



## Module 6. The role of tour operators and guides in the low-carbon process

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<b>MODULE 6. THE ROLE OF TOUR OPERATORS AND GUIDES IN THE LOW-CARBON PROCESS .....</b>	<b>130</b>
<b>6.1. Low-carbon tourism products and practices .....</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>6.2. The role of tour operators and guides in efficient energy use and reduced waste</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>6.3. The role of tour operators and guides in company image issues and consumer behaviour.....</b>	<b>139</b>
<b>6.4. Case studies .....</b>	<b>143</b>
Case study 1. Orioly: Booking and Management Solution for Tours & Activities .....	143
Case Study 2. Mama Thresl: Carbon neutral accommodation in Leogang, Austria .	143
Case study 3. ....	144
Camping La Serre: Eco-camping and glamping in Ariège, France .....	144
<b>6.5. Quiz.....</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>6.6. References.....</b>	<b>146</b>
<b>6.7. Figure .....</b>	<b>148</b>

## MODULE 6. THE ROLE OF TOUR OPERATORS AND GUIDES IN THE LOW-CARBON PROCESS

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Tourism and travel have a high environmental impact (Zotz, 2008, p.7). Tour operators and guides are involved in many of the stages responsible for delivering a tourism product: from planning and developing, to promoting and implementing the end-result, these actors are integral parts of a process that is known to generate **high carbon emissions, significant waste production and high resource consumption**.

In a world aching for more sustainable practices and for a greener future, responsible travel should be prioritized among possible solutions and conscious alternatives. To that end, this module aims at highlighting environmentally friendly aspects of tourism to VET establishments and hotel staff that can be **promoted and implemented by tour operators and guides**. With the scope to become ambassadors of low environmental footprint themselves, learners will get familiarised with **greener tourism products and practices**, as well as with greener company practices that can improve the **company image and consumer behaviour**.

## 6.1. Low-carbon tourism products and practices

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Tour operators and tour guides play a crucial role in promoting low-carbon tourism and reducing the negative environmental impact of tourism (Peeters et al., 2008). Their role is particularly important as tourism is one of the largest and fastest-growing industries in the world, and it can have significant negative impacts on the environment and local communities if not managed properly.

- *Tourism and its consequences can be detrimental for the environment and for tourism-dependent areas or other localities experiencing mass arrivals, especially after the lifting of COVID-19 related restrictions.*
- *Research and economic projections predict that global tourism will increase by 30% in 2023 (EIU, 2022). Tourism is, therefore, expected to have an increasingly negative impact on climate change and energy consumption.*

To tackle the environmental and socioeconomic challenges related to this phenomenon, tourism should take a turn towards greener and more sustainable products and practices. This undoubtable need has led to the definition of sustainable tourism as the tourism that strives to establish positive impact in all three areas affected: environmental, economic, and sociocultural (GSTC, 2022 & Fig.1). For the purposes of this module, we will insist on the **environmental aspect** and the ways in which **tour operators and guides can contribute to lowering carbon emissions** of tourism products and practices.

**Low-carbon tourism** refers to tourism practices that aim at reducing carbon emissions and utilizing tourism resources in a way to save or responsibly consume energy and minimize negative environmental impact (He & Wang, 2021, p.2). Such practices include -but are not limited to:

- *reducing carbon dioxide emissions in various activities,*
- *green/slow travel,*
- *new energy applications and new, sustainable materials usage,*
- *energy conservation,*
- *water saving technology, and so on (ibid.).*

In other words, responsible tourism is a holistic approach that seeks to promote:

- **low-carbon tourist attractions,**
- **low-carbon tourist facilities,**
- **low-carbon tourist consumption modes** (ibid., pp. 3-4).

### Examples of how tour operators and guides can promote low-carbon tourism

**Low-carbon tourism products:** Tour operators play a crucial role in creating and promoting low-carbon tourism products. They can offer eco-friendly tour packages that focus on sustainable travel practices, such as reducing carbon emissions by using public transportation, staying in energy-efficient accommodations, and engaging in activities that have a low environmental impact. Tour guides can also provide information on eco-friendly products, services and destinations.

