

Sustainability in the Dutch tourism and recreation sector: actions, approaches and prospects for sustained improvements

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Abstract

This paper proposes an evaluation framework for the sustainability depth of initiatives in the tourism sector. The proposed criteria are used to analyze two initiatives taken in the Netherlands to improve the sustainability of tourism and recreation activities. They include projects implemented under public-private partnerships, and initiatives adopted voluntarily by tourism companies. The empirical aim is to investigate to what extent these soft instruments may incorporate meaningful stimuli for behavioral change, and the greening of the resource-base supporting tourism activities. Can soft, bottom-up instruments tackle country-wide defined priority action areas for sustainable tourism, and to what extent do they have spin-off potential for continued improvements. The paper concludes with considerations on what roles the national government should and could further play and how could local/regional governments facilitate private sector action for sustainable domestic tourism development.

1. Challenges for sustainable tourism in the Netherlands

The domestic tourism and recreation sector is highly important for the Dutch economy. Employment amounts to 5 % nationally, while 4.5 % of total national income comes from tourism and recreation (Recron, 28 June 2005). In 2003, incoming tourists spent 8.1 billion € while Dutch tourists spent 23.5 billion on domestic tourism and recreation. Spending holidays in the Netherlands is still popular among the Dutch (CBS, 2004[a]). In 2000-2004, 21-23 % of Dutch people spent holidays in the country, while other 27-32% had combined holidays spending time both abroad and in the Netherlands. Incoming tourism is also significant. In 2004, 38 % of the booked Dutch accommodation was occupied by foreigners (CBS, 2004[b]). 90 % of Dutch population participates in either domestic tourism or day recreation activities.

In spite of the economic and social significance of tourism and the associated substantial environmental pressures, there has never been an institutionalized concern for an integrated tourism and recreation policy. There are a series of institutional aspects posing challenges for an integrative approach to sustainable tourism in the Netherlands.

The most important obstacle is the high vertical and horizontal fragmentation in the Dutch tourism governance system. Three government levels have competences on tourism policies: national, regional, and local. At the national government level competences are split: Ministry of Economic Affairs is concerned with the policy for incoming tourists; Ministry of Agriculture is interested in recreation affecting nature and green areas; Ministry of Environment is concerned with environmental quality, Ministry of External Affairs is concerned with the health and security of Dutch outgoing tourists and with the local impacts of Dutch tourists in developing countries; Ministry of Transport has competences on mobility.

Regional and local governments are also stakeholders in tourism policy by means of their competences regarding taxes on tourism services and facilities, spatial development and the decentralized aspects of environmental policy. These are typically exercised by means of detailed plans for land allocation and restrictions on land use, and company permits. But they may also play an important role in the promotion of certain (innovative) tourism products such as rural or agri-tourism and tourism in nature areas. However, as long as general frameworks are not formulated at national level, regional and local authorities have difficulties in deciding

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on their own, what can be considered a desirable tourism development and where they should trace borders to growth and types of tourism. This creates conditions for negative developments. An example is the exponential expansion of the airport in Eindhoven with increasing number of short-haul flights (Dobbinga, 2003). Next to the un-sustainability of outgoing tourism, it also has negative environmental and social impacts for the region, and lowers the attractiveness of the surrounding region for recreation.

Another disputed aspect in the sector regards the levels of local taxes for tourism services and facilities. They are set by local municipalities and vary widely, affecting the competitive position of companies in different regions. But because of their generally high level they also affect the competitiveness of Dutch tourism sector internationally. On some destinations all locally required taxes together count for as much as 20 % of the price for accommodation. Sustainable tourism does require that tourism contributes to local economy and social welfare. But many argue that the limits of financial flows to local budgets should be harmonized nationally and decided through negotiations with tourism companies and other interested stakeholders.

Another area of tension regards access to land for investments. Netherlands is a small country and competition for land use of very high. Most companies have expansion plans for their facilities that cannot be implemented because local/regional authorities do not approve them. Some companies want to expand to improve the economics of their facilities. But often companies argue they need more space to increase the quality of visit experience making more space available for nature and environmentally-educationally activities, which is typically considered an important economic aspect of sustainable tourism. Everybody agrees that land is scarce, but given the lack of a general framework of spatial planning specifically addressing tourism development issues, local/regional decisions on a case by case basis appear arbitrary and poison the relationships among stakeholders.

As a consequence of the uncoordinated multi-level, multi-scale governance of the sector, numerous and complex regulations are applicable to tourism and recreation service companies. They are often contradictory in requirements and expectations for the target group. The high number of regulations is also a problem for companies who frequently called for a simplification of the bureaucratic system.

Further, there is yet no common problem perception and vision among the key categories of stakeholders on what sustainable tourism may mean. The tourism sector has repeatedly called on the Dutch government to either appoint a minister (or state secretary) for tourism or to make sure that a coherent inter-departmental policy for sustainable development of tourism is formulated. So far calls have not been responded. Policies relevant to domestic tourism have continued coming in two streams: recreation in green/open-air areas from the Ministry of Agriculture and (incoming) tourism policy from the Ministry of Economic Affairs.

