



# Pro-poor Tourism: Who Benefits?

Perspectives on Tourism  
and Poverty Reduction

Edited by C. Michael Hall

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## **CURRENT THEMES IN TOURISM**

**Series Editors:** Chris Cooper (*University of Queensland, Australia*),  
C. Michael Hall (*University of Canterbury, New Zealand*)

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## ***Editorial***

# **Pro-Poor Tourism: Do 'Tourism Exchanges Benefit Primarily the Countries of the South'?**

Poverty reduction has become an important item on the tourism agenda. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (2007) has identified poverty reduction, along with climate change, as a global challenge to the tourism industry. According to UNWTO Secretary-General Francesco Frangialli:

... they require innovative and changed behaviour to effectively respond over time and Tourism can and must play its part in the solutions to both ... the UNWTO has been actively working on these issues for some years and is committed to seek balanced and equitable policies to encourage both responsible energy related consumption as well as anti-poverty operational patterns. This can and must lead to truly sustainable growth within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals. (UNWTO, 2007)

In the same press release the UNWTO states that 'Tourism exchanges benefit primarily the countries of the South' (UNWTO, 2007) and provide a list of characteristics that would be familiar to all first year university students of tourism:

- The number of international tourist arrivals has risen from 25 million in 1950 to 842 million in 2006; this rise is equivalent to an average annual growth of about 7%.
- The revenues generated by these arrivals – not including airline ticket sales and revenues from domestic tourism – have risen by 11% a year (adjusted for inflation) over the same span of time; this outstrips that growth rate of the world economy as a whole.
- International tourism receipts reached US\$680 billion in 2005 (€547 billion), making it one of the largest categories of international trade.
- Depending on the year, this trade volume equals or exceeds that of oil exports, food products, or even cars and transport equipment.
- Tourism, taken in the narrow sense, represents one quarter of all exports of services – 40% if air transport is included.
- Tourism's share of direct foreign investment flows, though still limited, has increased spectacularly between 1990 and 2005. (UNWTO, 2007)

Such figures are impressive with respect to international tourism. Yet if examining tourism exchange from a global perspective the actual share of international tourist arrivals which the south enjoys is relatively small. For example, Africa which accounts for 13.3% of the world's population and 3.8% of world gross domestic product (GDP) had a global market share of 4.6% (Table 1). Similarly, one of the fastest growing areas in terms of international tourism, the Asia-Pacific, and which accounts for just over half of the world's population, only accounts for 19.3% of the world's arrivals. In contrast, Europe, with just over 10% of the world's population has over 50% of market share. Another way of comparing the relative balance of arrivals is through an international arrivals mobility ratio. If comparing approximate population to international arrivals (2002 figures are used for population and 2003 for arrivals in this instance), the global 2002 ratio was 1:9.1. However, the imbalances in the world tourism system are well illustrated if one compares differences between the north and the south. The Asia-Pacific, which includes developed countries such as Japan, Australia and New Zealand, had a ratio of 1:30.8, while Africa had a ratio of 1:26.6. In contrast, Europe had a ratio of 1:1.6 and North America 1:5.5. Given this situation the potential of tourism to contribute to the economic development of the developing countries, at least at a macro-level, would appear to be questionable unless there are massive shifts in flows of international arrivals.

The use of tourism as tool for economic development in developing countries has been a focus of research in tourism studies since the 1970s (e.g. De Kadt, 1979; Lea, 1988; Smith & Eadington, 1992). In the 1990s this research interest was widened with the integration of economic development in the broader rubric of sustainability, and the establishment of new forms of tourism such as ecotourism in which the economic benefits received by destination communities were a significant concern (e.g. Cater, 1993; Hall & Lew, 1998; Murphy, 2000; Smith & Eadington, 1992). The current decade has seen further revisions of the development concept in tourism with increased attention being given to the equity dimension of sustainable development and which has lead to renewed interest in the community as a critical element in achieving development goals (e.g. Reid, 2003; Scheyvens, 2002; Weaver, 2004).

