

## A Study of Sustainability Issues in a Historic Chinese Water Town as a Cultural Tourism Site

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### Abstract

The UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) established the Indicators for Sustainable Tourism Workshop in China in 2005. (Bao, 2012). The enterprises involved were urged to plan ahead in order to maintain their competitive edge. In 2012, Bao studied Yangshuo, a popular Chinese tourist site for sightseeing and cultural tourism, and identified several issues, such as negative impacts on animals and the environment, an abundance of visitors, and negative attitudes toward foreigners (Bao, 2012).

The hospitality and dining industries have been the focus of several research in recent years (Liu et al., 2014; Song & Zhang, 2014; Targeted News Service, 2016). (Fabinyi & Liu, 2014). There has been a lack of studies focusing on tourist sites, especially those with a cultural focus. Therefore, there has to be greater study into the long-term viability of China's cultural tourist hotspots. Considering the importance of China's cultural attractions to the country's economy, it is essential to investigate opportunities for fostering cultural tourism in a sustainable manner. Three-sevenths of all international travel is

cultural tourism, and this sector is expanding at a rate of 15 percent per year, according to the World Trade Organization (Solimar International, 2015). Sustainable development issues at China's cultural tourism hotspots were also mentioned as a topic for future study. If the report is to be believed, then this is correct. Bao (2012) argues that the UNWTO Indicators for Sustainable Tourism Workshop study might be used by more tourism destinations and that further academic research on sustainable development in China is needed.

The rapid development of China's tourism industry made it imperative to assess the long-term viability of China's cultural tourist attractions. Visitors' and tourists' viewpoints were rarely sought out or analysed in earlier research on Chinese tourism difficulties (Bao, 2012; Fabinyi & Liu, 2014; Liu et al., 2014; Song & Zhang, 2014; Targeted News Service, 2016). Ballantyne, Packer, and Sutherland (2011) claim that organisations may learn about present and future issues by gauging the experiences and happiness of their visitors.

The best strategy to explore issues linked to sustainability in cultural tourism is to collect and analyse data on visitors' experiences and levels of satisfaction following their trips. The results of this kind of study would be useful to both the tourism

industry and municipal authorities. The purpose of this research was to examine sustainability issues from the perspective of vacationers.

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**Keyword:** Cultural Tourism, Level of Satisfaction, Cultural Analysis

## **INTRODUCTION**

The number of visitors travelling overseas has increased dramatically in the last 10 years (World Bank, 2016). 1.186 billion visitors visited globally in 2016 (World Tourism Organization [WTO], 2016), a 5% increase from 2015. (WTO, 2016). Over-commercialization, the erosion of historical and cultural assets, a loss of authenticity, and the possibly detrimental influence on local populations have all received extensive coverage in Western media (Chen, Huang & Cai, 2014). France, the United States, Spain, China, and Italy were the top five most popular tourist destinations worldwide in 2015. (WTO, 2016). Over the last decade, China's tourist development was second only to that of the United States (WTO, 2016). (as measured by international tourism receipts).

International visitors are no longer happy with just sightseeing in the twenty-first century, as family incomes rise and tourists' expectations of quality of service rise (Alegre & Garau, 2010). Rather, the experiential tourism business seeks to improve travellers' experiences and recollections (Yan & Hu, 2015). This is especially important in China, where individuals now have more discretionary cash to spend on leisure items and services than they had 10 years ago (Statista, 2014). The huge number of domestic visitors in China is also explained in part by the country's large population (Statista, 2014). People in China are also paying more attention to the growth of the tourist sector and the design of experience tourism products and services (Wu & Zhang, 2003). Due to the substantial influence that travel and tourist organisations have on society and the environment, stakeholders are expanding their attention on sustainable development within the tourism sector. Sustainable development is a plan that meets the demands of the present without jeopardising the ability of future generations, while preserving a balance between economic growth, environmental stewardship, and social well-being (Wang, 2006). There are both good and bad consequences. One positive consequence, for example, is that the tourist sector may monetarily benefit tourism organisations and industry personnel. Tourist behaviour, as well as government environmental preservation efforts, can have an impact on the environment (Hammond, 2013). A high amount of tourists at one place, as an example of a negative influence, may result in an imbalanced ecology of the destination. The tourists' conduct may disrupt the tranquil lives of the locals. If tourists litter, it will have a detrimental influence on the local streets, and refuse workers will have a lot more work to perform. These are some instances of how the expansion of the tourist sector may have an impact on a variety of factors, both favourably and adversely. The number of tourists in China

has climbed year after year, and concerns about the viability of the Chinese tourism sector have intensified (Hammond, 2013).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Experiential tourism, according to Stamboulis and Skayannis (2003), is travel that has been planned and prepared in advance. This form of tourism necessitated an investment of both time and effort on the side of the visitors. Experiential tourism enhances the vacations of visitors by providing emotional, psychological, and physical advantages to those who take part. Psychologically, people want to attain their goals and want to be recognised by others when they do. So they can feel proud, happy, and satisfied as a consequence. Experiential activities in tourism may provide visitors a chance to learn about themselves via exploration, demonstration, and understanding. As a result, tourists see visiting these locations as a success, and they feel good about themselves for accomplishing a tourist objective (Li & Li, 2006). After participating in experiencing activities, people may reconsider their earlier beliefs regarding the relationship between humans and nature, according to Curtin (2005). Walking through wildlife areas, for example, allows visitors to see how animals live in the wild.

