

Impact of Tourism in Rural Village Communities: India's Sustainable Tourism

Gao-Liang Wang, Harold Lalrinawma

Department of Marketing Management, Takming University of Science and Technology, Taiwan

ABSTRACT: *There are a myriad of definitions for Sustainable Tourism, including eco-tourism green travel environmentally and culturally responsible tourism, fair trade and ethical travel. Tourism is one of the world's largest industries. For developing countries it is also one of the biggest income generators. But the huge infrastructural and resource demands of tourism can have severe impacts upon local communities and the environment if it is not properly managed. Rural Tourism is growing in terms of number of visitors and the Government of India focuses on it as an engine of growth. We believe that any rural tourism development plan needs to focus on sustainable development and take into account the priorities and needs of local people. This paper emphasizes the need for sustainable forms of tourism by outlining the possible socio-economic, cultural and environmental impacts of current forms of Rural Tourism. The paper first explores the meaning of terms such as Rural, Rurality and Rural Tourism. It focuses on the genesis and growth of Rural Tourism, Rural Tourism in India, impacts of Rural Tourism and the need for sustainable Rural Tourism. The Tourism Department, Government of Assam in North East India, recognizing the value of tourism as an economic development tool, wanted support in developing adventure tourism responsibly and sustainably. With tourism to India growing at 13.5% per year, state policymakers saw the opportunity to draw more visitors to Assam, but were concerned about preserving important cultural and natural resources. It is clear that rural areas are an integral part of the modern tourism experience. It is a fact that in reality many forms of rural tourism are unable to conform to the guidelines of sustainable development. However with timely, accurate research and dissemination of information, proper planning, implementation and monitoring of policies as well as working towards strengthening of institutions will contribute towards the processes of achieving the principles and values of sustainable tourism in rural areas.*

Keywords: *India tourism industry, rural tourism, sustainable tourism*

I. INTRODUCTION

There are a myriad of definitions for Sustainable Tourism, including eco-tourism green travel environmentally and culturally responsible tourism, fair trade and ethical travel. The most widely accepted definition is that of the World Tourism Organization. They define sustainable tourism as “tourism which leads to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems.”

Tourism is one of the world's largest industries. For developing countries it is also one of the biggest income generators. But the huge infrastructural and resource demands of tourism (example: water consumption, waste generation and energy use) can have severe impacts upon local communities and the environment if it is not properly managed.

The initiatives taken by the state so far have not yielded the desired result and India's tourism performance has failed to match its potential even as countries not blessed with its natural and cultural endowments have taken the lead in reaping the benefits of tourism development for their people. The reasons for this poor performance need to be speedily addressed to enable tourism to make an appropriate contribution to national development.

As per the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2009 by the World Economic Forum, India is ranked 11th in the Asia Pacific region and 62nd overall, moving up three places on the list of the world's attractive destinations. It is ranked the 14th best tourist destination for its natural resources and 24th for its cultural resources, with many World Heritage sites, both natural and cultural, rich fauna, and strong creative industries in the country. India also bagged 37th rank for its air transport network. The India travel and tourism industry ranked 5th in the long-term (10-year) growth and is expected to be the second largest employer in the world by 2019.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

From Rural Tourism to Sustainable Rural Tourism:

Rural Tourism is growing in terms of number of visitors and the Government of India focuses on it as an engine of growth. We believe that any rural tourism development plan needs to focus on sustainable

development and take into account the priorities and needs of local people. This paper emphasizes the need for sustainable forms of tourism by outlining the possible socio-economic, cultural and environmental impacts of current forms of Rural Tourism. The paper first explores the meaning of terms such as Rural, Rurality and Rural Tourism. It focuses on the genesis and growth of Rural Tourism, Rural Tourism in India, impacts of Rural Tourism and the need for sustainable Rural Tourism.

“Riding on their imperial horses, Flying like kings,
Thinking that they have understood everything.
Do they not realize that even birds fly?”

- Tashi Rabgyas, angered by tourists, 1980(Hodge, 1991)

Tashi Rabgyas, a resident of Ladakh, expressing his feelings on tourists that have invaded this small town of Ladakh, located in the northern most state of Jammu & Kashmir, India. This growing tension between the tourism industry and the local community in rural areas is becoming more apparent by the day. This paper tries to understand the meanings of terms such as rural, rural tourism in general with particular reference to India and traces the development of rural tourism from an historical perspective to the current debates.