In the context of governmental disregard of a need for integrated approach to face the sustainable development challenges in the tourism sector, industry-led initiatives and partnerships with public authorities that are interested in various narrow aspects of tourism are by all means welcome. But the question is: how far reaching are actually such actions? Are they able to bring about significant changes in current tourism patterns and impacts and sustain environmentally-friendly and locally-beneficial tourism? These are the questions addressed in this paper. Section 2 proposes an analytical framework for the evaluation of 'sustainability depth' of initiatives in the tourism sector. It consists of three criteria that are used to assess in Section 3 two initiatives taken for domestic tourism in the Netherlands, one taken under public-private partnership, and one voluntary initiative. Section 4 draws some conclusions on the approaches and impacts of these initiatives, and the action-areas where governmental coordination and involvement is crucial for a genuine and coherent sustainable development in the Dutch tourism and recreation sector.

2. An analytical framework for the evaluation of sustainability depth of initiatives in tourism

In this section I propose an analytical framework based on which initiatives for sustainable tourism may be evaluated from the stand point of their 'sustainability depth'. I propose the use of three criteria to assess how far reaching the successful implementation of such project may be: one inspired from public policy literature, one developed based on sustainable tourism principles, and one looking at some project characteristics. The full conceptualization of 'shallow sustainability' and 'deep sustainability' will be explained after the presentation of the three criteria.

Bressers (2004) developed a theory for the analysis of public policy implementation processes and results – Contextual Interaction Theory. This is an actor-centered theory that argues that implementation results can be explained by looking at three key characteristics of the actors involved: their motivation, information availability and resources needed for implementation. Bressers' parsimonious theory is an interesting departure point for theorizing on the 'sustainability depth' of initiatives for sustainable tourism. Moving tourism activities on the sustainability track requires the motivation of stakeholders, the availability of information on what the problems and solutions are, and resources to bring about change. Contextual factors and actors operating in the business and political environment of stakeholders may influence these 'actor characteristics' both positively and negatively. This is why it is important that *instrument design (voluntarily or governmentally driven) stimulates stakeholders on these aspects*, 'empowering' them to take action by increasing their positive motivation, filling in eventual informational gaps and eventually also helping them mobilize the resources needed for successful implementation of measures. But the aspect of 'resources' has actually two crucial dimensions in the transition to sustainable tourism:

- resources seen as enabling change - if we look in terms of actor characteristics, (hence resources as cause of change); but also
- resources as the object/effect of change in terms of the infrastructure (tangible or not) in which tourism activities take place – accommodation facilities, landscapes and nature areas with all their elements such as biodiversity, land, water and air quality, transportation infrastructure and vehicles, quietness, etc.

Not all measures are able to lead directly to changes that contribute to shifting the paradigm of development, to initiate and sustain transitions towards sustainable development in the tourism sector. Some necessary changes require extensive and complex reshuffling of tourism resources that need to be organized, coordinated and their use closely monitored. When an instrument only collects information, such as the sources and extent of environmental pressure at destination, and does not envisage any follow-up action/measure, its sustainability impact may be rather shallow (considering only this criterion). The instrument would be just an early step in a series of measures/projects that may eventually lead to actions that could help towards positive changes in the resource base supporting tourism activities. Similarly, when an instrument aims at information diffusion and raising motivation of stakeholders to take action, it may achieve a change in the mindset of (some) stakeholders. But when the required measures are not cost-saving and stakeholders do not dispose of extra resources (financial, others' cooperation) to implement them - again - this can rather be viewed as a shallow sustainability initiative, as it does not manage to lead - on its own - to a change in the resource base of tourism that puts pressure on the environment or local communities. But many initiatives with limited reach, may lead to deep sustainability effects when they are coherently bundled in an integrated policy program. Hence, it is important to look both at project level and at program level, when the latter exists.

Considering the three variables that Bressers views as crucial for implementation it is interesting to look at the extent to which they are involved in instrument design and impacts/requirements. Are initiatives:

- mainly focused at motivating other actors change their behavior to enable more sustainable business/practices, and/or
- generating new information, e.g. in support for future actions/decisions, or to use it motivating other actors to action (such as to enable consumer choice of green holidays), and/or
- directly changing/enriching the resource base that supports tourism activities so as environmental impacts are minimized and local benefits are maximized.

Therefore, looking at the impact of projects, they could be mapped along one of the lines of the triangle below, or in one of the corners. In order to look at how 'deep' the sustainability impact of projects (policies/measures) is I propose to consider as *the first analytical criterion the impacts in terms of stakeholder motivation, information and resource-base changes induced towards sustainability*, mapped as in Figure 1.

