Exploring the Dynamics of Socio-Cultural Sustainability in Trinidad's Mice Market

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Abstract

Tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors in the world and it is well known to contribute to economic, environmental and socio-cultural benefits to many countries. It brings economic value in the form of revenue generation, continuous foreign exchange earnings and is a means for diversifying the economy. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, in 2011, the Travel and Tourism sector accounted for approximately 9.2 percent of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Environmentally, tourism can provide benefits in the form of green taxes, the induction of environmentally friendly practices by tourism facilities and beautification drives, which promote a level of aestheticism. Socio-culturally, tourism provides employment opportunities, it allows the local culture to gain wider acceptance and leads to cross cultural exchanges with other countries. Tourism is seen by many countries as a panacea to sustainable development. As such, different countries promote different forms of tourism products. Business Tourism, one such tourism product, adds significant economic value to the tourism GDP and is on the front burner for some countries. While this option is being undertaken as part of a sustainable development strategy, key stakeholders have continuously lobbied that such development should not be pursued at the expense of a country's socio-cultural assets, the core that boosts business tourism. The aim of this paper is to provide an understanding of business tourism and how it contributes to socio-cultural sustainability. It examines the importance and relevant theories that have been used to explain observed socio-cultural impacts and spill-off externalities. The paper also discusses the concept of business tourism and captures the socio-cultural impact of this niche market. It examines the viability of business tourism as it relates to socio-cultural sustainability in Trinidad and makes policy recommendations for the future. An examination of Australia's tourism industry and its key strategic areas for development are presented, and an analysis is provided on how Trinidad can be benchmarked against Australia in these key strategic areas. From this qualitative study utilizing a thematic analysis, it was determined that business tourism was socio-culturally sustainable and should be pursued as a micro sector for diversifying the Trinidad and Tobago economy. The findings also revealed that there are potential benefits when countries actively pursue business tourism that is in harmony with established socio-cultural practices. It also purports and embraces the notion of sustainability as a way forward.

Keywords: Business tourism; Qualitative Research; MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Events); Economic; Environmental; Socio-cultural; Sustainable; Sustainability; Socio-cultural impacts; Trinidad.

Introduction

Tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors in the world (WTTC 2009) as total international tourist arrivals climbed from 25 million in 1950 to 898 million in 2007 (World Tourism Organisation 2012). It is projected to increase to 1 billion by 2012, and 1.6 billion by the year 2020. These statistics whilst encouraging for countries seeking to diversify their economies into the tourism industry, this micro sector is perceived to be an extremely diverse one and differs from country to country. Each country is uniquely different both in terms of how it treats with its socio-cultural attributes in achieving its tourism strategies and how each uses its resources to promote various tourism products. Given this uniqueness, people travel for different purposes[1] which impact on the socio-cultural environment.

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[1] According to Cooper et al (2005), there are many reasons why people travel including food and drink (gastronomic tourism), enjoy the natural environment (eco tourism), relaxation (leisure tourism), travel to view or take part in sport (sport tourism), and to engage in business (Business Tourism).

Notwithstanding the economic value of some of these tourism products, others can have substantial impact on the socio-cultural attributes.

The Latin American Studies Organization and by Discover Magazine (2010) describe Trinidad as the "Little America" and the "economic tiger" of the Caribbean. This country boasts of having the infrastructure, amenities and facilities all geared toward the business traveler and over the years, it has become the main hub for international business in the Caribbean. Trinidad and Tobago boasts of having the socio-cultural attributes, diverse cultures, amenities and facilities all geared toward the business traveller. Over the years, it has become the main hub for international business in the Caribbean because there are business type hotels with conference facilities. Some countries have a strong socio-cultural record and Trinidad and Tobago is no different. This country is unique as it boasts a fusion of different cultures, which includes different faiths/beliefs, gastronomic treats, physical and cultural attractions, observance of various festivals/events throughout the year and warm hospitality.

Of crucial importance to a country are the benefits to be derived from this industry if it is managed properly. However, tourism can be a double edged sword that provides opportunities as well as challenges (Pattullo 1996; Mowforth and Munt 1998; Ateljevic 2007; Elliott 1999; Gmelch 2004; Hall *et al* 1999; Inskeep 1991; Jayawardena 2005; and, Matheison and Wall 1982). Business tourism has the potential to create job opportunities, stimulate the economy by providing a continuous flow of foreign exchange, encourage infrastructural and social development, form linkages with other industries and play a key role in diversifying Trinidad's oil based economy (Cooper *et al* 2005; WTO 2010; Sharpley and Telfer 2002; Swarbrooke and Horner 2001; McIntosh and Gouldner 1995; and, Rithie and Crouch 2003).