Here again a universal definition has been hard to come by. In a broad sense it can be defined as ‘a state of mind, and technically, according to activities, destinations and other measurable, tangible characteristics’ (Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997). Over time researchers have constantly added to understanding the activities that encompass rural tourism. The list includes interest in farms, nature, adventure, health, education, arts, and heritage (MacDonald & Jolliffe, 2003) and experiencing living history such as rural customs, folklore, local traditions, beliefs, and common heritage (MacDonald & Jolliffe, 2003). The key parameters that define rural tourism are: ‘it is located in rural areas, functionally rural; based on small-scale and traditional activities and enterprises (rural in scale), relies on the traditional qualities of the countryside, develops slowly under the control of local p and is non-uniform reflecting the complexity of the rural environment (Schneider and Perry, 2002).

Genesis and Growth of Rural Tourism:

Rural environments have a long history of extending themselves for recreational purposes. Historical data reflects the existence of countryside recreation in European countries right from the 17th and 18th century. Thomas Cook, the pioneer of tour packages conducted its first excursions to country areas (Williams, Han & Qualls, 1998). However before the 19th century few people other than the upper class travelled. This trend changed by the mid-19th century. Invention of the railways, availability of free time, increase in disposable income and other technological advancements (Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997) all contributed to luring the middle class to experience holidays once considered the domain of the elite. The motivation for these early tourists were either the urge to experience the popular images that they had been subjected to or in some industrialized regions, the working population (ex-migrants) visiting their rural roots in the countryside. Hungary is a classic example of the latter (Rátz and Puczko, 2002). Until this point the region didn't feel the need to build on this segment, as the volume was small. However with the continuous increase in the number of tourists visiting rural areas, the awareness of developing the region to cater to the needs also grew. The sliding Economies, changes in agricultural practices, the rural-urban migration initiated by the industrialization, were also contributory factors for this shift (Figure 1). With the increase in popularity and numbers, the impacts of tourism on the environment and people started emerging. As early as the 20th century questions of access to and preservation of valued landscapes were becoming contentious issues.

From Figure1, we can conclude that the development of rural tourism in a region was based on a two-pronged agenda: developmental benefits (job retention, creation of new jobs, farm support, and infrastructural development) and the preservation and conservation of the environment (landscape and nature conservation). Apart from the developmental and environmental reasons, the social criteria (broadening of cultural provision, enrich and revive dying arts and craft forms and social interaction for local people who often live relatively isolated regions) Rátz and Puczko (2002) are also motivational factors for the development of rural areas. It was based on one or more of the above factors, which has led many countries both developed and developing to focus on rural tourism.