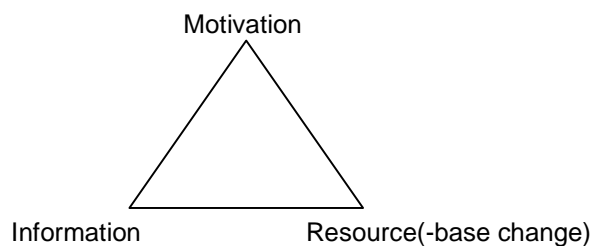


Figure 1. Possible impacts of initiatives for more sustainable tourism.

A second criterion I propose for the evaluation of initiatives is that of *the types and urgency of sustainability aspects addressed*. Initiatives may address one or more aspects of sustainable tourism: environmental, tourist satisfaction (economic), and social-local aspects. For the detailed analysis of this I propose to use the principles of the 1995 International Charter for Sustainable Tourism². The careful investigation of its principles led me to the selection of the following aspects for analysis.

Under 'social-local aspects' heading:

- a) participation of local communities and local stakeholders in tourism policy (Principles 3; 4; 6; 9)
- b) integration of tourism in all relevant local policies and planning (e.g. Local Agenda 21; Principles 3; 7; 9)
- c) local social and economic benefits from tourism: maximizing positive opportunities, minimizing negative effects (Principles 7; 8)

Under 'tourist satisfaction':

- d) service quality: treatment as a customer, comfort of accommodation and (quality) entertainment (low levels of noise, crowdedness – Principle 6; 8)
- e) generating new environmentally-friendly tourism products or demand for them (Principle 12)

Under the 'environment' heading:

- f) tourist awareness of importance of sustainability in tourism and how to contribute to this: e.g. codes of behavior, information on sustainable holiday opportunities - (Principle 17)
- g) nature and landscape management and conservation (Principles 1; 2; 11; 14)
- h) biodiversity conservation (Principles 1; 2; 11; 14)
- i) qualitative and quantitative management of environmental resources – water, energy,

² The Charter was adopted at the World Conference on Sustainable Tourism, in Lanzarote, Canary Islands, Spain, on 27-28 April 1995 and can be found at: <http://www.gdrc.org/uem/eco-tour/charter.html>.

- wastes' processing (Principles 1;2;16;11;14)
- j) combating environmental impacts from transportation (Principles 1;2;16;11)
- k) codes of conduct industry players (Principle 17)
- l) innovations for sustainable tourism and knowledge diffusion (Principle 5;12;33;14).

When evaluating initiatives from the perspective of sustainability aspects included it is important to *consider whether the aspects addressed are indeed priority challenges for sustainable tourism* at that destination and/or if they address aspects that are considered problems country-wise (for country level initiatives). This helps also to differentiate between genuine action and 'green-washing' or 'picking up the low fruits'. Evaluation from this perspective needs therefore to be based on knowledge of the most serious threats for tourism sustainability. This may be available from research studies already performed or consumers' organizations, or various stakeholders, NGOs, the local community, etc.

The two criteria proposed so far are actually related in evaluation, as measures are normally designed to bring improvements in one of more sustainability aspects. For example tourists may be informed through folders on how they can behave to avoid negative impacts on biodiversity in the nature area where they spend their holiday. Hence the initiative addresses the sustainability aspect [f] directly and [h] indirectly. Only when they pick-up the folder, read it and decide to incorporate advice in their behavior, do positive changes occur in the resource-base of tourism. When such an initiative is taken in a tourism destination where biodiversity conservation is a substantial challenge, with species seriously threatened, this could be seen as a 'shallow sustainability initiative' because the needed changes are uncertain and occur only indirectly. But when an initiative also envisages action directly, such as by reorganizing groups in small sizes, re-routing paths and limiting time schedule for access to the nature area, this can be seen as a deep sustainability initiative, as it brings about resource-base changes directly, in an aspect of high priority.

Initiatives' assessment based on this criterion needs to be further also integrated with a third one, pertaining to *project characteristics: scale of projects - local, regional, national; and replication potential for local/regional projects countrywide - high/low*. This is especially important when the level of analysis of the evaluation of sustainability depth of initiatives is national. Any improvement in local tourism practices with negative environmental or social impacts is welcome. A high number of local/regional initiatives enabling sustainable tourism at destination and transport sustainability contribute to sustainable development in a country's domestic tourism sector. However, while a project may be very important locally, it will have a low replicability potential when it only addresses 'niche problems', occurring only at that destination/facility (or very few others), rather than aspects of the sustainability challenge widely confronting stakeholders at country/regional level. When a project addresses a problem faced more widely in the sector, and its problem-solving approach can be used as a blueprint for improvements at other locations and success diffusion, its high replicability potential confers it features of a deep sustainability initiative. Hence, how much of a problem are the aspects addressed by an initiative for the challenge of sustainable development in the domestic tourism sector as a whole is also an element that needs to be discussed when looking at the sustainability depth of that endeavor.

