Journey to sustainable tourism
Inaugural Lecture
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Good evening
Professor Phakeng, the Vice-Principal: Research and Innovation, Prof Linington, the Executive Dean for the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, Prof Nel, the Chair of Department, Department of Environmental Sciences. Directors of School, Professors, Doctors, Colleagues and Fellow academics, Friends and Family. What an honour and a privilege it is for me to address all of you this evening. Giving me the opportunity to share a few thoughts with you.

My tertiary education journey started in 1990 and one of my professors told me then that when you started at the university you signed on a fine dotted line. That line was not a line it was actually a sentence that you committed yourself to be a life-long scholar, you committed yourselves to a journey of life-long learning.

I took this to heart and my lifelong journey of learning took me along a ‘Journey to Sustainable Tourism’ and our responsibility as citizens of the planet earth.

In 2001 the World Bank (2001, p. 267) stated the following:
At the start of a new century, poverty remains a global problem of huge proportions. Of the world’s 6 billion people, 2.8 billion live on less that $2 a day and 1.2 billion on less than $1 a day. Eight of every 100 infants do not live to see their fifth birthday. Nine of every 100 boys and 14 of every 100 girls who reach school age do not attend school. Poverty is also evident in poor people’s lack of political power and voice and in their extreme vulnerability to ill health, economic dislocation, personal violence and natural disasters. And the scourge of HIV/AIDS, the frequency and brutality of civil conflicts and rising disparities between rich countries and the developing world have increased the sense of deprivation and injustice for many.

These sentiments suggest not only that development and inequality are global phenomenon but also that development interventions taken since World War II have failed to deliver broad-based development in many developing countries. Instead there has been a deepening inequality both between and within countries (Haynes, 2005, Dwivedi et al., 2007). The assumption that developing countries would inevitably become developed over time has been totally disproved.

It is commonly agreed that the starting point of development, as it has become known, is the inaugural speech of President Truman on 20 January 1949. Although this was a turning point in modern development thought, it should be remembered that development is in fact much older than this. Truman’s speech for the first time created an economic division between developed and developing countries (Morse, 2004; Mowforth & Munt, 2009). After World War II development theory became a prominent new sub-discipline of political science. During this period many developing countries were emerging from colonial rule. These countries had to grapple with pressing economic and human development problems and still do today.

Development implies growth and expansion and, as Weaver (1998, p. 34) states, it “implies progression toward some kind of desirable outcome”. During the industrial revolution development was strongly connected to increased speed, volume and size. Frank and Smith (1999), however, indicate that the concept of growth in terms of development is being questioned and that there is a general realization that ‘more’ is not always better. According to Frank and Smith (1999) the term ‘development’, therefore, may not always mean growth and expansion, but it will always imply change. Stewart (1997, p. 1) states that “development may be defined as positive social, economic and political change in a country or community … [D]evelopment is concerned with positive change in existing human societies, and the success of development efforts is measured by the results seen in society.” The question arises: What is actually meant by ‘positive change’? Stewart (1997) answers this question by saying that positive change is a process that occurs through a consultative and democratic process, whereby people identify and act on what they perceive as good within their particular context, while being aware of their particular
constraints and opportunities. Development should be seen as “releasing the community of the poor from the poverty trap so that they can take responsibility for their own destiny” (Swanepoel & De Beer, 1997, p. xiii). Since development should lead to an improvement in the economic and spiritual welfare of the individuals or communities involved, it should lead to the alleviation of poverty.

Since the 1990s sustainable development has become increasingly prominent as a dominant development approach, leading to the demise of other development approaches (Woodhouse & Chimhowu, 2005). With the emergence of sustainable development the pursuit of economic growth is no longer the only core value of development strategies (Dwivedi et al., 2007).

Sustainable development originated from the modern-day environmental movement whose origins stem in part from 19th-century Europe where the traditional approach that humans have dominion over nature was replaced with a ‘preservation ethic’ (Hall & Lew, 1998). Influential publications in the 1960s and 1970s such as Carson’s (1962) Silent Spring, Hardin’s (1968) The Tragedy of Commons, Meadows et al.’s (1972) The Limits to Growth and Schumacher’s (1973) Small is Beautiful, made the world aware of the detrimental effects that human activities were having on the environment. Through the work of international organizations such as the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) humans started to be understood as part of nature and not separate from it. These organizations started to take steps to embrace social and environmental issues and to group them under one umbrella. This paved the way for the integration of social and environmental concerns that are critical for sustainable development.

