

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY: AN ASSESSMENT OF TRINIDAD'S BUSINESS TOURISM MARKET

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to provide an understanding of business tourism and its contribution to environmental sustainability. This paper discusses the concept of business tourism and captures the environmental impact of this niche market. It examines the viability of business tourism as it relates to environmental sustainability in Trinidad and makes recommendations, which includes policy propositions for the future. Additionally, an examination of New Zealand's environmental strategies are presented to determine whether Trinidad can espouse these and embrace environmental sustainability in its business tourism industry. From this qualitative study utilizing a thematic analysis, it was determined, that business tourism was environmentally 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 environmentally friendly practices. It also embraces the notion of sustainability as a way forward and proposes an environmentally friendly happiness valuation model for the way forward.

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KEYWORDS: Business Tourism; MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Events); Environmental; Sustainability; Happiness; Trinidad; Sustainable Tourism Development Model

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors in the world and it contributes to economic, socio-cultural and environmental benefits to many countries (WTTC 2009; WTO 2012; Cooper *et al* 2005; Swarbrooke and Horner 2001; and Ritchie and Crouch 2003). It brings economic value in the form of revenue generation, continuous foreign exchange earnings and is a means for diversifying the economy. Socio-culturally, tourism provides employment opportunities, it allows the local culture to gain wider acceptance and leads to cross cultural exchanges with other countries. The natural environment can also benefit from tourism in the form of green taxes, the induction of environmentally friendly practices by tourism facilities and beautification drives, which promote a level of aestheticism and happiness. Tourism represents a panacea to sustainable development for many countries. As such, different countries promote different forms of tourism products. Business Tourism or the MICE market (Meetings, Incentive, Conferences and Events) is one such niche market and it is on the front burner for some countries as it adds significant economic value to the tourism Gross Domestic Product (GDP). While this option is a viable one pursued as part of sustainable development strategy, key stakeholders have continuously lobbied that such development should not be pursued at the expense of the natural environment. The natural environment is of paramount importance in the business milieu today.

Companies and business tourism facilities are being encouraged to follow sound environmental practices when catering to the business tourism market, which would result in sustainable environmentally friendly business tourism. While this may be challenging to achieve, it can be done. New Zealand is a good

example of a country that has developed sound environmental policies and practices built into its business tourism product. This has made the industry quite successful and it gives justification as to its use in this paper as a benchmark for assessing Trinidad's MICE market. This paper takes the following format. First, it examines the literature on the subject matter of business tourism and environmental sustainability; then it outlines what methodology was used to gather exploratory data; followed by the results and discussion section, which discusses the findings in light of the literature review. Finally, it proposes recommendations for the future concerning sustainable and environmentally friendly business tourism in Trinidad and concludes summarizing the key findings in this paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section examines the various views and studies in the area of business tourism, sustainability, Trinidad's Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Events (MICE) market and environmental strategies employed by New Zealand.

Business Tourism

According to Phelan *et al* (2009), business tourism goes beyond work purposes, sports tournaments, festivals, concerts etcetera. It incorporates all activities associated with the Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Events (MICE) industry and it caters to the affluence and professional (Lawson 1982; Jafari 2000 and Swarbrooke and Horner 2001). 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. Consequently, business travellers pay more for services (travel first class, stay at 5-star hotels, tip heavily) and indirectly pay higher taxes which can then be used to fund environmental or social programs thereby benefitting the host. In addition, they are more environmentally sensitive, willing to support and buy into environmentally conscious goods and services, promote Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives and engage in greening projects. Generally, business tourism adds less to environmental degradation when compared to the leisure cruise market (Tourism Concern 2012). In this regard, business tourism is more sustainable than other tourism forms.

Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism development builds upon the premise of sustainability. 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 (Hall and Lew: 1999). Further, it promotes fairness and equality and aims to create win-win situations with the various stakeholders involved in the tourism process (Jurowski 2002). Sustainability is built on the premise that three pillars need to be satisfied (Maculay Institute 2006). These three pillars are the natural environment (eco-friendly), the economy (financial benefits), and socio-cultural benefits (create employment opportunities and preserve culture).

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 there are three pillars to satisfy with various stakeholders and behavioural reactions may not agree. Managers and stakeholders have their own interest (agency issues) and therefore it could be difficult to manage certain relationships (Elliott 1999; and Reichel and Haber 2005). One potential solution to 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).