**Changes in travel products:** Tour operators can also promote changes in travel products to reduce carbon emissions. For example, they can offer tours that require less transportation or fewer flights, or promote medium and short haul travel instead of long haul travel. This can reduce the carbon footprint of travel and help to mitigate climate change.

**Longer lengths of stay:** Longer lengths of stay in a destination can reduce the carbon footprint of tourism by reducing the number of trips taken and by giving tourists more time to engage in sustainable activities.

**Environmentally friendly travel modes:** Tour operators can promote sustainable travel practices, such as using environmentally friendly travel modes like trains, buses, bicycles or walking tours. They can also encourage tourists to use public transportation instead of renting cars, which can contribute to lower carbon emissions.

**Energy savings in accommodation facilities:** Tour operators can work with hotels, resorts and other accommodation providers to promote energy savings. They can encourage them to adopt sustainable practices, such as using renewable energy, reducing water and energy consumption, and minimizing waste.

**Protected areas in touristic offers:** Tour operators can collaborate with protected areas and conservation organizations to promote ecotourism and sustainable tourism practices. This can include offering tours to protected areas, promoting sustainable activities like hiking and wildlife watching, and supporting conservation efforts.

**Collaboration between protected area and tour operators:** Collaboration between tour operators and protected areas can also help to promote sustainable tourism practices. Tour operators can work with protected area managers to develop tourism products and services that are environmentally sustainable, culturally respectful, and economically viable.

**Shift to closer located destinations:** Tour operators can promote the shift to closer located destinations by offering tours to nearby locations. This can reduce the carbon footprint of travel and also support local economies.

**Green company image:** Tour operators can develop a green company image by adopting sustainable practices and promoting sustainable tourism. This can attract environmentally conscious customers and also create a positive impact on the environment and local communities.

**Education of customers for more environmentally friendly consumption behaviors:** Tour guides can play an important role in educating customers on environmentally friendly consumption behaviors. They can promote sustainable practices, such as reducing plastic waste, conserving energy and water, and respecting local cultures and traditions. This can help to raise awareness and promote a culture of sustainable tourism.

### Additional steps that tour operators and guides can take to promote Ecotourism

To support and promote low-carbon tourism, tour operators and guides should include the following focus points in their action plans:

- **Biological Diversity:** *To preserve biological diversity, all tourist actions must be directed towards preserving natural areas, habitats and wildlife, and minimizing damage to them (GIFT, 2022).*
- **Physical Integrity:** *Tourism operations should “maintain and enhance the quality of landscapes, both urban and rural, and avoid the physical and visual degradation of the environment” (ibid.).*
- **Environmental Purity:** *To minimize tourism’s environmental footprint, tourism stakeholders should invest in non-polluting solutions, as well as responsible waste-management by tourism enterprises and visitors (ibid.).*

For ecotourism to be successful and truly cautious, the collaboration between protected areas and tour operators is advised, so as to achieve the following:

1. **Reduce the number of visitors:** Tour operators can limit the number of visitors to ecologically sensitive areas to prevent overuse and minimize the impact on the local environment.
2. **Educate visitors:** Tour guides can educate visitors about the local ecosystem and the importance of preserving it. They can also inform them about sustainable practices such as reducing waste, conserving water, and minimizing their impact on the environment.
3. **Use eco-friendly transportation:** Tour operators can use eco-friendly transportation options such as electric vehicles, bicycles, or walking tours to minimize carbon emissions and reduce the impact on the environment.
4. **Support local conservation efforts:** Tour operators can support local conservation efforts by donating a portion of their profits to conservation organizations or by partnering with local conservation groups to implement sustainable tourism practices.
5. **Use sustainable accommodations:** Tour operators can choose accommodations that have eco-friendly practices such as using renewable energy sources, reducing waste, and conserving water.
6. **Respect local culture and traditions:** Tour guides can educate visitors about the local culture and traditions, and encourage them to respect them. This includes respecting local customs and not disturbing cultural or religious sites.

### Additional steps that tour operators and guides can take to promote Responsible travel

Low-carbon tourism cannot exist without an **energy-saving mindset**. This can be achieved by focusing on **Resource Efficiency**, i.e., the ways to “minimize the use of scarce and non-renewable resources in the development and operation of tourism facilities and services” (GIFT, 2022).