Consequently, I consider that initiatives that:

- have only motivational and/or informational impacts by means of which they address sustainability aspects that are urgent or pose serious problems at the destination or at country level; or, more generally,
- bring about only uncertain and/or indirect improvements in highly threatened sustainability aspects through their motivational, informational, and resource-base consequences, and/or
- produce improvements only in one or two dimensions of sustainability that are rather 'niche problems' than sector-wide challenges for sustainable development, and/or

- produce (mainly) local improvements with low replicability potential, may be coined as *'shallow sustainability'*.

Initiatives that bring about direct and meaningful changes in the resource base supporting tourism activities, and/or have the potential to spread adoption or changes at national level or throughout the entire stakeholder category, and/or address one or more sustainability aspects that are widely confronted in the sector and considered (potentially) serious threats for sustainable tourism at the destination or in the country, may be labeled as *'deep sustainability'* initiatives.

This does not mean that *'shallow sustainability' initiatives are a sort of greenwashing with no meaningful contribution to sustainable tourism. It also does not mean that 'deep sustainability' initiatives have achieved sustainable tourism of high standards, because sustainable tourism is a very complex goal with action needed in many areas, by many actors. Besides, it is not a 'steady state' per se: once achieved it may be any time reversed and become unsustainable again due to contextual factors or counterproductive decisions. The differentiation I propose only means that the former are much less likely to contribute to a shift in the development paradigm in the domestic tourism sector (as projects on their own), while the latter seem more likely to contribute – maybe slowly but surely – to a transition to sustainability at country level.*

The question is: *are voluntary initiatives able to initiate 'deep sustainability' projects in the tourism and recreation sector, or are they just 'picking the low fruits' as much empirical literature on environmental voluntary instruments testifies. The next section addresses this question by looking at two initiatives adopted so far for sustainable domestic tourism in the Netherlands³.*

3. Voluntary initiatives for sustainable tourism in The Netherlands

3.1 The Policy Agenda Environment Tourism and Recreation

In the 1993 Nature and Environment Plan a section was dedicated to the environmental consequences of tourism activities. For the implementation of the objectives set out in the plan, a national platform was set up - the Coordination Group for Environment Tourism and Recreation (CMTR in Dutch abbreviation). The platform was initiated by the Dutch Ministry for Environment VROM and Dutch Tourist Association ANWB, having as main aims the design of follow-up implementation plans and information exchange. A diversity of stakeholders participate: the five ministries mentioned in the introduction, the Inter-provincial Dialog Group, and 12 organizations from the recreation and tourism sector. The largest association representing companies in tourism and recreation sector is RECRON, including around 1200 businesses – campsites, holiday villages, groups-accommodation facilities and mixed businesses (including attraction parks). The CMTR public-private partnership elaborated the Policy Agenda Environment, Tourism and Recreation. This has been implemented since 1996 by means of 28 projects, organized in 13 selected strategies⁴.

In order to assess the types and extent of pressures exerted by recreation and tourism on the environment and nature, a research project was commissioned. Its results presented in 1996 to the Parliament were that the main pressures come from *transport⁵, recreational*

³ Several other initiatives exist but they are of smaller scale, some only in paper-form as yet, and the size limitations of the paper does not allow a full overview of voluntary initiatives.

⁴ For a complete list and project descriptions see <http://www.kicrecreatie.agro.nl/mtr/nederlands/index.html> (in Dutch only). The elaboration of projects was also linked with the objectives set in two national documents later adopted: the National Environmental Policy Plan of 1998 (NMP3) and the 1997 Policy on Environment and Economy

⁵ In terms of transportation used by the Dutch for domestic holidays: 90% go by car; 5% take the train; 2 % use the bike; 1% the boat 1% join touring buses and 2 % use other means (CBS, 2004[a]).

navigation and beach tourism, and that overall recreation and tourism contribute 2% - 5% to the overall environmental and nature pollution (Imming, 1995). More recently challenges for sustainable tourism have been signaled in the field of nature-based holidays due consequences tourism has such as loss/fragmentation of habitat, disturbance of bird breeding and wildlife, land erosion, and vegetation change. Since the requirement to implement Ecological-Main-Structures based on the EU Habitat Directive the use of *nature for tourism and for conservation* has entered a tensioned phase. Next to these, there is the concern for *environmental pressures* by facilities – water and energy consumption, and wastes generation. These are hence environmental aspects that initiatives in the Netherlands would need to address with priority for more environmentally sustainable tourism. Table 1 presents the strategies and projects started by CMTR and their aims. Some of these projects were initiated and implemented by private actors while others were designed and carried out as public-private partnership (PPP).