Mair and Jago (2010) claimed that a number of stakeholders must take steps to reduce their environmental footprint. For example, in 2008, New Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, was the first convention centre in the world to be awarded a six-star green star rating by the Green Building Council of Australia. The greening of business tourism practices are catching on quickly, in the form of changes to

products, processes and policies. 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, 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.

Trinidad's Mice Market

The twin island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is located approximately ten kilometres north of the South American continent. It gains significant wealth from oil and natural gas. The country has a population of 1.3 million people and is one of the most developed economies in this region. It is fast becoming the economic hub of the region with many business type hotels and facilities. The country boasts of natural attractions, historical sites, a diverse culture with various festivals (Carnival, Divali, Parang etc.), food and warm hospitable people. For example, the country has delicate eco-systems such as mangroves that are vibrant but also vulnerable to destruction; and is rich in biodiversity (habitat to numerous plant and animal species). Statistically, the tourism sector accounts for about 10.6% of the Gross Domestic Product (WTTC, 2009) and this figure is projected to rise given the government's current diversification developmental plan. This sector provides the best opportunities for inter-sector linkages to curb many problems such as revenue leakages via high spending on imports, and high food prices in society. In fact, tourism has been articulated as a strategy for diversification in the National Tourism Policy document of Trinidad and Tobago.

Locally, the government introduced a tax on the sales earned by companies, which goes to a green fund, and utilized for funding environmental efforts. Since going green has become a mantra and buzzword, many hotels have in fact gone green with their practices (Scott and Becken: 2010). The instillation of energy efficient light bulbs, sensor taps in the washrooms, the use of photovoltaic systems to heat water, limited use of plastics, encouraging the reusing of towels and other environmentally friendly practices have come on stream and are quite popular (Mair and Jago 2010). Some hotels are also promoting the conservation of resources given the general overuse of water resources in swimming pools, golf courses and personal use of water and energy by tourists.

Organizations in Trinidad & Tobago have also proactively responded by adopting voluntary initiatives to manage their environmental responsibilities and ensure that policies, procedures and practices conform to the entity's environmental targets and objectives. Specifically, multinational companies that have subsidiary operations in Trinidad, such as BP, Hilton and Hyatt are protecting their global customer image and value by ensuring that Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives and more in particular their environmental efforts are adopted by their subsidiaries.

The main challenge that Trinidad and Tobago faces as a country whose economy is heavily reliant on hydrocarbon exploitation is finding a means whereby to reduce emissions without harming favourable economic growth. Additionally, most companies in Trinidad and Tobago have not come to the realization that environmental accounting and the concept of "going green" makes good business sense. This may be explained by the hefty start-up investment required for which insufficient government support is given in terms of funding. Theoretically, according to Butler's model (1980), Trinidad displays symptoms of being at the Development stage of the Tourist Area Life Cycle. At the development stage, visitor numbers are climbing and the destination has to put measures, facilities and amenities in place to cater to the increased arrival of visitors. 'Development' is a phase and it is one that requires proper management (Cooper *et al* 2005). In this regard, development of tourism facilities should not be pursued in an ad hoc manner but due consideration should be given to the environment.

More so, business tourism has growth potential both in terms of diversification and in terms of economic impact on the GDP. The WTTC (2009) revealed 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. While the business tourism market has growth potential and is a viable

one, and environmental ills are increasing at a tremendous rate, the government has the capacity to put environmental protection orders in place so as to promote sustainable development and foster happiness. New Zealand provides a good benchmark of environmentally conscious strategies to encourage sustainable business tourism. The country's strategies can be adopted wholly in some cases or customised to fit Trinidad's existing system and could lead to competitive advantage.

Environmental Strategies Employed By New Zealand

The environmental strategies employed by New Zealand, which have made it a competitive tourism destination, have been identified and listed in Table 1 (Source: New Zealand Sustainable Tourism Policy). These strategies include setting environmental indicators; putting supportive legislative framework; incorporating environment into its future strategy; and implementing and encouraging the use of more sustainable business reporting models.