During the post-World War II period, and up to the 1970s, development policies had an almost exclusive economic focus. Development policies of the time were based on the idea that humans could overcome poverty through economic development, which would lead to an eventual trickle-down effect to the poorest people in society. Large-scale industrialization and agricultural development projects were often not suited to the environment and the culture of the countries where they were imposed. Development initiatives often left developing countries with debt, thus widening the gap between the rich and the poor, and a seriously degraded environment rather than an improvement in quality of life (Woodhouse & Chimhowu, 2005).

The failure of economic development theories and the associated environmental degradation, together with the growth in the environmental movement, laid the foundations for the emergence of sustainable development. In 1972 the United Nations (UN) conference on the Human Environment was held in Stockholm. This was the first time global environmental issues were discussed in a systematic and comprehensive manner. At this meeting, representatives of developing nations made it clear that environmental issues would not be part of their agenda until active steps were taken to alleviate poverty and bring about greater equity in trade relations, effectively linking environmental degradation and poverty alleviation (Miller & Twining-Ward 2005; Dwivedi et al., 2007). Although the Stockholm Conference was of limited scope it started a new wave of environmentally conscious international conventions and treaties such as the 1973 International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships and the 1980 Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources. The UN General Assembly adopted the recommendations of the Stockholm Conference and established the UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) to serve as an environmental monitoring agency (Dwivedi et al., 2007). Several years later the Stockholm Conference also led to the establishment of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED).

The concept of sustainable development first came to public attention in the 1980 World Conservation Strategy published by the IUCN (1980). The World Conservation Strategy highlighted the global nature of environmental problems and recognised the North/South divide and the growing gap between rich and poor countries (Gössling et al., 2009). Sustainable development was first popularized by the Brundtland Commission Report of the WCED entitled ‘Our Common Future’ (WCED, 1987), in which the integration of economic and environmental issues was highlighted. The report made statements that
warranted serious attention, such as the “Failure to manage the environment and to sustain development threatens to overwhelm all countries. Environment and development are not separate challenges, they are linked. Development cannot subsist upon a deteriorating environmental resource base” (WCED, 1987, p. 37). The Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987, p. 43) defines sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Five years after the Brundtland Report, the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) took place in Rio de Janeiro and popularly became known as the ‘Rio Earth Summit’. This event may be seen as the high point of the environmental movement worldwide. In the 20 years between the Stockholm Conference and the Earth Summit, the world had changed significantly. The cold war had ended, the Soviet Union had broken apart, the Berlin Wall came down and the Federal Republic of Germany became a part of a unified Germany, globalization was rapidly expanding, scientific advances had emerged at an accelerated rate, the Internet appeared and many environmental disasters had taken place, spilling over national borders, proving that national borders have become meaningless with respect to environmental issues (Khator, 1995; Dwivedi et al., 2007). While the Stockholm conference was attended by two heads of state, 134 NGOs and a handful of journalists, the Rio Earth Summit also had a much higher level attendance, 166 heads of state, 7 892 NGOs and over 8 000 journalists. The Earth Summit emphasized that environmental protection could no longer be seen as a luxury but as a necessity alongside economic and social issues. The Rio Earth Summit also succeeded in putting together five documents, one of which was Agenda 21, which outlines the basis for implementing sustainable development at local, national and international level into the twenty first century (UN, 1993). The Earth Summit also led to the creation of a new UN Agency, the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), which was tasked with collecting data on the environment and development and monitoring progress towards the goals of Agenda 21.

Despite the apparent success at Rio, the UNCSD reported to the follow-up meeting (Earth Summit+5) that very little progress had been achieved and that things were still moving in the wrong direction (UNCSD, 1997). The meeting called for improved international co-operation and stronger political will. Three years later, in 2000, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were signed by all 191 UN Member States. The MDGs listed eight goals that are to be achieved by 2015: (Ladies and gentlemen I draw your attention to the fact that we are now in 2015).

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger;
- Achieve universal primary education;
- Promote gender equality and empower women;
- Reduce child mortality;
- Improve maternal health;
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases;
- Ensure environmental sustainability; and
- Develop a global partnership for development.