They may reflect on the value of biodiversity and the interdependence of humans and nature as a result of this encounter. For example, Smith (2005) claims that experiential tourism is linked to an experience economy and that developers now give experiences as goods within tourism rather than just services in order to define experiential tourism more precisely. Experiential tourism invites visitors to participate in tourism activities and allows them to experience local culture as a customised and distinct type of tourism (Smith, 2005). Both tourists and developers strive for a unique and unforgettable experience. Tourists pay for their experiences under this framework, while developers give specific experience goods to visitors in order to engage them in the local community and culture (Smith, 2005).

According to Yan and Hu (2015), several tourism producers have attempted to build more experiential goods for visitors in order to increase the quantity and quality of memorable experiences travellers may have during a single trip or holiday. Experiential tourism, according to Wu and Zhang (2003), includes entertainment, education, and aesthetic appreciation, and tourists benefit from this stimulation on both a physical and cerebral level, as well as lasting memories.

Experiential tourism, as defined by these principles, is distinct from the conventional tourist model, which concentrates on all tourism items provided by individual operators and firms, such as food, souvenirs, and lodging (Li, 2007). Experiential tourism has grown in popularity as a result of the positive emotional and psychological bonds it creates between travellers and the places they visit (Yan & Hu, 2015). Traveling to various cities and countries is something tourists do because they desire a different kind of vacation experience. Such adventures are the most significant part of their trip (Li & Sun, 2009). Experiential tourism is a basic commodity that has great social importance as a focus of tourist resources. There is less of an environmental impact from this kind of tourism since it consumes less resources (Tang & Wang, 2009). For example, a dinner spiced with local spices is reasonably priced and sustainably produced, yet it may elicit a strong emotional reaction from tourists.

Tourism companies should develop their products and services completely, according to Yan and Hu (2015), so that tourists can easily reach their locations, have a good time, and remember their trips for a long time. Beyond memories, a more desirable consequence is for travellers to have a more holistic view of their locations, taking into account the physical as well as spiritual aspects (Yan & Hu, 2015).

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Sustainable development is a major issue for Chinese tourism sites (Chen et al., 2014). There is evidence that Chinese tourist firms can satisfy international sustainability standards according to Song and Zhang (2014)'s findings, which show that Chinese tourism companies can fulfil international sustainability requirements. The sustainable development methods of Chinese tourist and hospitality firms, however, were inconsistent according to Liu, Xie, and Zhao (2014). According to Liu et al. (2014), many Chinese tourist sites are suffering from a shortage of accommodations due to high demand and limited availability. In order to determine if visitors were happy with their trips, researchers listened to what they had to say about their experiences.

### **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

- To analyze the socio-cultural, economic, and environmental aspects of this cultural tourism destination based on those experiences.

### **Research Questions**

- What are the different dimensions of the cultural tourism destination based on the experiences of the visitors?

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Study design, methodology, sample, and data collecting are all discussed in this part. Ethical issues and potential modifications to the research design are also discussed. Visitors' impressions of Wuzhen's sustainability concerns were examined through online reviews by the researcher. Content analysis was employed as a study approach, with theme word counts “in order to analyse comments” (Strijbos, Martens, & Prins, 2006, p. 2). Content analysis was the most efficient approach to examine this data to uncover underlying information because of the range of traveler reviews on TripAdvisor.com that addresses various topics from various viewpoints.

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

For this study, we suggest using content analysis, an approach that lets us not only examine texts but also see trends in the phrases people use in reviews, how often they use such expressions, and the communication structure and discourses they use. Customers' behaviour may be studied through content analysis, which helps academics better comprehend the trip experience as well. It's been argued by Berg (2009) and Kolbe and Burnett (1991) that content analysis should be utilized to find patterns and theses in recorded conversations.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

Reviews written by tourists are a great window into their minds and hearts, say Isaac and Budryte-Ausiejene (2015). In addition, as stated by Ballantyne et al. (2011), studying feedback from tourists may inform the improvement of tourism products and services. Researcher was able to examine participants' emotions and perspectives thanks to the inclusion of comments and photographs posted by participants on TripAdvisor.

Following either a translation or transcription of the participant evaluations, we applied a coding system to extract the most salient points raised by the reviewers. The most important ideas, events, or emotions shared by the participants were uncovered using content analysis, and connections between them were explored.

The analysis of the relevant literature uncovered four contributors to the quality of the experience that a visitor has: the environment, the authenticity of the event, the opportunities for learning and education, and the level of service. The evaluation of the reviews provided by the participants was carried out with these four major themes and the ten codes (authentic local atmosphere, historical architecture, commercialization and modernization, cost of hotels and inns, crowdedness, experiential activity, management of the scenic area, convenience of transportation, revisiting/recommendations, and sanitation) in mind. In addition, the individuals' degrees of contentment were tallied and scrutinised for patterns and trends. As was covered in the portion of this research devoted to the analysis of the data, the purpose of the coding procedure was to ensure that the research data were analysed in a consistent manner. The previously discussed codes and their respective definitions for the purpose of this investigation are presented in the table that can be found below. This was done to reduce the likelihood of any confusion or misunderstanding.

