenyan ITOs have started their business, and whether these reasons connect with their motives to engage in sustainable tourism (Lashley &

Rowson, 2010) also merit investigation. Finally, replication in another developing country is also recommended to validate the main conclusion of this study in a broader context.

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