Project	Aim
Strategy: Sustainable development of rural tourism	
1. The sustainable farmer	Promoting agri-tourism as new product and extra income opportunity locally. Country level.
Strategy: Recreation close to home	
2. Brochure "Recreation and Green Spaces: examples close to home". Started 1998.	Diffuse information and encourage municipalities create recreational spaces close to cities/villages to reduce environmental/nature pressure and car use. Country level.
3. Development of Heempark in village Heeg, 1999-2002.	Recreation and education on nature and environment for villagers; reduction of car use. Local level
Strategy: Quality impulse for Coast and Environment	
Strategy: Tourism-Recreational Transport	
4. Development of nature-transfer Borger area. Started 2000.	Increase public transport use by the intensively visited forested area Gieten/ Borger (1million visits/year). Instruments used: information supply, development new transport options, routing and visitor streams' management. This is a first project in a series located in province Noord Holland. Regional level.
5. A Day out: tomorrow also nice?	Research on the obstacles and solutions for accessibility and environmental quality in recreational sites. Relevance – country level.
6. Transformation of tourism-recreational transport	Increase public transport use and sustainable transport in National Park Veluwezoom; informing tourists on the new opportunities. Regional level.
Strategy: Wastes and dumping (Association Netherlands Clean) – no project	
Strategy: Implementation of company environmental management system	
7. Environmental management systems (EMS) for stay-over and day-recreation facilities. 1999-2002.	Sector-wide actions to introduce EMS in 240 campings, bungalow parks and similar accommodation. Phase information diffusion 1999-2002 followed up by stimulation implementation at company level. Collective quantified targets for reduction drink-water use by 30 %; 25 % reduction electricity; gas use reduction 10 %; more cost-effective waste collection systems; separate waste collection: glass (min. 70%), paper min 85%), organic wastes (min. 50%). Company results reflected in three levels 'environmental barometer' annually checked (see Section 3.2)
8. Environmental handbook hotels	Providing information to members of Association of Hotel and Catering on environmentally-friendly practices. Country level.
9. Development "Ecomat"	Providing information for environmental management for companies in recreation sector, on CDROM
10. Keep the environment clean	Providing information on environmental management for navigation and harbors. Relevance – country level.
11. Environmental management systems for sport associations	Quickscans at 40 sport accommodations to identify saving options; pilot project to serve for diffusion EMS at country level.
Strategy: Noise hindrance	
12. Noise Barometer	Measure noise levels generated by motor-vehicles and locate devices displaying noise levels at places where motor traffic is high for awareness raising among drivers and motivate them for 'quite driving'. Information on 'quiet driving' made available. Country level.

Project	Aim
13. Noise pollution in quiet areas: simulation program	Gain information on noise sources and contribution to noise pollution. Relevance – country level.
14. Noise prevention in green areas	Study in the noise level around recreation areas in Drenthe. Local level.
Strategy: Quality surface water for swimming – no project	
Strategy: Environmental Measures Recreational Navigation	
15. Infrastructure for waste water collection in recreational navigation	Relevance country level.
16. Demonstration project borstelbannen in Friesland, Noord-Holland en Zeeland. Project ended	Reduction of nutrient pollution of waters by changing type of ship paint used. Regional project.
Strategy: Outgoing tourism (5 projects, not discussed in this paper)	
Strategy: Consumer as Target Group	
17. Environmental information for tourists	Development of land-level system for environment-relevant travel information. Aimed at information diffusion to stimulate environmentally friendly behavior tourists and motivating consumers to generate a demand-driven development of a green tourism market. Monitoring consumer behavior. Research on possibilities for regional-integrated environmental management. Country level.
18. Questionnaires camping companies	Survey on 2100 camping companies on the accessibility of environmental information and its diffusion among tourists. The impact is increased interest and care of tourists for the environment. Country level.
Strategy: Financial Support and Stimulation	
19. Investigation on fund raising for Environment and Tourism	administrative nature – collecting information
20. Financial database Environment and Tourism	administrative nature – collecting information
21. Expansion existing programs on Environment and Tourism	Impact on environmental sustainability dimension – collecting information
Strategy: Communication as Stimulation Instrument	
22. Sector communication as stimulus for environmental innovation	Development of a green network of national, regional and local actors in need of environmental information for innovation in tourism and recreation sector. Participation will not only inform but also increase stakeholder motivation for green innovations and adoption. Country level.
23. Hospitality for People & Nature	Brochure for tourism companies with information diffusion on cases of success. Effect of informing and increasing their motivation to adopt environmentally-friendly practices. Country level.

Looking from the first analytical perspective at the aims of the projects listed in Table 1 the following picture emerges:

- 6 projects can be placed on the line *information-motivation* in Figure 2 as they aim at generating new information that helps some other actors to increase their motivation to take further actions for more sustainable tourism: projects 2, 12, 17, 18, 22, 23;
- 9 projects assume only generation of *information*: projects 5, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 19, 20, 21; some aim to generate new knowledge to support the design of new measures, others to help some actors become aware of measures and implement them;
- 3 projects have both the effects of generating *information* (environmental education and awareness, and information on sustainable transport options and benefits) *and new tourism resources* that ease the burden on nature and environment (by creating a new recreational area or more sustainable transport infrastructure around existing area): projects 3, 4, 6;
- 2 projects have a mainly resource impact: projects 15, 16 with change effects on infrastructure and ship-paint for cleaner waters;
- 3 projects cover all three impact areas of *motivation* and *new information* and *resource* change/generation: projects 1, 7, 11.