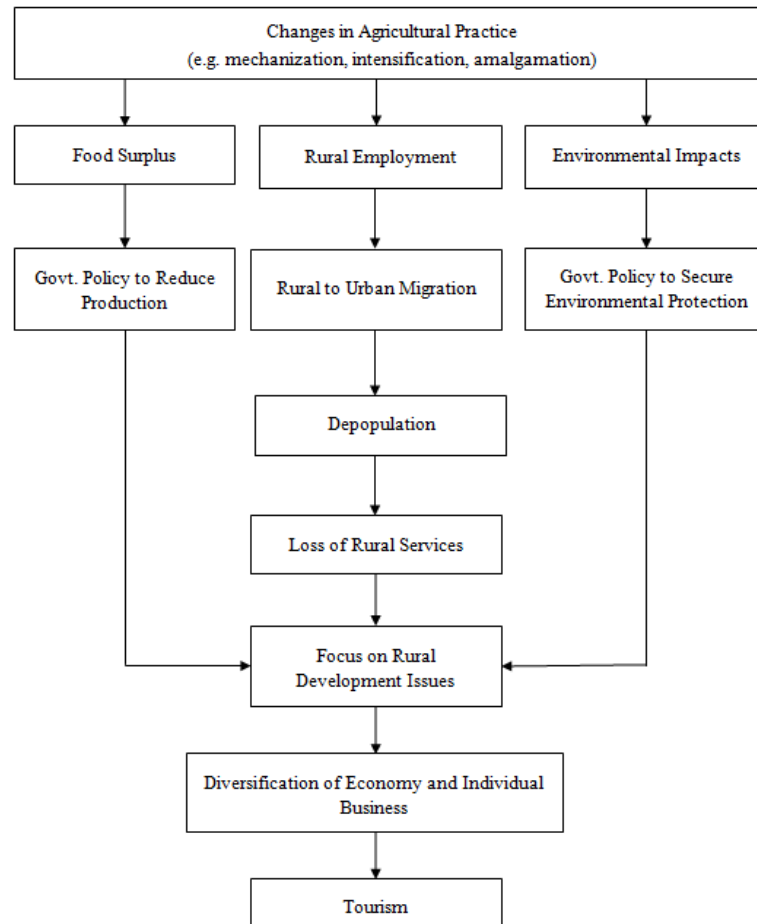


Figure 1: The context of Rural Tourism (Source: Schncider and Perry, 2002)

III. CASE STUDY

The Sustainability Debate:

This literature review aims to summarize some of the key literature underlying the Framework report. While it is not the intention to plunge into a lengthy debate over the definition of ‘sustainable development’ versus that of ‘sustainability’, it is important to introduce some meanings and principles as they will be referred to in this document.

Sustainable development was famously defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987), but many authors have since developed their own definitions and adopted varying stances on ‘sustainability’. Attempts have been made to classify these notions, resulting in concepts of weak versus strong, light green versus dark green and techno/anthropocentric versus eco-centric, with the former in each case taking the view that natural capital may be replaced with human-made capital, whereas the latter deems natural and human-made capital as incompatible (Haughton and Hunter, 1994). Within this range of definitions and approaches, there are common themes that can be combined to provide some ‘principles’ for sustainable development, based on the underlying notion that future generations should be compensated for reductions in the endowment of resources brought about by the actions of present generations (Pearce, 1988). Haughton and Hunter (1994) argue that these concepts of futurity, equity and environment must underpin the process of sustainable development, such that the principles of inter- and intra-generational equity and trans-frontier responsibility are at the forefront of sustainable development policy.

Increasingly, notions of sustainability are being linked to systems thinking (Bell and Morse, 2003) whereby sustainability is understood to be a framework for managing change. A system is a whole whose elements interact as they continually affect each other over time and operate towards a common purpose (after Senge, 1994); thus systems thinking encourages thinking about cause and effect and inter-relationships between elements. While this holistic approach to measuring sustainability is valuable, recognizing that “sustainability is not determined by single components”, systems theorists are still struggling to suggest a methodology for linking cause and effect in complex systems, to adequately analyze direct, indirect and flow-on effects of any one action and to deal with multiple, tiered temporal and spatial scales.

Sustainable Tourism:

The multiple issues bound up in the sustainable development/ sustainability debate are inevitably transferred to the concept of sustainable tourism. Again, the lack of any universal definition has led to a multiplicity of tailor-made meanings and applications (Box 1). As with sustainable development, there is the freedom to adopt varying 'shades of green' in approaching sustainable tourism. From the light green approach that holds tourism development and tourist and operator satisfaction as the central aim to the darker green in which the precautionary principle and concept of carrying capacities feature highly (Hunter & Fairfield, 1997). The stance adopted has major implications as it will govern the approach to implementation and hence the outcome.

Environmental threats to tourism:

In many mountain regions, small islands, coastal areas and other ecologically fragile places visited by tourists, there is an increasing concern that the negative impact of tourism on the natural environment can ultimately hurt the tourism industry itself. In other words, the negative impact of intensive tourism activities on the environmental quality of beaches, mountains, rivers, forests and other ecosystems also compromise the viability of the tourism industry in these places. There is now plenty of evidence of the 'life-cycle' of a tourist destination, that is, the evolution from its discovery, to development and eventual decline because of over-exploitation and subsequent deterioration its key attractions. In many developing and developed countries alike, tourism destinations are becoming overdeveloped up to the point where the damage caused by environmental degradation-and the eventual loss of revenues arising from a collapse in tourism arrivals-becomes irreversible.