Table 1: Identification of New Zealand Core Environmental Strategies

1. Set environmental indicators to guide the tourism industry forward
2. Put legislative framework to support the industry example. Waste Minimization Act 2008
3. Make the environment a core part of future strategy
4. Implement and encourage the use of more sustainable business reporting models
5. Foster tighter networking relationship between all key stakeholder groups
6. Set up a regional council pollution hotline where people can report pollution and environmental degradation
7. Develop and adopt a sustainability policy for the business and review it regularly
8. Develop an Action Plan, setting out ways to enhance sustainability performance; make someone responsible for each action and impose a deadline; review to ensure deadlines are met
9. Integrate sustainability into existing management systems and processes (example. Build ethical recreation principles into operations manuals)-develop and implement induction and training processes that include sustainability as a core element to include in operational manuals
10. Seek to become a carbon neutral certified business, reduce CO₂ emissions as much as possible, and offset those that remain (example. By funding native tree planting or energy efficient schemes to compensate for carbon released from vehicle and boat operations)-work with other tourism businesses, councils and community groups to implement a local "Trees for Travelers" sponsorship initiative
11. Implement a formal client feedback process, and include sustainability performance as an area for comment; introduce client rewards for good ideas (example vouchers)
12. Become Qualmark endorsed, by meeting the requirements for environmental accreditation
13. Consult a business mentor, to identify more ways to operate efficiently (free up time), develop and grow the business.
14. Communicate sustainability objectives to staff (example through awareness sessions, meetings), encourage suggestions, actively involve them, and reward achievements (build values into performance criteria for staff)
15. Buy locally produced goods and services, sourced from medium, small and micro enterprises
16. Establish a partnership with a local school, and work with local and regional partners to support the school and environmental education (education outside the classroom-mentoring students)
17. Donate unused food to a food bank, food scraps to a pig farmer and donate old, partially used or unused products to local charities (example old linen, furniture, kitchenware, and office equipment that is still functional)
18. Reduce contaminants by using natural products such as citrus, salt, vinegar and baking soda to clean surfaces, windows, drains and floors
19. Educate guests as to how they can make a positive contribution to local biodiversity conservation efforts (example include information in compendium/notice boards on conservation efforts, volunteering and sponsorship opportunities)
20. Implement team building days, volunteering on local conservation project (beach clean ups etc.)
21. Review all products and services that you purchase, and advise your suppliers that you will give preference to products that meet social and environmental criteria (based on distance from origin, biodegradability, efficiency rating, recycled content, ability to be recycled etc.)
22. Keep the community informed of initiatives and seek involvement and support

This table provides a listing of environmentally friendly strategies engaged by New Zealand.

METHODOLOGY

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 data in the area of business tourism and its environmental 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 were 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. This data was collected over a three month period (February-April 2011).

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 environmental 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 environmental 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 New Zealand and discuss whether these could be applied to the business tourism niche in Trinidad as a means of embracing environmental sustainability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section of the paper presents responses from the seven interviewed respondents under three core themes: Business Tourism; Environmental sustainability of business tourism; and Future environmental strategy and recommendations.

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 environmental 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.

Respondents reported that the business tourism niche was a significant market to make investment. 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).

Sustainability Of Business Tourism

The respondents stated that the environment is of paramount importance to any form of business and development. It is the responsibility of everyone including developers who design, build and engage in the supporting infrastructures. They are encouraged to follow established guidelines, practices, policies

and the regulatory framework so that these projects conform to environmental standards. At the same time, businesses have caught on to 'going green'. Many hotels have in fact adopted environmentally friendly practices as those outlined in the literature review. Respondents revealed that initiatives like e-tickets, using environmentally friendly products, energy efficient equipment in hotels, natural lighting, reusing of wastewater and managing of waste are great environmental efforts that can go a long way in preserving the environment for future generations. Interviewees also mentioned that rainwater can be utilised for landscaping and measures designed to reduce the amount of water in flushing hotel toilets. By engaging in environmental good practices, business tourists are influenced by these efforts and they follow the practice of locals in up keeping the environment. In most instances, they will return and encourage others to visit. Economically, this is good for a country.