Research shows that the tourism sector needs to implement significant changes in travel behaviour in order to ensure a low environmental impact (Peters et al., 2008). Such changes may refer to the **travel product** itself (e.g., the destination), the

**transportation**, and the **tourist incentives** (e.g., regarding length of stay). For instance, tourism professionals can promote sustainable tourism by:

- *Promoting destination alternatives that require less flying and, therefore, a shift from long haul to medium and short haul travel.*
- *Incentivizing customers to make a shift to longer lengths of stay that can favour mass transportation in trains, buses, or even bicycles instead of private cars/taxis.*
- *Including closer-to-home destinations that limit carbon emissions in travelling.*

Moreover, tour operators and guides can contribute to the sustainability of the tourism industry through the following actions:

1. **Engage in local community development:** Tour operators can engage in community development by supporting local businesses and promoting sustainable livelihoods for the local community. This can include sourcing locally produced goods and services, hiring local staff, and supporting community development initiatives.
2. **Encourage responsible behavior:** Tour guides can encourage responsible behavior among their visitors by promoting sustainable practices such as reducing waste, conserving water, and minimizing their impact on the environment. They can also discourage activities that are harmful to the environment or cultural sites.
3. **Provide cultural education:** Tour guides can provide cultural education to their visitors by sharing local customs and traditions, and encouraging visitors to respect them. They can also educate visitors about the local history, art, music, and literature.
4. **Use sustainable food and beverage practices:** Tour operators and guides can promote sustainable food and beverage practices by sourcing locally produced, organic, and seasonal food. They can also encourage visitors to reduce their consumption of meat and other high-carbon foods.
5. **Advocate for responsible policies:** Tour operators and guides can advocate for responsible policies that promote sustainable tourism practices, such as supporting renewable energy, reducing waste, and protecting natural and cultural heritage sites.
6. **Embrace technology:** Tour operators and guides can use technology to promote responsible travel, such as offering virtual tours to reduce the carbon footprint of travel or using mobile apps to provide visitors with information about sustainable practices.

### Summary

*Low-carbon tourism requires changes in travel products and practices. Eco-friendly, ethical, and responsible attitudes and alternatives can limit tourism's negative impact on the environment and promote sustainable goals.*

### Questions for reflection

What travel product do you offer to your customers? Can you think of ways to make this product greener (e.g., by reducing distances and travelling necessity)?

How could you incentivize your customers to prolong their stay in one place instead of travelling more frequently?

Do you favour public transportation in your tours?



## 6.2. The role of tour operators and guides in efficient energy use and reduced waste

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In the domains of efficient energy use and responsible consumption, tour operators and guides can play a crucial role by:

### 1. Learning about benchmarking in their domain

The sustainability of tourism and any related activities can only be considered to have a long-term positive impact if they can be measured to generate result analysis and progress assessment. For that purpose, **benchmarking** must be implemented to compare "a business's performance in a given area (such as water consumption) with those of a similar business" to determine progress and competitive advantages (GIFT, 2022).



**Commonly used benchmarks in the tourism sector** (ibid.):

- **Electricity and energy consumption in kilowatt hours (kWh) per square meter of serviced space**
- **Fresh water consumption in liters or cubic meters (m3) per guest per night**
- **Waste production (kg per guest per night and/or liters per guest per night)**

Tour operators and guides should be familiar with benchmarks in their domain. In this way, they can advertise the positive impact of organised actions, increase competitiveness, and raise awareness on small steps that can make a big difference.



To measure your company's carbon footprint, you can use online measurement tools like the **Carbon Measurement Blueprint for Tour Operators** provided by *Intrepid* (<https://www.intrepidtravel.com/eu/download-our-carbon-measurement-blueprint-for-tour-operators>). Upon completing the measurement, you can adjust your sustainability goals and improve your actions.