Examples of such exploitation of 'non-renewable tourism resources' range from a small fishing village in India's Kerala state-which saw its tourist sector collapse after two decades of fast growth, because inadequate disposal of solid waste-to several places in the industrialized world, such as Italy's Adriatic coast and Germany's Black Forest.¹⁴ It can also be argued that environmental pollution and urban sprawl tend to undermine further tourist development in major urban destinations in developing countries, such as Bangkok, Cairo and Mexico City. In addition, tourism in many destinations could be particularly threatened by external environmental shocks, notably the potential threat of global warming and sea-level rise. Significant rises in sea level could cause serious problems to tourism activities, particularly in low-lying coastal areas and small islands. Global warming is also expected to increase climate variability and to provoke changes in the frequency and intensity of extreme climate events-such as tropical windstorms and associated storm surges and coastal flooding-that may threaten tourism activities at certain destinations (United Nations Security Council Resolution, 2001).

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Pro-poor tourism: A poverty reduction strategy:

While responsible eco-tourism and other sustainable tourism strategies may bring significant socio-economic benefits to host communities, they are not necessarily aimed at poverty alleviation. Given that the United Nations Millennium Declaration¹⁹ has placed poverty at the center of the international development agenda, it can be argued that sustainable tourism development should go beyond the promotion of broad socio-economic development and give greater priority to poverty reduction. This priority shift would also address a somewhat ignored recommendation of the seventh session of the Commission on Sustainable Development which, inter alia, urged Governments "to maximize the potential of tourism for eradicating poverty by developing appropriate strategies in cooperation with all major groups, and indigenous and local communities" (United Nations Security Council Resolution, 2001). A pro-poor tourism (PPT) approach differs from ecotourism and other sustainable tourism strategies in that its overriding goal is to deliver net benefits to the poor.²⁰ While PPT and ecotourism may have some similar objectives, the key difference is that poverty reduction is the core focus of the PPT approach, rather than a secondary component of a mainly environmental sustainability strategy. In other words, although environmental protection remains an important PPT goal, the quality of the environment in which targeted poor groups live is only one part of a broader poverty reduction strategy.

Government Tourism Policy:

The NAP, 1992, is only the latest statement of the Government's tourism policy. It attempts a purposeful shift in priorities towards a 'leisure:' oriented tourism strategy, but it does not abandon the earlier emphasis on cultural tourism whose antecedents can be traced back to the Sargent Committee report of 1946. Cultural tourism remains the central plank of India's tourism strategy for obvious reasons. However, less understandable is the neglect so far of other equally strong reasons or attractions to visit India. India has a diverse range of tourist destinations, and as a foreign guide book puts it: Basically India is what you make of it and what you want it to be. If you want to see temples, there are temples in profusion with enough styles and types to confuse anybody. If it is history you want India has plenty of it; forts, abandoned cities, ruins,

battlefields and monuments all have tales to tell. If you simply want to lie on the beach there are enough of these to satisfy the most avid sun worshipper. If walking and the open air is your thing then head for the trekking routes of the Himalayas, some of which are as wild and deserted as you could ask for. Earlier strategies to exploit this varied potential had relied on the recommendations of surveys that only focused on the historic and archaeological monumental aspects of India's tourist potential. These surveys showed that heritage was the biggest draw in attracting foreign tourists to India (Bhatia 1993). One of these surveys was conducted by a UNESCO expert Dr. F.R. Allchin in 1968 who established a much broader definition to the cultural heritage. Dr. Allchin's report broke down the various aspects of India's cultural attraction and reviewed them in the light of the then prevailing conditions. He divided the monumental heritage into four principal subject groups: a) Buddhist monuments; b) Hindu monuments; c) Indo-Islamic monuments; and d) Monuments of European and British association with India. He advised that each deserved to be exploited for purposes of cultural tourism. The same classifications continue to be identified in today's strategies.

To provide a spectrum on the impact of Tourism in India, here is an analysis on the Adventure Tourism Market Development in North East India.