One particularly important aspect of the interest in equity and human well-being as a tourism development goal has been the growth of academic and development agency interest in the relationship between tourism development and poverty-reduction strategies – what is often referred to as pro-poor tourism (PPT). Significantly, as with the tourism and sustainable development relationship, the PPT field has developed in great part as a result of interchange between academics and researchers and public and non-government organisations (NGOs) with interests in the less-developed countries. For example, one of the strongest advocates for PPT, as well as researchers on the subject, is the Pro-Poor Tourism Partnership (<http://www.propoortourism.org.uk/>) a collaborative research initiative between the International Centre for Responsible Tourism (ICRT), the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI). However, also as with sustainable development, the PPT field has become increasingly open to contestation and critical debate, as the contents of the

Table 1 International tourism, GDP and population by region

Region	GDP (PPPSUS billions estimated) 2002	GDP as % of world GDP	GDP per capita (PPPSUS estimated per person) 2002	Population 2002 (million)	Population as % of world population	International tourist arrivals 2000 (million)	International tourist arrivals 2003 (million)	International tourist arrivals 2005 (million)	Market share (%) 2005	Average annual growth 2000/05 (%)	Inbound mobility ratio – arrivals (2003): population (2002)
Europe	12,297	25.2	18,803	654	10.5	395.8	407.1	441.5	54.8	2.2	1 : 1.6
Asia Pacific	16,631	34.1	4,470	3,479	55.7	110.5	113.3	155.4	19.3	7.1	1 : 30.8
Americas	15,091	30.9	17,609	857	13.7	128.1	113.1	133.5	16.6	0.8	1 : 7.6
N. America	12,144	24.9	28,597	425	6.8	91.4	77.3	89.9	11.2	-0.3	1 : 5.5
Africa	1,897	3.8	2,280	832	13.3	28.2	31.0	36.7	4.6	5.4	1 : 26.8
Middle East	2,866	5.8	6,795	422	6.8	24.2	29.5	39.1	4.8	10.1	1 : 14.3
World	48,781	100	7,815	6,242	100	687	694	806	100	3.3	1 : 9.1

Notes: PPP refers to purchasing power parity; purchasing power is a measure of what can be bought in the territory in which that money is earned; percentage figures have been rounded.

Source: derived from UNDP, 2004; UNWTO, 2006.

present volume illustrate. The range of opinions regarding PPT and its potential to act as a positive force for human well-being is well summed up by Hall and Brown (2006: 13), 'does PPT simply offer another route by which economic imperialism, through tourism, may extend its tentacles, or is it an appropriately liberating and remunerative option?'

In one sense, the focus on providing tourism employment to the presently unemployed is perhaps not far removed from the goals of any regional economic development programme. PPT advocates tend to suggest that there are qualitative differences with respect to its approach with respect to the poor (e.g. Ashley *et al.*, 2000). However, critics suggest that it is another form of neo-liberalism that fails to address the structural reasons for the north-south divide, as well as internal divides within developing countries (e.g. Chok *et al.*, 2007; Scheyvens, 2007; Schilcher, 2007). These debates are not just academic as NGOs have also been highly critical of the notion of fighting poverty through tourism. For example, Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism Executive Director Ranjan Solomon stated:

For as long as the rich and powerful are going to draw up the parameters and architecture of tourism policy, nothing will change – not much, in any case. How can it? For after all, the investor is there to make profits. Social responsibilities do not factor – evidence of this is too thin to be counted or weighed in. The occasional burst of charity is not what we are talking about and asking for. Tourism is, virtually, for all intents and purposes, one with a purely economic function in-so-far as the industry is concerned ...