In terms of challenges, business tourism can have negative economic impacts such as inflationary effects, excessive demand for resources, unbalanced socio-economic development and exploitation, socio-cultural dislocation, enclave economic impact, socio-economic leakages, and vulnerability to economic and political conditions (Inskeep 1991; Miller and Twining –Ward 2005; Mowforth and Munt 1998; Kasim 2006; Dwyer 2005; and, Chok *et al* 2007). Tourism also has the propensity to impact upon the authenticity of a country's culture and generally, the way of life. More so, tourism can also act as a catalyst for spreading many of the incurable diseases in the region today. Diseases are spread much faster when carriers of the disease travel to other geographical areas and encounter the locals there; SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome), and H1N1 "swine flu" are examples.

Against this background, countries must be very selective in identifying their developmental goals as it seeks to foster a business climate and attract investors. With regards to Trinidad and Tobago, its National Tourism Policy Document only speaks to business tourism as a growing viable niche, nevertheless due consideration should be given to the sustainability and the impact this form of development will have on the spill off sectors and the socio-cultural environment. Therefore, the crafting of a sustainable tourism development strategy encompasses effectively managing the relationships among the three pillars of sustainability. These three pillars are the natural environment (eco friendly), the economy (financial benefits), and socio-cultural benefits (create employment opportunities and facilitate the preservation of culture).

In short, countries should focus their diversification efforts in areas in which they already have some competitive advantages by creating economic entities and their interconnections among the three pillars of sustainability (Edgell: 1999).

Literature Review

Synopsis of Tourism and Business Tourism

Business tourism as described by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) is referred to as the Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Events (MICE) market. This market represents a potential source of revenue and employment that fosters scope for improving the environment and gives opportunities to promote international trade, build capacity for diversification and fosters sustainability. 'Sustainable' and 'sustainability' are the buzz words used today and these concepts are being advocated as best practices by many countries. Trinidad and Tobago is no different and in its National Policy document; the blueprint for tourism, has embraced the notion of sustainability as a way forward and as a means to promote socio-cultural attractions.

Business tourism can broadly be separated into individual travel and organized group arrangements (Lawson 1982; Jafari 2000; and Swarbrooke and Horner 2001). According to Phelan *et al* (2009: 39), Business Tourism goes beyond work purposes, sports tournaments, festivals, concerts etcetera. It incorporates all activities associated with the MICE industry, but has some peculiarities as it caters for the affluence and the professional.

In this regard, business tourism caters to those of a high-income bracket and according to the Business Tourism Partnership (2003), business tourism is at the high quality and high yield end of the tourism spectrum. As a result, business travellers pay more for services (travel first class, stay at 5 star hotels, tip heavily) - they indirectly pay higher taxes which can then be used to fund social and cultural programs from which the country benefits. Additionally, they are more socio-culturally sensitive implying that they are willing to support and buy into culturally conscious activities, goods and services, promote CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) initiatives and engage in heritage projects.

Generally, business tourism has socio-cultural challenges and opportunities when compared to other forms of tourism. According to Tourism Concern (2012):

> "*Indigenous peoples frequently suffer greatly due to tourism. Indigenous peoples … whose language, traditions and social institutions have largely withstood the impacts of colonisation or other incoming groups and cultures to a region. …in many countries, indigenous peoples are socially, politically and economically marginalised from mainstream society, which views them as inferior and 'under-developed'. Their opinions are not sought about tourism development on their ancestral lands. Displacement from or violation of these lands can amount to cultural devastation.*"

In extreme cases, local people may be debarred from enjoying the natural facilities of their own country or region. For example, along part of the Mediterranean, almost half of the coastline was acquired by hotels for the sole use of their visitors and consequently, the local public is denied access (Global Tourism). In another instance, locals were relocated to make way for the creation of parks and outdoor recreation at Forillon and Gros Morne in Canada, which incontrovertibly aroused considerable local opposition.

Against this backdrop, due care must be exercised when selecting certain tourism activities, as some of these may fail to integrate with the natural features and indigenous socio-cultural diversity. In summary, tourism has the potential to increase public awareness of cultural attractions and to spread awareness of socio-cultural problems when it brings people into closer contact with culturally diverse populations. In relation to Trinidad and Tobago, a commentary article written in the Guardian Newspaper dated 15th March 2012 (page A33) highlights that:

> "*… the integrity and orientation of past, present and future generations of our people are founded upon a unique and invaluable cultural, historical and environmental ethics. This ethics defines and perpetuates a communal identity, language, history and value system. It also involves an irrevocable cultural attachment to our landscape.*"

Therefore, if tourism is to be sustainable, it must incorporate these principles and practices of a country's culture and quality of life. Where the cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds of the tourists are very different from those of the local population, the results of their intermingling may be favourable for the business tourists, but explosive for the locals. The so-called demonstration effect of *prosperity amid poverty* may create a desire among local people to work harder or to achieve higher levels of education in order to emulate the way of life of the tourists.