Situation and Solution:

The Tourism Department, Government of Assam in North East India, recognizing the value of tourism as an economic development tool, wanted support in developing adventure tourism responsibly and sustainably. With tourism to India growing at 13.5% per year, state policymakers saw the opportunity to draw more visitors to Assam, but were concerned about preserving important cultural and natural resources. They chose an adventure tourism development route, defined according to a consumer-based understanding of "adventure," which called for the development of products and itineraries that would include:

1. Nature and wildlife exploration;
2. Cultural interactions and learning - which may include regionally unique spiritual and religious experiences, and exposure to defining cultural aspects such as the production of tea in Assam;
3. Rural experiences; and
4. Active, physical sports whether strenuous or easy- including but not limited to cycling, trekking and hiking, kayaking and other river exploration, hang-gliding, and horseback riding challenge.

This beautiful North East Indian state, bounded by Himalayan foothills and cut through by the powerful currents of the Brahmaputra River, has little existing tourism infrastructure and low market awareness. The state's tourism department leaders requested not only recommendations for product development, but also wanted to ensure that new products would reach an audience of tour operators and travelers to begin operating trips in the region. In addition, the state's leaders were very concerned that any new market development initiatives encourage sustainable, responsible tourism Solution.

Assam's tourism officials selected Xola as its partner in this important initiative because of its specialization in adventure tourism, the linkages to industry its approach brings, and its overriding emphasis on sustainable tourism development for the benefit of communities and the environment. Xola completed a Feature Adventure Destination analysis for Assam using the Adventure Tourism Development Index approach developed by the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA), The George Washington University (GW), and Xola Consulting, Inc. specifically, the goal of the project was two-fold:

1. To support Assam in developing its adventure tourism market by providing specific market development guidance, and
2. To provide access to markets and media through the consulting partners (ATTA, GW) results.

As a result of this study:

1. A responsible tourism development philosophy for the state was recommended;
2. Seven adventure tourism zones or "Hotspots" were defined;
3. A structure for organizing specific activities relative to product development, human resources development, infrastructure improvement, marketing, and impact monitoring was created; and
4. Highlights of the research showcasing Assam's unique assets will be revealed to more than 450 international adventure tour operators & adventure and mainstream travel media in a special report released through the Adventure Travel Trade Association (www.adventuretravel.biz), the largest trade organization for adventure tourism companies.

Foreign Tourist Arrivals:

Ministry of Tourism compiles monthly estimates of Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in India and Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEE) from tourism on the basis of data received from major airports. Following are the important highlights, as regards these two important indicators of tourism sector for 2010 and December 2010.

FTAs in India during 2010 were 5.58 million with a growth rate of 9.3 per cent as compared to the FTAs of 5.11 million during 2009. FTAs during the December 2010 was 6,55,000 as compared to FTAs of 6,46,000 in December 2009 and 5,34,000 in December 2008. FEE from tourism during 2010 were US\$ 14,193 million as compared to US\$ 11.39 billion during 2009 and US\$ 11.74 billion during 2008. The growth rate in FEE in US\$ terms during 2010 was 24.6 per cent. FEE from tourism during the month of December during 2010 were US\$ 1.55 billion.

Contribution to the Economy:

Combining unparalleled growth prospects and unlimited business potential, the industry is certainly on the foyer towards being a key player in the nation's changing face. Furthermore, banking on the government's initiative of upgrading and expanding the country's infrastructure like airports, national highways etc, the tourism and hospitality industry is bound to get a bounce in its growth. The hotel and tourism industry's contribution to the Indian economy by way of foreign direct investments (FDI) inflows were pegged at US\$ 2.24 billion from April 2000 to November 2010, according to the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP). India's hotel pipeline is the second largest in the Asia-Pacific region according to Jan Smits, Regional Managing

Director, Inter-Continental Hotels Group (IHG)Asia Australasia. He added that the Indian hospitality industry is projected to grow at a rate of 8.8 per cent during 2007-16, placing India as the second-fastest growing tourism market in the world. Initiatives like massive investment in hotel infrastructure and open-sky policies made by the government are all aimed at propelling growth in the hospitality sector.