It can be therefore noticed that most projects address the motivation and information dimensions. Basically 21 projects have an information component and 9 of them have also a

motivation component.

Of the 15 projects that have an information-motivation orientation or information-only component, for 6 *projects* the consequences of new information collection and diffusion are basically indirect and uncertain (projects 5, 12, 13, 14, 19, 20). They can be seen as rather steps in a process for change than able to directly produce important behavioral changes or resource-based changes. They are focused on information collection/management and research on what the problems are and what should be done about it. Although 5 are of national relevance, these projects can be viewed as rather ‘shallow sustainability’ initiatives because they only produce a weak impact on the addressed sustainability aspects that are considered serious problems in the Netherlands – combating environmental impacts from transportation (4 projects); and nature and landscape management and conservation (1 projects). In terms of comprehensiveness of instrument design, they only address one or two sustainability aspects.

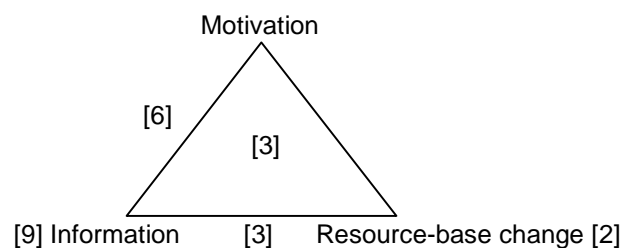


Figure 2. Mapping of projects in the 1995 Policy Agenda in terms of motivation-information-resource change impacts.

The rest 9 *projects* with information-motivation orientation or information-only component, score better as regards their ambitions for behavioral and/or institutional impacts at national level but also do not lead directly to resource-base change towards sustainability (projects 2, 8, 9, 10, 17, 18, 21, 22, 23). They are also narrowly focused as they all address only one or two sustainability aspects. A good point is that they are all relevant at country level. However, only one project addresses a problem considered a priority for sustainable tourism in the Netherlands - combating environmental impacts from transportation. Further, the projects address sustainability aspects in which improvements are welcome, although not really stringent:

- codes of conduct industry players: 4 projects (here are the projects providing environmental information for companies);
- participation of local communities and local stakeholders in tourism policy: 2 projects;
- environmental awareness raising of tourists and what their contribution can be: 2 projects.

In 2003, 71.6 % of domestic Dutch holidays were ‘self-organized’ trips. This means that tourists do not come in contact with a tour operator but book directly with the accommodation facilities in their chosen destination. Therefore projects such as 17 and 18 focusing on environmental awareness have a good potential of influencing consumer behavior. One project (23) addressed the important aspect of innovations for sustainable tourism in green networks. Consequently, these 9 projects may be placed somewhere between shallow and deep sustainability approach.

Finally, there are 8 *projects* that have a resource-base change consequence. Of these there are three important projects (1; 7; 11) that address entire segments of stakeholders. Five projects bring improvements that are of importance locally/regionally (projects 3, 4, 6, 15, 16) but they address sustainability problems that confront many recreational destinations in the Netherlands - traffic noise and quality of visitor experience, congestion, water nutrient pollution - and can be used as blueprints when stakeholders in other areas have sufficient

motivation and information to implement similar measures. Therefore, because these projects produce resource-base changes on sustainability aspects that also include some of high priority in the country, and having high replication potential at other localities/regions, they may be described as 'deep sustainability' initiatives. They produce direct changes in the following aspects:

- management of environmental resources, 4 projects;
- combating environmental impacts from transportation, 3 projects;
- nature and landscape management and conservation, 3 projects;
- generating new environmentally-friendly tourism products, 2 projects;
- participation of local stakeholders in tourism policy, 4 projects;
- local social and economic benefits from tourism, 2 project.

4 of the projects are the only ones in the program where 3 or more sustainability aspects are simultaneously addressed, which is a positive aspect in terms of instrument design comprehensiveness.

Looking now only from the standpoint of the third criteria at the design of projects, Figure 3 shows how many projects addressed directly each of the selected aspects⁶.