## 2. Promoting low-carbon tourist attractions

By designing tourist experiences that involve lower to no carbon emissions, tour operators and guides can entice more visitors and customers to adopt an environmentally friendly mindset. Low-carbon attractions are the attractions that recognize the value of the natural environment and impose no damaging effects to the existing natural balance. These include natural points of interests such as forests, lakes, etc. They also include low-carbon tourist products developed with a care for the environment and the commitment not to disturb it.

## 3. Promoting low-carbon tourist facilities

Tourism facilities including accommodation, sanitation, supply facilities or other special service facilities can be a part of the solution when looking to minimise carbon emissions and energy consumption (Lacalle, 2021).

Tour operators and guides can promote sustainable practices and low-carbon facilities by actions like the following:

- *Highlighting the creation of an ecological parking at a spot of interest.*
- *Promote spots of interest that provide electric car chargers at their facilities.*
- *Promote facilities that provide bicycles or low-carbon vehicles.*
- *Promote facilities that use eco-friendly toilets and garbage cans.*
- *Promote spots of interest that invest in environmentally friendly facilities, new energy supply systems, and renewable energy sources (e.g., solar panels, water consumption regulatory systems, rainwater harvesting devices, etc.).*

## 4. Promoting low-carbon tourist consumption mode

Tourism professionals can **act as ambassadors** for the preservation of the environment. They can encourage their customer to adopt eco-friendly attitudes in a wide range of activities like transportation, energy consumption, etc. Tour guides can also contribute to low-carbon tourism by **educating and raising awareness** among tourists about the importance of sustainable travel practices. They can encourage tourists to take part in activities that have a low environmental impact, such as hiking, cycling or kayaking.

## An action plan to raise awareness:

1. **Promoting eco-friendly transportation:** Tour operators can promote eco-friendly transportation options such as walking, cycling, or public transport. They can also encourage visitors to offset their carbon footprint by participating in carbon offset programs or by donating to environmental organizations.
2. **Encouraging sustainable accommodation:** Tour operators can encourage visitors to stay in eco-friendly and sustainable accommodations that use renewable energy sources, minimize waste, and conserve water.
3. **Promoting sustainable food and beverage practices:** Tour operators and guides can promote sustainable food and beverage practices, such as sourcing locally produced, organic, and seasonal food. They can also encourage visitors to reduce their consumption of meat and other high-carbon foods.
4. **Using energy-efficient equipment:** Tour operators and guides can use energy-efficient equipment, such as energy-saving light bulbs and equipment with low carbon emissions, to reduce their carbon footprint.
5. **Providing eco-friendly activities:** Tour operators and guides can provide eco-friendly activities that promote sustainable tourism practices, such as nature walks, bird watching, and local cultural experiences.
6. **Encouraging responsible behavior:** Tour operators and guides can encourage responsible behavior among their visitors by promoting sustainable practices such as reducing waste, conserving water, and minimizing their impact on the environment. They can also discourage activities that are harmful to the environment or cultural sites.

### Summary

*Using energy efficiently, minimising carbon emissions, and reducing waste are all processes that require strategic planning and a pro-active attitude. First, you have to know your company's impact on the environment; second, you need to make changes in order to establish progress and truly lower the devastating effect of tourism on the climate crisis.*

### Questions for reflection

Do you have the infrastructure to support low-carbon facilities?

How do you encourage low-carbon tourist consumption?

Which benchmarks do you use?

## 6.3. The role of tour operators and guides in company image issues and consumer behaviour

Tour operators and guides can play an important role in shaping the image of their company and influencing consumer behaviour towards responsible and sustainable tourism practices, by taking the following steps:

### 1. Creating a tour operator business plan.

The role of tour operators and guides in low-carbon tourism can be enhanced if there is a tour operator **business plan** in place. Such a plan can limit the negative impact of tourism activities and tourist presence and, therefore, **improve a company's image** and enhancing its green reputation, while simultaneously **encouraging more responsible consumer behaviour** and **engaging more stakeholders** to make a bigger impact on the environment and society.

 To prepare for writing your business plan, you can use printable Business Model Canvas templates like the following: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Business\\_Model\\_Canvas#/media/File:Business\\_Model\\_Canvas.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Business_Model_Canvas#/media/File:Business_Model_Canvas.png)

For a tour operator business plan to be efficient, your organisation should fill in at least seven sections: **an executive summary, a company overview, a description of your services, an analysis of your market, an implementation plan, a team summary, and a financial plan** (Fors, 2021).

