

Sustainable Tourism Challenges and Strategies in Malta

Leslie Vella

Chief Officer Strategic Development/Deputy CEO

Malta Tourism Authority

Tourism Strategic Development Options

- The three tourism strategic development options identified for tourism to Malta and Gozo for the period 2021-2030 are the following:

- **RECOVER**

- **RETHINK**

- **REVITALISE**

Malta Tourism Strategy to 2030

- The Malta Tourism Strategy 2021-2030 is an all embracing document which:
 - Draws from the Past
 - Thoroughly analyses the Present
 - Visualises an ideal Future
- It seeks to balance the various and wide-ranging characteristics of an Industry which has economical, commercial, developmental, social, environmental, traditional, cultural, experiential, recreational, emotional, developmental, commercial, aspirational, technological and innovational.

Challenges, Targets, Goals and Actions

- The Strategy features 13 Strategic Challenges, 11 Strategic Targets each linked to a specific set of UN Sustainable Development Goals and 22 individual Strategies.
- The 22 Strategies feature no less than 125 Goals and 245 Actions emerging from such Goals.
- This makes it a Strategy in which deliverables and commitments are measurable and benchmarkable.

The Quest for Sustainable Tourism

- The UNWTO defines sustainable tourism as tourism that meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future.
- Rather than being a type of product, it is an ethos that underpins all tourism activities. As such, it is integral to all aspects of tourism development and management rather than being an add-on component.
- The objective of sustainable tourism is to retain the economic and social advantages of tourism development while reducing or mitigating any undesirable impacts on the natural, historic, cultural or social environment.
- This is achieved by balancing the needs of tourists with those of the destination.

Sustainable Tourism: the challenges

- “Sustainable Development” and “Sustainable Tourism” have become widely used and abused terms that invariably find themselves inserted in any convenient space in a document, plan, speech or presentation.
- From the tourism perspective, the rapid and continuous growth of international tourism until 2019 led to increased sensitivities and a shift in opinion that “sustainability” needed to move from an aspiration to a practice
- The post-COVID world is leading to accelerated calls for more tangible sustainable measures to be introduced and implemented with commitment and haste.

The options available:

More with More?

More with Less?

Less with More?

Less with Less?

The Paradox of Growth

- Growth is the key objective of all political, economic and commercial considerations
- While Growth is described in positive terms, the opposite of Growth is often described in the most negative of terms:
 - Decline
 - Reversal
 - Stagnation
 - Reduced
 - Shrunk
- It is very challenging to contemplate a more sustainable approach to doing things when operating under the Growth Paradigm

Malta's Realities

- Small area, water and resource poor, densely populated
- Heavily dependent on imported energy, food, goods
- Small domestic market
- Lack of economies of scale
- Peripheral location: high transport costs especially air
- Shift to a service oriented economy
- Labour market challenges
- Developed country with high standard of living aspirations

Sustainable Growth

- Growth which achieves a fair balance between current needs and the maximised utilisation of scarce resources
- Growth which is measured not only in traditional economic terms but incorporates other elements such as quality of life, social justice, environmental considerations, greater link with the land, the sea and the community
- Growth in terms of needs/requirements rather than for the sake of growth
- Growth based on a balance between inputs and outputs: one which not only takes but also gives.

Sustainable Growth and Tourism

- Growth not for the sake of growth but as a means to an end. Alice asks the Cheshire Cat: “Where do I go from here? It depends on where you want to get to!”
- A tourism which gives the most but takes the least:
 - **Energy:** Transport, Food, Buildings, Renewable, Low to Zero Carbon, Smart technology.....
 - **Water:** Extraction, Production, Use, Reuse.....
 - **Land use:** Density, Regeneration, Character, Extended use, Vertical vs Horizontal, Landscape.....
 - **Food:** More local, Less waste, Gastronomy as a destination experience not simply food
 - **Waste:** Reduce, Recycle, Reuse
 - **Consumption:** (Entertainment/Leisure/Attractions) Linked to the Territory and the Culture not alien to it
- Tourism as a predetermined share of a mix of economic activity
- Development for Tourism or Tourism for Development?
- Achieving sustainability requires a committed, long-term, integrated, multidisciplinary, multisectoral change of philosophy and practices
- Growth models which allow for future proofing and long term viability

Strategic Vision

To manage and formulate the future development of tourism to Malta in line with sustainability principles through strategies aimed at making best use of the country's natural capital and cultural attractions in a way which balances between the welfare and wellbeing of the country's residents and the maximisation of visitor economic value and satisfaction.