In some instances, local communities respond to the tourists' desire for souvenirs and exotic products. This includes building consumer demand for products made using indigenous materials and for services - including tourism services - that are provided in a way that minimizes socio-cultural impacts. The tourism industry can play a key role in providing cultural information and raising awareness among tourists of the social consequences of their actions. Tourists and tourism-related businesses consume an enormous quantity of goods and services; moving them toward using those that are produced and provided in socio-culturally sustainable way, in essence from cradle to grave, could have enormous positive impact on the planet's social environment (Global Development Research Centre 2012). Swarbrooke and Horner (2001: 04) identified the different forms of business tourism and illustrated its diversity. According to them, business travel and tourism is the core from which many different forms of business tourism is encapsulated.

It has the potential to encourage other types of tourism to occur (McCartney 2008) and offers the opportunity for empowering these various stakeholders to care, conserve, protect, preserve, appreciate, understand and encourage cross-cultural exchanges in a satisfying and culturally uplifting manner. Research suggests that approximately 40% of business travellers will return with their families at a later date as leisure tourists (Business Tourism Partnership 2009). It would seem to suggest that by returning to the same destination that apart from the quality customer service experiences, cultural magnetism are key considerations.

Overall, the increasing use of the internet and other forms of technology are providing organisations, individuals and businesses with cutting edge facilities to network, interface, and redevelop the tourism product in line with socio-cultural standards (McCartney 2008; Buhalis and Law 2008). However, this increasing use of technology has changed the traditional way of doing business and has negatively impacted on the travel and tourism market. Companies are seeking new ways of cutting costs, preserving the socio-cultural environment and are exploring other avenues like utilizing information technology to minimize the environmental and socio-cultural impact on destinations.

Sustainable Tourism Development

Sustainable tourism development builds upon the premise of sustainability[2] and attempts to incorporate economic, environmental and socio-cultural principles into tourism. This aids in minimizing the negative effects and maximizing the benefits (Hall and Lew: 1999; WTO 2004). It emphasizes using environmentally friendly resources to maintain biological processes and conserves the natural heritage. It respects the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities and provides socioeconomic benefits like stable employment, income generating opportunities, poverty alleviation and social services. Generally, it takes into consideration the resource base that currently exists and the utilization of resources in a manner that the resource base of future generations are not impaired.

Further, it promotes fairness and equality and aims to create win-win situations with the various stakeholders involved in the tourism process (Jurowski 2002). There is a premise that three pillars need to be satisfied in order to achieve sustainability. These pillars are the natural environment, the economy and socio-cultural benefits. As such, prudent management of these pillars will allow for informed and meaningful participation of all stakeholders. It has much potential to revitalize and reinforce cultures as well as it has the propensity to create opportunities and seek the interest for all involved (Harris *et al* 2002).

The Relationship between Business Tourism and Sustainability

Business tourism can be sustainable and could bring real benefits if the three underlying pillars of sustainability work in harmony. However, the reality of the situation is that stakeholders on each side may differ in their behavioural reactions. Managers and stakeholders have their own interest (agency issues) and therefore it could be difficult to manage certain relationships (Elliott: 1999).

Given these diverse relationships in this industry, there is always the potential for agency problems. One potential solution for the proper functioning of a business tourism niche is to bring the relevant stakeholders together so that they could develop a proper policy for the implementation and execution of business tourism. Tosun (2006) and Miller and Twining-Ward (2005), articulated that tourism planning has evolved and in the spirit of compromises, all stakeholders benefit (Dewhurst and Thomas: 2003). With regard to Trinidad, business tourism can be sustainable and there are prospects for future development (Tao and Wall: 2009). The infrastructure, geographical location, main target market access via dependable airlift, technology, cultural attractions and activities, people resources, environmental practices, aesthetics and sound banking systems all give due consideration and weight for the business tourism niche to fit into Trinidad's existing system.

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[2] The notion of 'sustainability' is touted as a 'best-practice' model used in tourism development as it emphasizes social responsibility and greening (Sharpley and Telfer 2002; Mowforth and Munt 1998; Hall and Lew 1999; Garrod and Fyall 1998; Harris *et al* 2002; Liu 2003; Frey and George 2009). Sustainable development is referred to as: "*development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*" (WCED, 1987:43). It is a dynamic process of changes that can work in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations (Liu 2003). Sustainability is a subset of sustainable development which takes a holistic approach to development.