Tourism is largely an avenue and instrument for the rich and affluent whose wealth has been accumulated in the context of unjust structures and systems of society. Incremental changes in policy which slogans like 'liberalization with a human face' will stop far short of what is needed – an overhauling of tourism practice to guarantee it is just, participatory, and geared to authentic human advancement. (Solomon, 2005)

Solomon's comments were in part a response to the Declaration on Tourism and the Millennium Development Goals launched by the UNWTO and other agencies and NGOs in September 2005. According to WTO Secretary-General Francesco Frangialli in releasing the declaration:

Tourism needs greater recognition by governments and development institutions for its capacity to generate economic, environmental and social benefits ... It is also a sector that promotes inter-cultural understanding and peace among nations ... For poor countries and small island states, tourism is the leading export- often the only sustainable growth sector of their economies and a catalyst for many related sectors. It can play a key role in the overall achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. (eTurboNews, 2005a)

The release of the declaration also highlighted that developing countries received US\$177 billion in tourism receipts in 2004 with tourism being the primary source of foreign exchange earnings in 46 of the 49 poorest nations

that the UN describes as the Least Developed Countries (eTurboNews, 2005b). For those in support of tourism as a means of poverty reduction, these figures are indicative of the value of tourism as a means of improving welfare and living standards. Yet, the argument may well be put forward that these figures perhaps illustrate the problems associated with tourism, development and globalisation and the impacts of trade liberalisation. Indeed, while the declaration calls for tourism to be integrated into all development and poverty reduction strategies, with an emphasis on positive linkages with local economic activities (see <http://www.unwto.org/step/>). However, poverty reduction is integrated with UNWTO's desire for increased liberalisation of trade in tourism services ('with a human face') as local linkages must, in turn, be connected to international linkages, as part of the commodity chain of international tourism. As the 2003 addendum report of the UNWTO Secretary General to the General Assembly with respect to liberalisation of trade in tourism services (available for download from the UNWTO website under the heading of 'improving competitiveness' [[http://www.unwto.org/quality/trade/en/trd\\_01.php?op=3&subop=15](http://www.unwto.org/quality/trade/en/trd_01.php?op=3&subop=15)]) states:

It is recalled that the Osaka Millennium Declaration adopted at the outcome of the fourteenth General Assembly concluded that '*the liberalization of the conditions governing trade in services is compatible with sustainable tourism development and the protection of social and cultural values and identities*', the elements now included in the Organization's concept of '*tourism liberalization with a human face*'.

In the report presented by the Secretary-General to the last General Assembly it was stressed that: 'an expression of freedom by nature and an international phenomenon by definition, tourism has everything to gain from the conquest of extensive new territory in the realm of freedom'. The Secretary-General added that:

everyone stands to benefit from a development in tourism exports. First of all, the Third World countries which are on the whole net beneficiaries of international tourism trade in that their cumulative tourism balances of payments reflect a surplus in relation to the industrialized countries, a surplus that can help to finance their development and reduce their foreign debt. And the industrialized countries stand to benefit as well for two reasons: first, because through tourism they fulfill the wishes of their consumer citizens who would like to be able to travel abroad more freely and easily: and second, because their large enterprises, in particular the multinationals, have everything to gain from cheaper travel and easier access to foreign markets, not to mention the associated possibility of exporting their tourism engineering or that of their sub-contractors to those markets. (Secretary General, UNWTO, 2003: 2)

The idea that openness is good for growth and human development has become deeply ingrained in development institutions (e.g. see Dollar & Kray, 2000). Indeed, there is perhaps insufficient recognition in the discussion on pro-poor tourism that the focus on poverty reduction actually received its impetus since the early 1990s as a result of the interests of the World Bank.

The World Bank's *World Development Report 1990* relaunched poverty reduction as a primary objective of the Bank. As Culpeper (2002: 2) observed, 'other agencies, notably the principal multilateral development banks and bilateral aid agencies, soon followed suit'. The World Banks' policy descriptions focused on the development potential of greater openness to trade and foreign investment as part of a broader globalisation policy agenda.