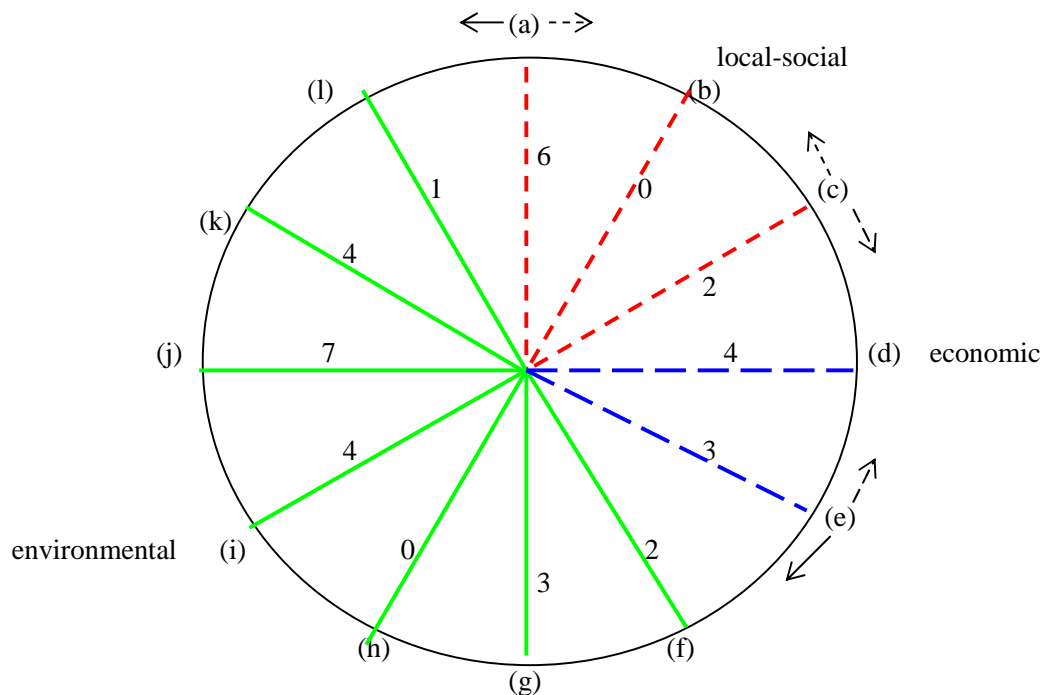


Figure 3. Mapping of projects in the 1995 Policy Agenda in terms of aspects of the three dimensions of sustainable tourism - based on the 1995 Charter adopted in Lanzarote.

Remarkable is the absence of biodiversity conservation aims in projects, although tourism and recreation takes place in nature areas of which 19 are managed as national parks. Besides, in the last years there was increasing pressure on land availability due to the set-up of Ecological-Main-Structures. Similarly remarkable is the absence of projects to reduce environmental impacts from beach tourism although this was signaled in the research report presented to the parliament as a major problem. Although there are 4 projects concerned with sustainability aspect [i] - qualitative and qualitative management of environmental resources -

⁶ Their contribution is as follows: aspect [a]: projects 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 17; aspect [c]: projects 1, 3; aspect [d]: projects 4, 12, 13, 14; aspect [e]: projects 1, 3, 7; aspect [f]: projects 17, 18; aspect [g]: projects 1, 3, 5; aspect [i]: projects 7, 11, 15, 16; aspect [j]: projects 3, 4, 5, 6, 12, 13, 14; aspect [k]: projects 8, 9, 10, 23; aspect [l]: project 22.

bathing waters and beaches were not addressed despite the fact that a special strategy was designed by CMTR for this.

Summarizing, from the standpoint of the three criteria proposed for the evaluation of initiatives, basically 8 of the 23 projects have features that may qualify them as deep sustainability initiatives, 9 projects may be placed somewhere between shallow and deep sustainability approach, while 6 projects with only weak informational impacts may be seen as shallow sustainability initiatives. Initiatives focused on information or motivation dominated the design of projects, some sustainability aspects have been given more attention than others, while projects of country-level relevance and/or high replicability potential.

3.2. Voluntary environmental management system for tourism facilities

The Environmental Barometer (EB) is an ecolabel for companies in the recreation and tourism sector and is divided into three levels: bronze, silver and gold. EB is an internal environmental management system based on which companies achieve higher performances than required in the legal framework. They need to adopt an environmental policy and a declaration of measures to be taken in the following 3 years on the following aspects:

- most expected measures regard aspect [i]: qualitative and quantitative management of environmental resources – water, energy (energy efficient devices and renewable energy), wastes' processing (separated collection) and reduction; use of recyclable/biodegradable/environmentally-friendly products; reduction/replacement of chemicals; sustainable construction; but there are also requirements regarding
- [d]: tourism satisfaction – health aspects (e.g. prevention of Legionella bacteria)
- [f] tourists' awareness on environmental issues
- [g]: nature and landscape management and conservation, referred to as 'green area management measures' for hotels and 'nature development' for campings;
- [l] continuous environmental training of personnel;
- for campings and bungalows also various measures are also required on aspect [j] combating environmental impacts from transportation; measures depend on the qualification expected – basic, bronze, silver or gold;
- also for campings and bungalows aspect [f] should also take the form of minimum twice a year organization of environmental/nature educative activities for guests.

Having in view that EB has direct consequences for the resource-base supporting tourism activities bringing improvements in environmental and nature quality, it is widely adopted at national level and addresses so many sustainability aspects (6 on the environmental and 2 on economic dimension), this program can be qualified as a deep sustainability initiative.