Also, Business Tourism Partnership (2003) argues that business tourism is sustainable and it is less risky when compared to other industries. It offers higher added value with fewer socio-cultural negative impacts than mass leisure tourism. The report states that:

> "*Furthermore, conference and incentive visitors are together as a group, so that it is possible to inform and educate them about the local community in which their event is being held in order to maximize the enjoyment of their stay but also to minimize any disruption and possible inconvenience to the local resident population. It is very much harder to manage, in the same way, the impact of individual leisure travellers on a destination.*"

Research also suggests that business tourism is more socio-culturally sustainable than mass leisure tourism. It is more indoor concentrated and has less impact on the environment and the socio-cultural surroundings. Notwithstanding the above, business tourism can provide long term benefits if managed properly; resulting in sustained economic, social and environmental benefits over time. The main benefits of business tourism for destinations (adopted from Swarbrooke and Horner 2001) are infrastructure developments, viability of leisure facilities (shops), create opportunities for local businesses, and continuous flow of foreign exchange since business travellers tend to visit in the off-peak seasons.

Business tourism can contribute to the other tenants of sustainability. It generates social value by creating employment (not limited to higher level skills); as well as it creates economic value in the form of revenue and environmental value in the form of infrastructure (development of heritage sites) which complies with green standards. This new trend of building infrastructure, amenities, and facilities fulfils certain environmental and socio-cultural standards and keeps in sync with sustainability (Mair and Jago 2010). As reported, poor planning and lack of focus on socio-cultural development can have devastating effects for the host destination (Jayawardena 2005).

Thus, without careful attention to the balance between the volume and type of tourist activity and the sensitivities and carrying capacities[3] of the resources being developed, tourism projects can not only be socio-culturally harmful but also economically self defeating and environmentally degrading. According to Jayawardena (2005) and Middleton *et al* (1998), the quest for wealth and short-term profits comes at the sacrifice of environmental and socio-cultural interests.

The goal in this situation is to reduce the negative spillages or externalities of this relationship while fostering the positive externalities. Benefits of this relationship can be rewarding if managed properly, and one pillar of sustainability should not be held higher and given more priority than the other two.

Researchers claimed that a number of stakeholders must take steps to reduce their socio-cultural footprint (Chok et al 2004; Dewhurst and Thomas 2003; and Ko 2005). These steps include: minimizing the commercializing of local culture (reconstructed ethnicity-turn local culture into commodities when religious traditions, local cultures and festivals are reduced to conform to tourist expectations); economic inequality (between locals and tourists); job level friction (between local workers and foreign expatriates); streamlining tourism products to fit the mould of tourist designs; and the risk of standardization in the process of satisfying tourists' desires. Notwithstanding these challenges, the advancements of socio-cultural practices in business tourism are catching on quickly, in the form of changes to products, processes and policies. Multinational companies also have been conforming to these practices by engaging in CSR efforts. In many instances, these institutions have been instituting self regulatory socio-environmental conduct in their operations (Christmann 2004).

Socio-cultural pros and cons of this relationship

These challenges should neither be feared nor underestimated but should add to a country's diversity and social harmony to foster socio-cultural sustainability which "*speaks to the ability of a community to almost withstand the presence of tourists and to even continue to function without 'disharmony'.*" (Duval 2004: 72). This reflects a fundamental change compared with a decade ago. In this regard, socio-cultural sustainability in tourism can bring about benefits to a country.

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[3] The carrying capacity is the maximum number of persons which the environment can contain without degrading.

These include: bringing in outside dollars to support community facilities and services that otherwise might not be developed, encourage civic involvement and pride, provide cultural exchanges between host and guest, encourages the preservation and celebration of local festivals and cultural events, facilities and infrastructure developed for tourism can also benefit residents (Telfer and Sharpley: 2002), encourages the learning of new languages and skills, tourism related funds have contributed to institutions being built in some areas, which generally resulted in job creation for locals (Tosun 2006).

Positive externalities can also come in the form of infrastructural development (including roads, water lines, restaurants and other forms of developments) which not only caters to tourists but locals as well. Overall, the standard of living of a population can be improved (Higgins-Desbiolles: 2006) and there can be poverty alleviation as well (Chok *et al* 2007). In short, business tourism can play a vital role in minimizing poverty, creating direct and indirect jobs and can be a critical link in supporting other sectors in the country.