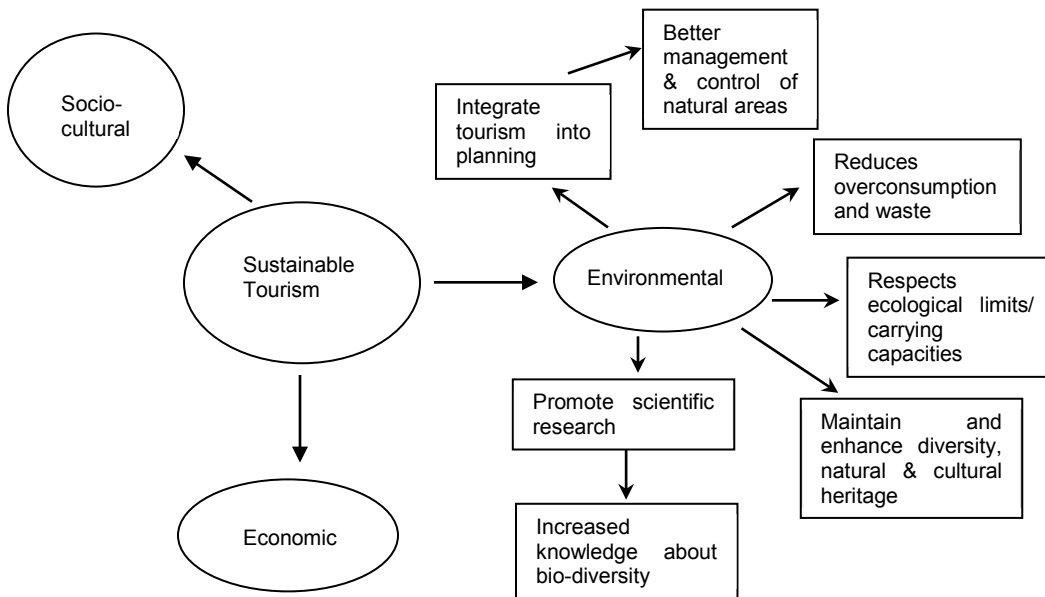
Foreign exchange is earned on a continuous basis and there is a positive spill-off effect, which contributes to job creation, entrepreneurial ventures and linkages with other sectors. The respondents also supported a strong regulatory framework to protect, preserve, care and maintain the natural environment. They claimed that a green fund tax and funding of green fund projects should continue and expand. They also recommended the passing and implementation of the Beverage Container Act, which adds value to the environment; create employment, and supports recycling initiatives. All respondents supported the view that this country generates a lot of carbon emissions and pollution, and they suggested that the government should market carbon credits as done in the United Kingdom. They also claimed that tax breaks could be an option to encourage green practices.

Future Environmental Strategy 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 environmental 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, environmentally 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 environmental aspects of business tourism forward. The respondents shared the view that a strategy for an environmental 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 environmental 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 environmental practices in business tourism. It was also mooted that benchmarking should be pursued vigorously to bring the tourism products in line with international green standards, practices, policies, legislations and regulations.

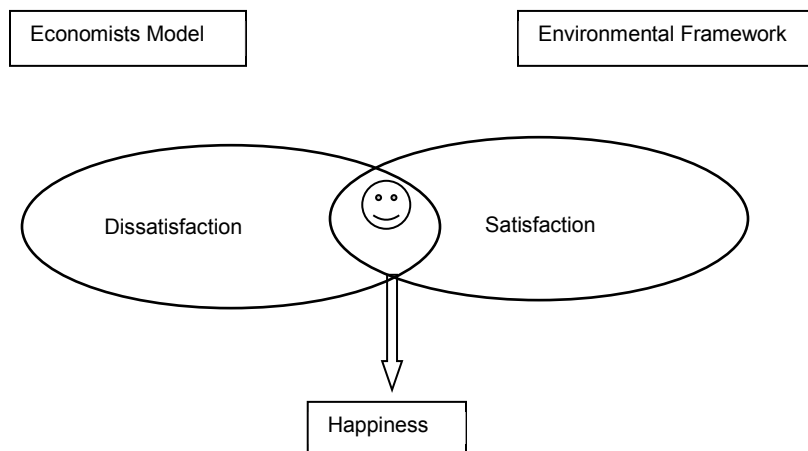
Given the very nature of business tourism and its fragility, the strategic plan should also focus on sustainability and sustainable tourism development, address the challenges of traffic congestion, engage in strategic marketing and reform the legislation so that players can comply. Overall, six respondents agreed that business tourism in Trinidad was environmentally 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. In summary, this paper presents a framework that speaks to a sustainable development model and proposes an environmental happiness valuation model, which examines the satisfaction levels of all stakeholders. This model and the framework allow and display the importance of the environment, the economics and socio-cultural activities that influence sustainable tourism as the way forward. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the model and the framework.