### 2. Promoting responsible and sustainable tourism.

Promoting responsible and sustainable tourism involves adopting practices that **minimize negative impacts** on the environment, culture, and society while **maximizing positive contributions** to the local community and economy (GIFT, 2022).

Tour operators and guides can promote responsible and sustainable tourism practices, such as:

- *reducing waste,*
- *conserving water,*
- *protecting natural and cultural heritage sites,*
- *supporting local businesses,*
- *promoting sustainable transportation.*

By promoting such practices, they can help to create a positive image for their company and encourage consumers to choose sustainable tourism options.

### 3. Educating consumers.

Tour operators and guides can educate consumers about **the environmental and social impacts of tourism**, and the importance of responsible and sustainable tourism practices. By providing **information** about sustainable tourism practices, they can encourage consumers to make informed decisions and adopt responsible tourism behavior.

#### Ways to provide information:

- brochures,
- guidebooks,
- during the tour itself.

In this context, tour operators and guides can also encourage **carbon offset programs**, which enable visitors to offset the carbon emissions associated with their travel by supporting projects that reduce carbon emissions.

### 4. Providing exceptional customer service.

Tour operators and guides can provide exceptional customer service by going above and beyond in meeting the needs and expectations of their clients. By doing so, they can create a **positive impression** of their company and influence **consumer behavior** through **word of mouth** recommendations.

Exceptional customer service can help tour operators and guides promote sustainable tourism by:

- **Building trust and loyalty:** *Exceptional customer service builds trust and loyalty with customers. By providing a memorable and positive experience, customers are more likely to return and recommend the tour operator or guide to others. This can have a positive impact on the company's reputation and attract more customers interested in sustainable tourism practices.*
- **Encouraging responsible behavior:** *By providing excellent customer service, tour operators and guides can encourage responsible behavior among their customers. For example, guides can explain the importance of responsible and sustainable tourism practices to their customers and encourage them to minimize their impact on the environment.*
- **Enhancing the customer experience:** *By going above and beyond in meeting the needs and expectations of their customers, tour operators and guides can enhance the customer experience. This can create a positive impression of the company and encourage customers to adopt responsible tourism practices in the future.*
- **Fostering a sense of community:** *Exceptional customer service can foster a sense of community among customers, particularly if the tour operator or guide encourages interactions among customers. This can create a sense of **shared responsibility** for protecting the environment and supporting local communities, which can translate into a more sustainable tourism experience.*
- **Encouraging feedback and improvement:** *Tour operators and guides can use feedback from customers to improve their **sustainability practices**. By actively seeking feedback and responding to customer concerns, tour operators and*

guides can continually improve their sustainability practices and provide an even better customer experience.

## 5. Using social media and online platforms.

Tour operators and guides can use social media and online platforms to promote their company's image and encourage sustainable tourism practices. By sharing stories and images of sustainable tourism practices, they can create a positive impression of their company and **inspire consumers** to choose sustainable tourism options. Through social media and online platforms, they can also share information and raise awareness of lesser-known issues, as well as seek feedback to improve themselves in the future.

## 6. Partnering with businesses that share your vision.

Having partners increases the efficiency of an action plan and creates strong networks that can work together towards precise goals, like emissions reduction. Sustainable practices can be promoted more effectively when there is consistency in the experiences provided to the customer (Fonseca, 2022).

For instance, a network of environmentally conscious businesses can more easily support the preservation of the environment and the local development (Škorić, 2022). Partnerships can include accommodation facilities and service providers, local destination marketing organisations, local restaurants/bars/wineries, local museums and art galleries, and so on.

Tour operators and guides can partner with **sustainable tourism organizations** to promote responsible and sustainable tourism practices. By doing so, they can align themselves with credible organizations and create a positive image for their company.