On the other hand, if socio-cultural aspects are not managed properly it can result in the commercialization of local culture (reconstructed ethnicity), attract visitors whose lifestyles and ideas conflict with the community (use of illegal drugs/alcohol). It also has the capacity to change individual behaviour and family relationships, increase sexually transmitted diseases (Aramberri 2007; Kempadoo 1999; Singh 2002; and Jones *et al* 2005), loss of traditional values and culture, competition for limited resources, harassment, human violations and increase in crime. Arising out of these challenges there can be a loss of cultural identity (Scheyvens; 2002) through the bastardisation and trinketisation of culture (Mowforth and Munt 1998), host irritations depending on the volume of tourism can change and locals can become agitated resulting in cultural clashes when they do not derive much direct benefits from foreigners and business tourism. Research also showed that high land values came as a result of foreign domination and development (Scheyvens 2002; and Elliott: 1999), increases in the cost of living because certain communities are foreign dominated (Saveriades 2000), and high numbers of expatriates in certain communities can lead to tensions with locals (Scheyvens; 2002).

The Socio-cultural Sustainability of Business Tourism in Trinidad and Tobago

The twin island Republic of Trinidad and has a population of 1.3 million people and is one of the most developed economies in the Caribbean. It is fast becoming the economic hub of the region and it offers many business type hotels and facilities. Statistically, the tourism sector accounts for about 10.6% of the GDP (WTTC, 2009) and this figure is projected to rise given the government's current diversification developmental plan. This sector (Tourism) apart from being less risky provides the best opportunities for inter-sectorial linkages to curb many problems such as revenue leakages via high spending on imports, and curbing the problem of high food prices in society.

More recently, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has expressed its intentions to revise its marketing strategy, appoint new tourism ambassadors and increase its expenditure to promote the socio-cultural aspects of tourism. They also are empowering communities and businesses to preserve, maintain, foster cultural authenticity and continue the initiative of promoting socio-cultural activities.

More so, business tourism has growth potential both in terms of diversification and economic impact on the GDP. It was revealed from the WTTC (2009) that business tourism grew steadily from 2004 to 2008. The US$ in millions climbed from 159.0 in 2004, to 200.9 in the year 2008 and it is projected to increase further to 401.6 by the year 2019. These figures illustrate the growing nature of business tourism in Trinidad and its potential to contribute quite significantly to the economy of the country. There is also immense potential as it fosters diversification for the Trinidad and Tobago economy to benchmark against Australia and adopt strategies to foster socio-cultural sustainability. Australia's tourism industry has been a pioneer with regard to sustainably managing and preserving their culture, and gives justification for being a benchmark in world tourism.

Overview of Australia's Tourism Industry

According to Tourism Australia (2012), Australia is the world's sixth largest country and its smallest, flattest continent with the lowest population density in the world - only two people per square kilometre. It is an intriguing contrast of vast, open landscapes and sophisticated, vibrant cities, Australia is a popular travel destination due to its many tourist attractions, remarkable wildlife and beautiful beaches. More so, their indigenous culture and heritage; sophisticated cities and regions; and friendly, tolerant, culturally diverse population make this destination even more attractive.

Australia has the third highest standard of living in the world and four of the world's top 10 most liveable cities in 2010 were in Australia, according to The Economist Intelligence Unit. Today Australia also defines itself by its Aboriginal heritage, vibrant mix of cultures, innovative ideas and a thriving arts scene.

According to the Department of Resources Energy & Tourism, December 2011, Tourism generates $94 billion in spending and contributes nearly $34 billion to Australia's GDP, directly employing over 500,000 people and earning nearly 10% of total export earnings, making it Australia's largest service export industry. It helps to fund critical economic infrastructure like airports, roads and hotels, and provides the people-to-people linkages to Australia's international interests. It also plays an important role in the economic development of regional Australia, with 46 cents in every tourist dollar spent in regional Australia.

Methodology

Data

Qualitative research offers empirical information (Neuman 2006, Willis 2007, and Punch 2005), deep insight and richness of detail (Neuman 2006; Minichiello and Kottler 2009; Willis 2007; Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006; Anfara and Mertz 2006; Punch 2005; and Outhwaite and Turner 2007). A qualitative research methodology was primarily selected to gather exploratory[4] data in the area of business tourism and its socio-cultural sustainability in Trinidad. This was necessary to get rich detail and probe the topic. A thematic analysis was then used for collating similar themes that emerged in the interview process. The data was collected from a structured questionnaire administered to seven key industry professionals who are located in the areas of: Ministry of Tourism (MOT); Tourism Development Company (TDC)/Convention Bureau; Bureau of Standards; the Environmental Management Authority (EMA); Trinidad Hotels Restaurants and Tourism Association (THRTA); Cascadia Hotel, a business hotel and a Tourism Consultant.