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Table 1. Codes used to categorize the reviews based on the provided definitions

Codes	Definitions
Authentic local atmosphere	Sense of ancient southern Chinese culture
Historical architecture	Local buildings that represent traditional Chinese architecture
Commercialization and modernization	Non-culturally related travelling experience, especially in purchasing souvenirs and the convenience of living
Cost of hotels and inns	Experience of staying in local hotels and inns
Crowdedness	Number of visitors in the town
Experiential activity	Experience of tourist-involved activities
Management of the scenic area	Staff-related service and preparation on the site
Convince of transportation	Commuting within and outside the town
Revisiting/ recommendations	Level of recommendations to revisit again in a certain period
Sanitation	Environment and the tidiness of the town, the sites, and the hotels

The researcher began by classifying the evaluations based on the 10 codes provided, and then proceeded to examine those classifications from the perspectives of social, economic, and environmental aspects of the sustainable development of tourism destinations.

Also analysed was the participants' use of specific keywords throughout their responses to the survey questions. The 234 reviews that were gathered were organised into groups according to the terms that the people who participated in the research used. According to Ryan and Bernard (2003), one method for assessing the interests of consumers may be accomplished by analysing the frequency with which they utilise topical terms in online comments. The frequency with which words are used is very important to readers, and the frequency of keywords provides information to researchers on the precise perceptions that travellers have of a given place. Following the analysis of the reviews provided by the participants in their respective groups, the researcher distilled the information into 10 key themes that are representative of the overall trip experience in Wuzhen. The number of topics that are connected to tourism that were taken into consideration for this research was cut down to ten in order to facilitate the evaluation of sustainable development in the tourism industry. The topics that were summarised were cross-referenced with the framework of sustainability, which includes social, environmental, and economic aspects. These factors included the ambiance, architecture, commercialization and modernity, modes of mobility, expense, crowdedness, activities, administration of the area, revisiting recommended, and sanitation. In the end, the 10 subjects served as the basis for developing the ten codes that were applied to the content analysis. "catalogue essential concepts

while retaining the context in which these concepts appear" was made possible thanks to the coding procedure, which was necessary for carrying out a content analysis research since it required a consistent examination of the text (Bradley, Curry, & Devers, 2007, p.176). The researcher created a codebook by using the codes to ensure that there would be uniformity in the analysis of the reviews. The most important instruction for a content analysis approach, as Hsieh and Shannon (2005) say, is to code the text from the data and then establish analysis and interpretation through the information that has been coded. The researcher was able to organise the reviews into distinct categories using the coded labels and definitions that were generated as a consequence of the coding process, and then examine the primary themes that were prevalent throughout all of the categories. After that, the researcher assessed the evaluations with regard to the most important concerns about the development of sustainable tourism in Wuzhen.

Because assessing the evaluations of the participants based just on their superficial meaning was insufficient, the researcher, after determining the codes, turned to content analysis in order to examine the details included inside each review (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2015). In addition, Kassirjian (1977) recommended that the content analysis process take into account the possibility of systematisation. In addition to this, the findings should have some theoretical bearing on the aims of the research. In accordance with the customers' knowledge theory, the researcher considered the reviews provided by the participants as illustrations of their trip experiences in order to accomplish his goal of determining whether or not Wuzhen is capable of maintaining its current level of sustainable growth (Liao et al., 2010). The researcher analysed the Wuzhen tourism site by comparing the experiences gained from travelling with the fundamental components of sustainable development.

## **CONCLUSION**

The proposed study looks at sustainability issues in the context of one cultural tourist destination, Wuzhen, China's ancient water town, using data from TripAdvisor. There are still many problems related to sustainable development that tourism destinations in China need to address. Previous studies examining issues related to Chinese tourism have mostly focused on the perspectives of locals, tourism organisations, and governments, with little attention paid to the perspectives of actual tourists. There is an urgent need to examine the sustainability challenges that occur when visitors visit cultural tourism attractions in China because of the country's booming tourism industry. Wuzhen was chosen as a case study by the researchers because of its status as a well-known tourist destination and excellent representation of a traditional Chinese town.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Participants' reviews on TripAdvisor were analysed for stakeholder perspectives, however such perceptions may differ from those of the stakeholders in this study. Collecting data directly from stakeholders like employees, small company owners, locals and tour guides may be a better option in the long run. Primary research in the future might better investigate the satisfaction levels of stakeholders with Wuzhen's tourist growth.

The second drawback is a result of the study procedure. Only reviews written in English and Chinese will be considered for inclusion in this study, which aims to collect feedback from a single internet site.

For this research, tourists' opinions are proposed to be used rather than those of third-party organisations to assess Wuzhen's authenticity.

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