The emphasis of the MDGs on poverty and human development rather than on the environment illustrates a shift in focus from Stockholm and Rio. The World Summit of Sustainable Development (Rio+10) in Johannesburg in 2002 continued this trend, building on the Agenda 21 and the MDGs. The main areas addressed in the Rio+10 Plan of implementation were poverty, production and consumption, protecting and managing the natural resource base, sustainable development in a globalizing world, health, and the means and framework for implementation. Like the MDGs, the Rio+10 Plan of implementation was outcomes-based and placed an emphasis on establishing partnerships, networks and implementing change through clear goals, targets and indicators. The use of indicators as a means of gauging progress towards the attainment of sustainable development has gained momentum over the last 20 years (Bell & Morse, 1999, 2003; Morse, 2004). The Rio+10 Conference achieved general agreement that three main pillars of sustainability exist, namely environmental protection, social development and economic wellbeing.
Through the all-encompassing nature of sustainable development (multi-disciplinary, multi-scale, multi-perspective) it has perhaps become the culmination of all development theories (Morse, 2004). Development theory would never be the same again.

Miller and Twining-Ward (2005) highlight four important lessons from the emergence of the concept of sustainable development. First, sustainable development is not a social, economic and environmental problem but a combination of all three and, as a result, requires interdisciplinary modes of enquiry. Second, complex systems such as those involved in sustainable development are inherently unpredictable and therefore require approaches based on non-linear science. Third, because of the changing nature of sustainable development, policies and actions need to be continually modified and adapted to changing conditions. Fourthly, in order to reduce the vulnerability of the Earth system to abrupt change, monitoring is required from local to global scales, enhancing systems knowledge and extending human foresight.

The emergence of sustainable development has promoted the sustainable development of tourism. Agenda 21, together with the seventh session of the UNCSD in 1999, promoted a wider focus on the sustainable development of tourism to include economic and social aspects.

Tourism has become a natural part of life for millions of people harbouring the expectations of becoming tourists at least once a year for their annual vacation if not more frequently. This was not always the case, for most of recorded history. Travel was difficult, expensive, uncomfortable and often dangerous so the desire to travel must initially have been prompted by powerful motives, not surprisingly the earliest travellers were religious pilgrims motivated by spiritual purposes or travellers who journeyed in the quest of health. As travel became easier and more affordable other motives came to the fore such as pleasure. The social and economic emancipation of the middle classes also made travel the realm of ordinary people who now had both the time and the disposable income necessary to travel. A further catalytic event that led to the rapid growth of tourism historically is the development of efficient and affordable forms of mass transport, railways in particular made mass tourism a reality and later following the end of the Second World War the rise of civil aviation initiated international tourism

Tourism or mass tourism as it has become known had its origins in the inland health spas and mineral waters as it was commonly believed that the waters had curative properties which attracted people who were seeking remedies for their health conditions. The mineral water therapies were not a new innovation as they dated back to the Roman Times. The mineral waters were first only used by the sick but later became the domain of the wealthy and the elite in the mid-eighteenth century who were drawn to the social life and the attractions this offered, the modern tourism resorts were born, catering for all the needs of these new leisure seekers. At around the same time there was a shift in the medical thinking that suggested that sea bathing and the drinking of sea water was a more effective treatment to many ailments than those offered in the inland spas. This led to the spread of mass tourism to coastal areas leading to the development of coastal resorts.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the sea and the coast had become popular destinations. There was a major attitudinal shift that occurred as a result of the Enlightenment of Europe that included a new popularity and influence of natural theology in which the enjoyment of the natural spectacles such as the sea and the landscape was now seen as a celebration of God’s work. This led to the development of travel to natural places such as the English Lake District and the Scottish Highlands in Britian. This was also particularly pronounced in the United States of America, which later resulted in the establishment of a system of National Parks and Protected areas (Williams & Lew, 2015).

It is difficult today to imagine a world without tourism. In order to truly understand the phenomenon of tourism it has to be defined in order to appreciate what it actually means. Middleton (1994, p. 8) quotes the Tourism Society’s definition: “Tourism is deemed to include any activity concerned with the temporary short-term movement of people to destinations outside the place where they normally live and work, and activities during their stay at these destinations.”
The tourism product in its broader sense goes far beyond the individual destination or tourist enterprise. The need for co-operation and collaboration between the various role players in a destination region is evident. Despite differences between specific enterprises the entire tourist destination region is often seen as a collective experience (Bennett & Strydom, 2005).