The Instrument

The formulation of the questionnaire entailed adapting relevant questions found in the literature (Cooper *et al* 2005; Edgell 1999; Duval 2004) with a view to addressing the socio-cultural sustainability of business tourism in Trinidad. The questionnaire comprised of three sections with all open-ended questions. The first section asked questions pertaining to business tourism and its importance. The second section raised questions relating to the socio-cultural sustainability of business tourism and the pros and cons of it. Finally, the third section solicited responses on issues pertaining to strategies and recommendations regarding the way forward for business tourism in Trinidad.

The paper will also shed light on the various strategies employed by Australia and discuss whether these could be applied to the business tourism niche in Trinidad as a means of embracing socio-cultural sustainability.

Results and Discussion

This section of the paper presents responses from the seven interviewed respondents under three core themes: Business Tourism; Socio-cultural sustainability of business tourism; and Future socio-cultural strategy and recommendations. More so, Australia's tourism strategies, as categorized by key strategic areas, will be refined and presented as recommendations for Trinidad's MICE market.

Business Tourism

Consistent with the literature reviewed, all respondents agreed that increased technological advancements in air travel, economic growth, infrastructure, increased education and development of professional associations facilitated the growth of this niche market. However, one respondent stated that business travellers return to the destination as leisure or eco travellers because of cultural aesthetics and satisfaction. It was also determined that the increased propensity of business travel grew as a result of increased education, growth in bilingual skills, understanding of cultures, good knowledge of doing business, ease of travel, availability of facilities, and accessibility of company resources have all contributed to the rise of business travel.

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[4] This exploratory research work had some limitations. For example, the sample size examined was small and one should be very careful when generalizing. Another limitation is that this study did not examine the economic and socio-cultural impact of business tourism. Cost and time were also constraints when this study was undertaken. Additionally, the results and findings were somewhat restricted given that the literature search found little empirical work on business tourism in Trinidad

It was reported that the business tourism niche was a significant market to tap into. The respondents claimed that some factors which make Trinidad a budding tourism destination are: geographic location; existing industries; infrastructure and flights; accommodation and facilities; environmental aesthetics; uniqueness; sound environmental practices; experience of hosting conferences; English speaking; existence of an environmental body (Environmental Management Authority) that upholds the preservation of the environment and economic pricing ($1 US = $ 6 TT).

Socio-Cultural Sustainability of Business Tourism

The respondents stated that the social and cultural fabric is of paramount importance to any form of business and development. It was reported that employment would be generated from both direct and indirect jobs with regard to the MICE niche, and when locals become employed in the industry- there is a huge positive social ripple impact.

The interviewees also claimed that the common man benefits significantly in the form of enhanced facilities and amenities that were developed for the business tourist market. Society can also benefit from the infrastructural development which can take the form of new roads, and through the extension of certain utilities. Arising out of such development, there is a tendency for people to relocate with their families and form new relationships which redound to the benefit of all. It was agreed that the country and citizens benefit tremendously from the business tourism ripple impact and the revenue generated has the potential to stimulate and spread economic development as well as improve the general standard of living of all citizens. One respondent revealed that, "…*business travellers stay at business hotels and pay business rates which are higher… these hotels where the business tourists stay pay taxes—and these taxes are used to improve infrastructure and other development which the citizens of the country benefit from.*" Additionally all stakeholders stated that business tourism is holistic and everyone stands to benefit directly or indirectly. All respondents claimed that business tourists tip heavily, buy local souvenirs, spend generously on entertainment and generally contribute more to socio-cultural activities.
Some negative responses were also revealed regarding MICE, it was stated that business tourism contributes to enclave development where certain benefits are limited to those areas as against other forms of tourism which have the propensity to spread benefits. It was also mooted that business tourism is highly concentrated in the accommodation sector, and in this respect the income generated is somewhat restricted to the owners who operate these accommodations.

Three respondents claimed that there can be behavioural and psychological attributes of workers who offer their services in this industry. It was reported, "*Some people who work in the industry see themselves as not providing a service but of being in servitude. As a consequence, there can be a negative psyche for individuals working in this industry*".

One respondent suggested that because of certain locations more economic undertakings are being pursued at the expense of culturally rich areas that have more potential to form linkages and offer better diversification avenues. The respondent articulated that "*The danger of going after the business tourist is that there can be hyper development in certain areas like Port of Spain and Westmoorings for example, and not a lot in other culturally rich areas which may need development and lack infrastructure…*".

There was also the concern that business tourism in general has the potential to attract unwanted visitors whose lifestyles and values contradict drastically that of the locals. It (business tourism) can also lead to a change in behaviour and family relationship, increase in diseases, cultural diffusion, frictions and violations.

Future Socio-Cultural Strategies, Challenges and Recommendations

Notwithstanding the existence of a Policy document (Trinidad and Tobago tourism policy) and a master plan (Vision 2020), all respondents were in favour that there should be social strategies for driving sustainable business tourism in Trinidad. In fact, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has to adopt a policy to foster the development of economic activity in the country in an efficient, socio-culturally safe and sustainable manner.