## 7. Discouraging negative impact behaviours, encourage green attitudes.

Tour operators and guides can play a significant role in encouraging customers to be mindful of the environment and to appreciate sustainable practices (Leiman, 2021). A few easy steps to succeed this are the following:

- Using **eco-friendly transportation** in tours, encouraging low-emission travel.
- Encouraging **physical** activity (walking, hiking, cycling, etc.) and, therefore, carbon-free travel experiences.
- **Discouraging littering and reducing waste** during tours (e.g., by providing reusable water recipients or encouraging this practice).
- Promoting proper **discarding practices and recycling**.
- Encouraging **wildlife and local culture respect** and discouraging any disruption with harmful effects.
- Following **rules and regulations** regarding wildlife and ecosystem balance in any location they send their customers.
- Choosing **local products, local workers, and local suppliers** to enhance local economy while simultaneously reducing carbon emissions thanks to shorter travel distances.
- Offering **tips** on respectful and ethical practices.

- **Publicizing** all the above to raise awareness on sustainability solutions for the wider public (e.g., on your social media pages, or on your website's blog).
- **Giving back.**

Tour operators and guides can **create itineraries with a positive impact** (Tuppen, 2021).

This involves such actions as designing low emissions travelling experiences, preserving the natural environment, and enhancing the local communities, as well as declaring, measuring and reporting on carbon emissions to keep one's goals in check.

However, tourism companies can also have a positive impact by **investing in eco-friendly projects** around the globe. To that end, companies can also make donations in support of noble causes meant to save the planet. Publicizing such actions can also positively influence customers and other stakeholders.

**Strategic partnerships** can also ensure stronger alliances in combatting the climate crisis, by ensuring ethical and responsible practices in wider contexts and spreading awareness.

#### *Summary*

A company's image reveals its identity, goals, and business ethics. Environmentally conscious companies must include and promote eco-friendly and responsible practices, encouraging more responsible consumer behaviour and engage more stakeholders accordingly.

#### *Questions for reflection*

*How does your company promote sustainability issues?*

*How often do you get new customers based on the travel product that you offer?*

*Why is it so important to involve local actors in tourism activities?*

## 6.4. Case studies

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### Case study 1. Orioly: Booking and Management Solution for Tours & Activities

**Website:** <https://www.orioly.com>

Orioly is an online booking and management solution destined for tour operators looking to promote destinations via responsible tours and activities that preserve local ecosystems. Members joining Orioly can become a part of local associations and a network of environmentally conscious businesses; they can create partnerships based on a consensus around sustainable practices and the need for respective awareness.

Via the Orioly platform, tour operators can support various projects that “*preserve the environment and promote local development*” [3] ; they can also give their guests the opportunity to make donations at the cause of their choice during the booking process.

### Case Study 2. Mama Thresl: Carbon neutral accommodation in Leogang, Austria

**Website:** <https://www.mama-thresl.com/en/>

Mama Thresl is a carbon neutral accommodation in the Alps that has largely invested in sustainability and ethical tourism:

- *The rooms are made of natural, local materials by local artisans.*
- *The energy that is consumed comes from a biomass heating plant and energy recovery processes.*
- *Triple-glazed windows provide thermal insulation.*
- *The kitchen serves organic local products.*
- *The organic waste from the kitchen ends up in a methane gas plant.*
- *Via an interface between the booking software HotelNetSolutions and ClimatePartner, Mama Thresl lets guests see the carbon emissions calculated for their overnight stay. If guests choose a carbon neutral stay, they are charged less and they support a hydropower project in Renun, Indonesia.*



## Case study 3. Camping La Serre: Eco-camping and glamping in Ariège, France

**Website:** <https://www.camping-la-serre.com>

Camping La Serre is a campsite that has established innovative sustainable measures and embraces a holistically respectful approach for the environment and the local communities. With high respect in the area's biodiversity, the site offers sustainable accommodation in luxury lodge tents, chalets, mobile homes, and wooden cabins. The campsite has implemented the following actions:

- *Solar panels to produce electricity.*
- *Sorting and recovering green waste processes to minimise waste.*
- *Wild-life preservation programs.*
- *Eco-friendly tourism promotion via hiking and mountain bike trails, canyoning, rafting, and canoeing.*
- *Heritage appreciation and slow tourism promotion via cultural, archaeological, and other enticing points of interest.*