V. CONCLUSION AND FEATURED RESEARCH

Conclusion

It is clear that rural areas are an integral part of the modern tourism experience. It is a fact that in reality many forms of rural tourism are unable to conform to the guidelines of sustainable development. However with timely, accurate research and dissemination of information, proper planning, implementation and monitoring of policies as well as working towards strengthening of institutions will contribute towards the processes of achieving the principles and values of sustainable tourism in rural areas. The tourism sector needs a national consensus on the role and place of tourism in national development and the early removal of impediments that have hitherto handicapped its growth. Public sector investment though limited can be made more efficient through the inter sectorial convergence of policies and programs supportive of tourism. An integrated inter-sectorial investment plan that provides effective infrastructural support to tourism through the Ministries of Railways, Surface Transport, Shipping, Civil Aviation, Urban Development, Rural Development and Environment and Forests etc. can be achieved through the preparation of a tourism component plan. Private sector investment can be enhanced by removing the barriers to growth and expediting critical policies that are being evolved. Public and legislative support will be essential for the sustainable development of the sector.

Promotion of sustainable tourism, through the development of policy tools, capacity building and awareness-raising programs, local involvement, guidelines for good practice and actual implementation remain essential goals. Sustainable tourism should aim to directly support poverty eradication and sustainable production and consumption. Making progress on a larger scale will be a fine balancing act and will require a massive "sea-change" in approach from the entire Travel and Tourism industry but it is an approach that is clearly worthy of support from all stakeholders interested and involved in the industry.

Featured Research

The international tourist arrivals in India are expected to grow at a compound annual rate of 7.9% for the period 2010-2015. Despite the economic slowdown from India tourism abroad is estimated to increase from 0.87 million in 2008. Departure tourism India abroad should reach 20.5 million in 2015. In 2008, the first four (4) meets the states 75% of the total market share of domestic tourists visiting India. National Tours is known to increase with a CAGR of 12.29% for the period 2008-2015. In 2008, among the three (3) countries have contributed with 40.15% share of total international tourist arrivals in India. Change the rate of earnings growth has fallen to a figure of 9.5% in 2008 and 2009 was further reduced and a negative growth rate (-3%). Indian Tourism foreign exchange earnings should grow at a CAGR of 7.9% for the period 2010-2015. The budget of the Union of India in 2010 the Indian government has given over 1,000 million rupees INR to the Ministry of Tourism of India. In 2009, FDI investment in India's hotel and tourism was over U.S. \$ 550 million. The number of cruise arrivals in India is projected to increase by 233.33% in 2010, the number of cruise arrivals in 2007. The number of tourist arrivals of Buddhism in India doubled in 2009 from 2008. Budget incredible India campaign has increased INR Rs 62.3 million for 2010-11 over the previous year 2009-10. The number of medical tourist arrivals in India is expected to increase at a CAGR of 24.6% between 2009 and 2013. Medical tourism market in India should be more than U.S. \$ 2 billion in 2013.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Bell, S. & Morse, S. (2003). *Measuring Sustainability: Learning from Doing*, Earthscan, London.
- [2]. Bhatia, V. (1993). *Analysing genre: Language use in professional settings*. London: Longman.
- [3]. Haughton, G. & Hunter, C. (1994). *Sustainable Cities*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London
- [4]. Hunter, D. J., & Fairfield, G. (1997). Disease management. *British Medical Journal*, 315(1), 50-53.
- [5]. MacDonald, R. & Jolliffe, L. (2003). Cultural rural tourism: evidence from Canada. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 30(2), 307-322.
- [6]. Pearce, P. L. (1988). *The Ulysses factor: Evaluation visitors in tourist settings*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- [7]. Rátz, T. and Puczkó, L. (2002). *The impacts of tourism. An introduction*. Hämeenlinna: Häme Polytechnic.
- [8]. Schncider, G. and Perry, J. (2002). *Electronic Commerce (2nd Edition)*. Thomson Learning.
- [9]. Senge, P. M. (1994) *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies for Building a Learning Organization*. New York, NY: Double-day.
- [10]. Sharpley, R. and J. Sharpley (1997). *Rural Tourism*. London: International Thomson Business Press.
- [11]. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1373 (2001). *Directory of International Best Practices, Codes and Standards*. 1-6. <http://www.un.org/en/ctc/bptable.html>
- [12]. WCED (1987). *Our Common Future: Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development*, WCED, Switzerland.
- [13]. Williams, J. D., Han, S. L., & Qualls, W. J. (1998). A conceptual method and study of cross-cultural business relationship. *Journal of Business Research*, 42(1), 135-143.