Consequently, 'openness' has come to mean trade liberalization plus promotion of longer-term foreign investment, particularly FDI. Along with sound domestic economic policies, developing countries were now being told that openness (in this sense) is central to poverty-reducing growth. (Culpeper, 2002: 3)

Such ideas have clearly been embraced by the UNWTO and other public, private and NGO stakeholders as part of the tourism and poverty-reduction and pro-poor tourism agenda.

Nevertheless, as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has recognised:

In practice, the relationship between trade and growth is determined by a complex array of domestic and external factors. Cross-country evidence provides little foundation for the use of loan conditions or world trade rules to promote rapid liberalization. (UNDP, 2005: 120)

The UNDP as with many other commentators do argue that liberalisation of trade in services, such as tourism, offers potential benefits to developing countries. 'The problem is that industrial countries have focussed on areas that threaten to undermine human development prospects, while failing to liberalize areas that could generate gains for poor countries' (UNDP, 2005: 137).

The counter-institutional argument with respect to pro-poor tourism is that while projects at the local level may be beneficial to some communities and individuals the bigger picture remains the problem. Unless structural changes are made, particularly with respect to agricultural trade, the hopes for poverty-reduction in many parts of the developing world remain poor indeed. While 'poorer countries' do have the capacity to 'harness their assets of natural beauty and cultural wealth for development gains' (Secretary General of the UN Conference on Trade and Development, Dr. Supachai Panitchpakdi in eTurboNews, 2005b) it is often difficult to eat a view. The notion espoused by the UNWTO that 'tourism exchanges benefit primarily the countries of the South' is a ridiculous one and hides the reality that not only is the consumption of tourism the domain of the wealthy, but in many ways so is its production. Pro-poor tourism initiatives will be of value to some communities, as is usually the case with the transfer of economic and intellectual capital, yet issues of the location of those places in the international and domestic tourism commodity chains still remain. Pro-poor tourism initiatives are also of some value to consultants, researchers and companies who benefit financially from such trade aid support initiatives, and who, together with tourists and government agencies, may also be able to assuage their need to 'do something about the gap between rich and poor without changing their own lifestyles. These comments are not to deny the importance of poverty

reduction. It is clearly one of the most important issues of our time. Yet whether tourism is a means of reducing poverty gaps beyond isolated instances or is perhaps symptomatic of a causal relationship, at least with respect to the broader scope of north-south trade, needs to be debated much further than is presently the case in tourism policy circles.

C. Michael Hall  
Editor

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# Tourism and Poverty Alleviation: An Integrative Research Framework

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The past decade has seen an upsurge of interest from the governments and development organisations in a tourism-based approach to poverty alleviation. More specifically, poverty alleviation has been established as a major priority within the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) itself, as is evidenced by the launching of the concept of ST-EP (Sustainable Tourism as an effective tool for Eliminating Poverty). In contrast, the implications of tourism for poverty alleviation have been largely neglected by the tourism academic community. Relevant research to date is fragmented, limited in scope, and lacks a consistent methodological development. To address these deficiencies, this paper presents an integrative research framework, which synthesises multiple perspectives and can be used as an overarching guideline to stimulate and guide other future enquiries on tourism and poverty alleviation. Towards this end, a number of research needs and opportunities have also been identified and suggested along with the presentation of the framework.

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## Introduction

Although the economic significance of tourism for developing countries is long established (UNWTO & UNCTAD, 2001), noticeably in generating foreign exchange earnings, attracting international investment, increasing tax revenues and creating new jobs, it is not until recently that tourism has begun to be exalted as a powerful weapon to attack poverty. Dated back to the late 1990s, the Pro-Poor Tourism Partnership in the United Kingdom, a collaborative research initiative of the International Center for Responsible Tourism (ICRT), the International Institute for the Environment and Development (IIED) and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), has been committed to investigating the ways to tap the potential of tourism in poverty alleviation and is responsible for most of the early research and documentation (Ashley *et al.*, 2001). Inspired by the vision and innovative work of the Pro-Poor Tourism Partnership, UNWTO (2002, 2004a) launched the Sustainable Tourism