It was also suggested that there are skilled professionals who have the capacity and ability to inform this policy document. What is needed is more coordination among the key local stakeholders involved to move the socio-cultural aspects of business tourism forward.

The respondents shared the view that a strategy for a socio-cultural public awareness drive is necessary. They claimed that this could be done through education and proper communication so that even the average person knows that there are benefits to be derived from socio-cultural efforts when pursuing the diversification into business tourism. Communication has the tendency to shape behaviour and once people understand how they can benefit, they will buy-in and support such endeavours.

Respondents support the propensity of resource pooling as it affords cost effectiveness, diversification and promotes efficiency and effectiveness as it applies to the socio-cultural practices in business tourism. It was also mooted that benchmarking should be pursued vigorously to bring the tourism products in line with international standards, practices, policies, legislations and regulations.

Given the very nature of business tourism and its fragility, the strategic plan should also focus on sustainability and sustainable tourism development, address the challenges of traffic congestion, engage in strategic marketing and reform the legislation so that players can comply. Overall, the respondents agreed that business tourism in Trinidad was socio-culturally sustainable and share the view that if business tourism is to be a high quality sustainable industry, all players need to play their respective role to ensure the viability of the MICE industry.

Other strategies for informing business tourism that were articulated by the respondents include:
- Further development in business tourism should focus in poor and marginalized areas that have few export and diversification options
- Employment of women to address gender inequality problems
- Adapt the Global Code of Ethics for tourism
- Improve and increase the current linkages with other sectors
- Promote local management and partnership to maximize local employment, use local supplies and managerial training.

Refining Australia's Tourism Strategies employed in its Business Tourism Sector to accommodate Trinidad

Australia is a leader in terms of socio-cultural sustainability and therefore their strategies can be moulded into bespoke strategies and embraced by Trinidad to gain a competitive edge in promulgating sustainable socio-cultural tourism. The strategies which have been identified into **six strategic areas** which can be adopted and implemented in Trinidad with some modification. Table 1, depicts how the aforementioned strategies can be adopted. What would be required is proper marketing, communication, awareness building and in some cases regulations (both new and enforced) to get compliance and support to drive sustainable business tourism forward.

Table 1: Trinidad's Adoption of Australia's Strategies

Australia's Tourism Strategy	Trinidad's Probable Reaction Strategy
Grow demand from Asia Australia has a unique opportunity to drive demand from Asia because of its growing economies with good consumer confidence, burgeoning growth in the middle class (especially China, India and Indonesia), and Australia is a near "western developed", English speaking country with strong destination appeal. Industry and government need to deepen consumer understanding, strengthen distribution, develop tailored marketing campaigns and appropriate product, as well as relevant policy frameworks.	The Caribbean on a whole can consolidate its market position utilizing institutional relationships with other islands and regional bodies such as CSME, and the CTO (Caribbean Tourism Organization) to get more mileage via advertising and destination awareness. Just as Australia is promoting its various attractions through marketing and forming partnerships, Caricom can promote specialty products in the region, for example, Dominica as eco tourism, Barbados as leisure tourism, Guyana as soft adventure and Trinidad as business tourism. In Trinidad's context, more aggressive marketing can be employed to enable business tourism to reach a wider catchment area. The TTCB (Trinidad and Tobago Convention Bureau) was set up in 2009 with the specific intention to market and facilitate this business tourism market. More strategic marketing emphasis and focus should be concentrated around Trinidad's main source markets (the USA, UK and Canada).