Figure 1: Pillars of Sustainable Tourism



This figure depicts the key components that influence sustainable tourism with particular emphasis on environmental sustainability.

Figure 2: A proposed environmental happiness valuation model



This figure displays a Venn diagram that illustrates the importance of the environment as it relates to Happiness.

It is felt that countries should now challenge the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) measurement metrics, that is the Economist’s Model, for measuring the wealth of a country as against the environmental framework adopted by Bhutan which lists environmental protection as one of the four pillars of *happiness* as more important than GDP. In this regard, countries must change their measurement metrics and question the Economist’s wealth valuation model. What is important is a country’s *happiness*, and money (GDP) should not be the only yardstick to offer such a measurement. See the proposed *environmental happiness valuation* model and the contrasting views of the economists in Figure 2, which illustrates the relationship between the Economists’ Model and the Environmental framework that measures the degree of satisfaction and dissatisfaction of these approaches. Note this figure depicts the contrasting views of

the economists and environmentalists. Against this background, *happiness* should be the pillar all countries should foster for their citizens. Satisfaction leads to happiness, contentment and changes the quality of life. In short, any country that is seriously considering diversification into sustainable business tourism as the way forward, can apply this framework and the proposed environmental happiness valuation model.

Refining New Zealand’s Environmental Strategies Employed In Its Business Tourism Sector To Accommodate Trinidad

New Zealand is a pioneer in terms of environmentalism and therefore their strategies can be moulded into bespoke strategies and embraced by Trinidad to gain a competitive edge in environmental sustainability. Trinidad’s MICE market can adopt and implement the strategies identified in Table 1. Table 2 depicts which strategies to adopt wholly and which to customize. 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 2: Strategy Adoption / Customisation to fit Trinidad’s Existing Environment

Adopt strategy wholly (Strategy #)	Customise it to fit Trinidad (Strategy #)
1	2
3 – 5	6
7 – 9	10
11	12
13 – 22	

This table depicts which strategies to adopt wholly and those that require customising to Trinidad’s unique market.

Multi stakeholder involvement and support is crucial for many of the strategies to bear fruit and become successful. Apart from stakeholder involvement and support, community awareness and buy-in is needed so that there can be understanding in what the country is attempting to achieve. Understanding would lead to support and this would translate to individuals behaving with self-direction and a level of consciousness towards safe environmental practices. While the Environmental Management Authority has the regulations (EMA Act No. 3 of 2000) to guide individual, group and corporate behaviour towards operating in a more environmentally friendly manner, these regulations are seldom enforce. New Zealand has sound legislative framework and has the support of key stakeholders who police the environmental laws. Trinidad also needs to follow suit with regard to this.

While people can report environmental transgressions to the EMA, 24-hour hotline numbers provide an option since it may be vital in gathering data to enhance and support environmental preservation. Other initiatives include a tree planting/gardening initiative to get visitors and local schoolchildren involved in the activity; programs targeted at schools to award the students who can implement the best recycling product, for example make handicraft with recyclable products; challenging local engineers to build structures with reusable materials; and ensuring that local businesses comply with service standards.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed that Trinidad could gain immensely in the area of business tourism if it manages the delicate balance between tourism development and environmental sustainability. All respondents agreed that the diversification into business tourism was economically sustainable as it offers one of the best linkages to other sectors. Tourism represents one of many developmental activities that can be achieved in a responsible manner to prevent further loss to the environment as well as assist in reversing the environmental damage that has already occurred. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has indicated its commitment to environmental preservation and upkeep in promoting sustainable development. Six out

of the seven respondents supported the view that business tourism was environmentally 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. 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. This study brought forth an exploratory understanding of where Trinidad's niche is currently in position and it highlights that business tourism can be environmentally sustainable representing a valuable market to invest. It also makes recommendations for the way forward by examining New Zealand's strategies and proposes an environmental happiness valuation model.

This exploratory research work has some limitations. For example, the sample size examined is 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

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