This instrument has proven to have a high spin-off potential in the Netherlands with sustained diffusion since its introduction. In 2004, 250 companies held an EB (camping sites, holiday parks, group-accommodations, hotels and restaurants) of which 100 already have the gold label. The number of EB companies has continuously risen throughout the years, as companies that already adopted the ecolabel proved to continue doing good business and attract high numbers of tourists given their well marketed green image.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

While large environmental empirical literature suggests that in most cases soft instruments do not generate far reaching actions and they result mostly on 'picking up the low hanging fruits', the evidence on the two instruments analyzed in this paper is mixed. While some initiatives have indeed rather focused on low hanging fruits, there have also been 'deep sustainability' projects targeting directly the greening of the resource-base supporting tourism activities. Some addressed sustainability aspects viewed by researchers as serious threats for tourism

quality and growth in the Netherlands, with a good replicability potential across the country. Others tackled less stringent sustainability aspects and restricted their impact to informational and motivational aspects. An overall assessment of the CMTR Policy Agenda projects can be visualized as somewhere in the middle-high zone of a scale from 'shallow' to 'deep sustainability'. But the Environmental Barometer can be seen a success story, a sector-supported initiative that led to a growth in the supply of environmentally-friendly holidays, and an ensuing spin-off cycle of demand-supply growth of green holidays. Figure 4 presents the evaluation of the two soft instruments in the Netherlands – CMTR and EB.

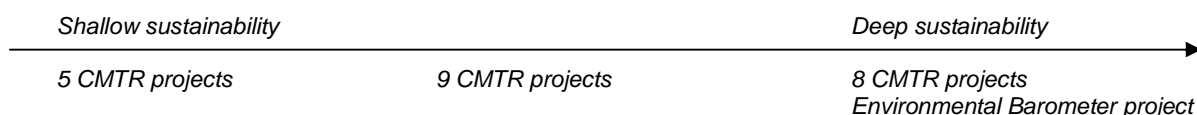


Figure 4. The sustainability depth of two voluntary initiatives in the Netherlands.

The government was present in the CMTR initiatives through its many tentacles spread through the tourism sector. But its presence displayed the same characteristics of high fragmentation and uncoordinated action. The question is: Would governmental intervention and coordination bring about more numerous and more ambitious 'deep sustainability' initiatives, than it has been achieved so far bottom-up and through-project level PPP? Where may improvements be brought and how? Some suggest that it is imperative that a minister or special department / public authority is assigned with competences on integrated tourism policy. Others argue that such an actor would only be an additional actor on an already crowded scene who eventually would anyway take one or another position in the debate and focus only on one or several aspects of the highly complex field of tourism.

I consider that, unless there is an authority specifically assigned with tourism policy competences, high numbers of deep sustainability initiatives are unlikely. The design of such initiatives is strongly dependent on the systematic coordination and cooperation among public authorities. They need to be rooted in an integrated sustainable tourism development policy in order to ensure an efficient distribution of financial, human and infrastructural resources. Many actions are needed at many levels and in many places and without coordination, the efforts may be unnecessarily duplicated. Besides, there is a large variety of stakeholders in the sector, and matching the right actors to the appropriate initiatives requires good knowledge of the entire sector and the roles actors play. At this stage there are very few stakeholders that have a very good understanding and full overview of what is going on in the field. A specifically assigned authority would fulfill this role, as well as that of facilitator in negotiations and joint framing of problems, challenges and solutions towards an integrated sustainable tourism development policy.

This should be an overarching frame based on which other national-level frames need to be further designed, such as a spatial planning policy of tourism developments, a policy for local tourism taxes, a policy for beaches, and a policy for sustainable holiday mobility. Also a framework needs to be drawn regarding the involvement and competences of local authorities and communities in the planning of desirable tourism forms, products and growth that may consider the possible use of Local Agenda 21 to plan for tourism. An integrated policy would also better coordinate the efforts of stakeholders towards sustainability aspects that researchers indicate need to be addressed with priority. Looking at Figure 3 showing the 'distribution of focus' in the CMTR projects it can be seen that some sustainability aspects have been less or not at all tackled. An integrated policy would favor a more balanced distribution of initiatives. What has been long awaited in the Netherlands is the integration of nature management, environmental protection and tourism planning. The access of tourists and tourism companies to areas protected under the Ecological-Main-Structures still waits for

new solutions that are more acceptable for both biodiversity conservationists and the tourism/recreation sector. Also the integration of policies for the promotion of rural and agricultural tourism still needs improvements to generate more significant results. Additional instruments need to be designed to further improve the environmental performances of accommodation companies. Although the adoption rate of EB was high for a voluntary instrument, it is important to note that hotels and conference centers have had so far the smallest adoption rates⁷. These are intervention areas for which governmental action is most appropriate to induce more substantial changes in the resource-base of tourism. But there are also areas where it is difficult to conceive deep sustainability initiatives without governmental leadership, such as the development of mechanisms to internalize environmental costs in tourism products, and sustainable tourism mobility. So far the Dutch government has left too much to market forces and consumer preferences and private initiatives. But there are clear limits to what sustainability improvement these may achieve without governmental coordination and active participation.

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⁷ The highest adoption rate is among camp-sites and bungalows. See <http://www.recron.nl/milieubarometer/nl/zoek.htm>.