## 6.5. Quiz


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1. **What does responsible tourism entail?**
  - a. Low-carbon tourist attractions
  - b. Low-carbon tourist facilities
  - c. Low-carbon tourist consumption modes
  - d. All the above
2. **What can a web-based carbon calculator offer?**
  - a. The measurement of company results and progress in the field of carbon emissions
  - b. A projection of expenses in energy consumption
  - c. Increased competitiveness
  - d. Wider public exposure
3. **Which of the following is a low-carbon attraction?**
  - a. A city that is already over-populated
  - b. The Colosseum during full season
  - c. An amusement-park
  - d. A lake
4. **How can you advocate for lower-emissions-tourism?**
  - a. By promoting flying as the quicker way to travel
  - b. By proposing shorter stays in travel destination and more frequent travelling
  - c. By encouraging public transportation, walking, and cycling during your tours
  - d. By avoiding partnerships with local suppliers
5. **Why is a tour operator business plan important?**
  - a. It contains final ideas for your project
  - b. It encourages you to think critically about your vision and your customers
  - c. It prevents you from getting second opinions
  - d. It is a benchmark
6. **How can you preserve biodiversity during your tours?**
  - a. By encouraging travellers to gather wildflowers
  - b. By using electric cars in protected areas to make less noise
  - c. By clearly discouraging the disruption of wildlife (both flora and fauna)
  - d. By placing garbage cans in forests

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## 6.7. Figure

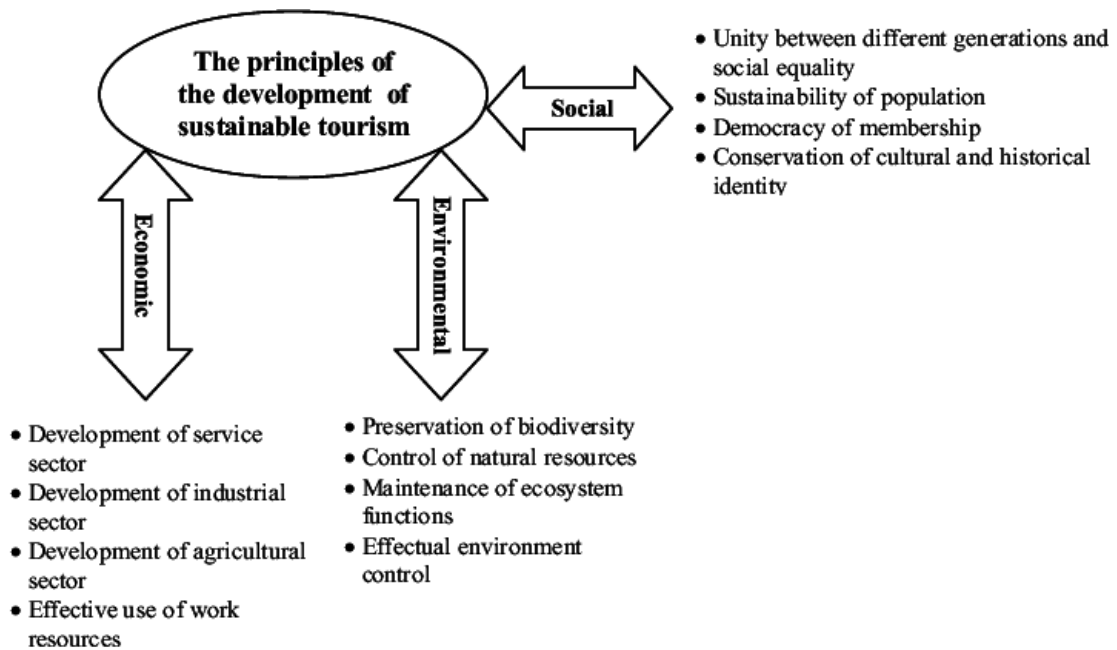


Figure 1: Principles of sustainable tourism development

Source: ResearchGate

[https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Principles-of-sustainable-tourism-development\\_fig1\\_228717168](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Principles-of-sustainable-tourism-development_fig1_228717168)



## PARTNERSHIP



## PROJECT



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