Build competitive digital capability Developing strong and efficient digital marketing and transactional capabilities is essential to remaining competitive. Currently, only a third of Australia's tourism operators have online booking and payment facilities, limiting their ability to service customers both domestically and overseas. Government will continue to work with industry to ensure more tourism enterprises are able to take advantage of online opportunities.	Building upon strong information communication technology can be an advantage to not only build destination awareness but to attract investors by showcasing what resources Trinidad has to cater to the MICE niche. Using ICTs will promote a virtual experience and this will maximize consumer reach; provide a better, more engaging customer experience and provide a techno savvy platform which will be more eye catching and appealing than other countries in the region. Businesspersons are attracted to technology, internet, destinations which offer convenience in business and therefore Trinidad should position itself accordingly for this market.
Encourage investment and implement the regulatory reform agenda and Build industry resilience Government will work with industry to reduce the barriers to investment so that the industry can invest in the products and infrastructure that consumers are seeking. Building on Australia's competitive advantages, the government will work with industry to increase industry productivity, innovation and quality.	A stakeholder approach (multi-stakeholder collaboration as identified in the National Tourism Policy Document) can be used to get buy-in and support and have everyone pulling in the same direction. Funding for tourism projects can be greater when there exist the propensity of large stakeholder groups coming together. Future policies should be created by engaging industry stakeholders such as THRTA, MOT, TDC, NGOs, EMA, Independent consultants, TTCB, Bureau of Standard among others. Even though this process may be painstaking, the outcome would be a collaborative and holistic policy where everyone buys in to a common goal and takes the industry forward.
Increase supply of labor, skills and Indigenous participation Government will work with industry to support industry recruitment, retention, labour mobility, education and training to fill these gaps, and explore ways to increase the supply of skilled tourism labour and Indigenous participation.	Partnerships with international professional associations (for example, NABHOOD) should be encouraged so that members of local associations can gain international exposure and experience. Working with different tertiary bodies such as the universities and industry specific technical institutes to ensure a continued supply of quality labour with the necessary requisites. However, local labor should be given preference and support for development wherever necessary. When catering to the business market - gastronomic attractions can be tailored to meet the local market, that is, serve local food at business events, for example substituting cassava for potato in dishes. This gives local flair and flavor, which can have a ripple impact/positive spill off on the agricultural sector. Marketing of cultural dishes should be encouraged as part of business tourists' agenda, for example, mini bake and shark, doubles, corn soup etcetera can be served during the snack breaks or reception times at conferences. Foster an environment where local tourism cottage industries are encouraged to flourish by giving the locals the necessary supporting incentives. For example, have products such as locally produced jams, handicraft, snacks etcetera sold to business travelers in shops at the business hotels. Partnerships can be developed with the various governmental ministries/bodies/agencies to train, develop and fill any labour gaps.
Ensure tourism transport environment supports growth Governments will work in partnership with industry to ensure the supply of transport capacity and infrastructure continues to move ahead of demand and facilitates, rather than hinders, tourism traffic.	With regard to transportation to and from the main source markets of US, UK, and Canada; Trinidad does have ample supporting airlift networks. On a national level, however, traffic is a problem and one suggestion is to divert traffic by using certain streets as "one-way" streets. Allowing the use of the bus route to vehicular traffic during certain times of the day is another suggestion. Developing transportation network bypass and flyovers are other ways one can open new routes and alleviate the traffic problem. A traffic plan should be developed and implemented with input from key stakeholders to ensure its ultimate success.

In synopsis, this paper speaks to sustainable tourism development and proposes that socio-cultural sustainability be put on the front burner as this will result in the satisfaction levels of all stakeholders. Australia has developed a plan for their tourism industry which incorporates the elements of managing a successful MICE market. Therefore, any country that is seriously considering diversification into sustainable business tourism as the way forward, can apply the refined Australian strategies.

Conclusion

The time when corporations could act independently without stakeholders' opinion is long gone (Adams, 2001). In light of newly emerging regulatory pressure and heightened consumer awareness whereby the consumer in choosing a product can exercise a responsibility to discriminate socially and environmentally, it is clear that companies that do not take their environmental and social responsibility seriously will not survive. Trinidad & Tobago cannot afford to lag behind and must certainly take a more proactive stance given its economic base and the government's vision of developed nation status by 2020. The time has come when socio-cultural policies should not be ignored.

According to Parris (cited by Pattullo1996: 198), "*If we ignore our culture... one morning we will wake up and there will be no more visitors. Visitors will simply have ceased to find us interesting, since we would have become just like them and they will opt to get their suntans somewhere closer to home where the airfare and meals are cheaper.*" Thus, one of the strengths of the region is our culture, traditions and way of life, and this should be preserved if we are to be competitive and sustainable as a destination region.

Trinidad can gain immensely in the area of business tourism once the social and cultural practices are adhered to. All respondents agreed that the diversification into business tourism was economically sustainable and it offers one of the best linkages to other sectors. The respondents supported the view that business tourism can be socio-culturally sustainable in Trinidad. The challenges articulated are not insurmountable and with collaboration and key stakeholder engagement there exist a potential for emerging economies to gain developed status by benchmarking against countries such as Australia. However, instead of attempting to re-invent ourselves into something which we are not, we should be focusing our diversification efforts in the area which we already have some competitive advantages. We have much to offer the world!

This study brought forth an exploratory understanding of where this niche is positioned presently and showcases that business tourism can be socio-culturally sustainable and is a valuable market to tap into. It is sustainable as it satisfies the three pillars of sustainable tourism. However future studies are encouraged in this area because there exist, other spill-off externalities which will impact on the business tourism sector. Such studies include medical tourism, escort services, health issues, ethical conduct by companies and the environmental impact on business tourism.

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