The travel and tourism industry is currently one of the largest industries in the world. It is estimated that the tourism industry employs more than 130 million people worldwide and makes capital investments in excess of US$400 billion annually. According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO, 2015) the number of international tourist arrivals shows a substantial growth from a mere 25.3 million arrivals in 1950 to 1.138 million in 2014. The WTO (2014) also estimates that worldwide, international tourist receipts have grown from US$2.1 billion in 1950 to US$1 159 billion in 2013. More than US$ 3.1 billion is earned every day through international tourism. This shows the incredible rate of tourism growth. The international receipts in Africa have also grown from US$0.1 billion in 1950 to US$ 34.3 billion in 2013. The total percentage of tourist receipts that Africa receives is still dwarfed in comparison to other world regions.

The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) confirms this by stating that “tourism is recognized as one of the sectors with the most potential to contribute to the economic regeneration of the continent, particularly through the diversification of African economies and generation of foreign exchange earnings” (NEPAD, 2004, p. 3).

Using 1995 as a base year, the WTO Tourism 2020 Vision (WTO, 1998) forecasts that international arrivals are expected to reach 1.6 billion by the year 2020. Of these, 1.2 billion will be interregional and 378 million will be long-haul travellers. It is predicted that tourist arrivals will grow by an average of 4.1% a year until 2020, while receipts from international tourism will increase by around 6-7% annually. The WTO (1998) also indicates that tourists will become increasingly environmentally conscious and will base their selection of destinations on the destinations environmental quality.

Changes in the market forces, as well as the move towards more environmentally sensitive and sustainable forms of tourism, have led to significant changes in tourism. The emergence of sustainable development has been a major driving force in this change towards a new form of tourism. The negative economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts resulting from tourism’s rapid and unplanned developments associated with mass tourism led to calls for a new or alternative form of tourism. The concern over the negative impacts was taken a step further to advocate a symbiotic relationship between tourism and the environment instead of a relationship of conflict or co-existence (Weaver, 1998, p. 11). These factors, together with the rising concern for the sustainability of the tourism product, resulted in the development of Alternative Tourism (AT). AT sets out to be consistent with natural, social and community values, an approach which would allow both hosts and guests to enjoy positive and worthwhile interactions and experiences (Lubbe, 2003, p. 79). According to Krippendorf (1982), the philosophy behind AT was to ensure that tourism policies should no longer concentrate on economic and technical necessities alone, but rather emphasize the demand for an unspoiled environment and consideration of the needs of local people. AT, which places natural and cultural resources at the forefront of tourism planning and development, includes many new types of tourism, such as ecotourism, green tourism, controlled tourism, environmentally sensitive tourism, Africa tourism, rural tourism, agri-tourism, health farms, guest houses, bed and breakfast establishments, township tourism, cultural tourism, community tourism, soft tourism and ethnic tourism (France, 1997; Weaver, 1998; Page & Dowling, 2002; Scheyvens, 2002; Fennell, 2003; Lubbe, 2003). AT is seen as being the opposite of mass tourism: where mass tourism is ‘large-scale’, AT is ‘small-scale’; where mass tourism leads to homogenization of the tourism product, AT promotes ‘desirable differences’ between destinations; mass tourism is ‘externally controlled’, AT is ‘locally controlled’; mass tourism is ‘high impact’ while AT is ‘low impact’ (Weaver, 1998).
Although mass tourism is said to be predominantly unsustainable, there has been a move amongst conventional mass tourism towards greater sustainability through controlled electricity use, disposal of waste and rotating laundry schedules (Fennel, 2003).

Sustainable tourism is the tourism industry’s reply to growing international and consumer pressure to include and address economic, social and environmental issues. The concept of sustainability has had a profound influence on the world and the way in which the tourism industry conducts itself. Careful consideration must be given to the minimization of negative environmental impacts while enhancing the positive impacts. Besides the environment, tourism businesses now has to take all stakeholders into account: employees, state and local communities as well as shareholders, investors and consumers. Companies are also adopting the ‘triple bottom line’ approach to reporting, where social, environmental and economic aspects have to be considered and accounted for. The Institute of Directors of Southern Africa (2002) acknowledges that there is a move away from the single bottom line (profit for shareholders) to a triple bottom line, which embraces the economic, environmental and social aspects of a company’s activities. No longer can we live in a world dominated by economics and finance, now each one of us also have to take environmental and social consequences of our actions into account.

In 1999, the World Tourism Organization (WTO) committed itself to a Global Code of Ethics for Tourism. Tourism ‘ethics’ is concerned with the way in which the tourism industry conducts itself and refers to the codes by which human conduct is guided, the way in which business is done, the way in which we treat each other and the way in which we travel (Goodwin & Pender, 2005). The Global Code of Ethics was designed to “promote responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism” (WTO, 1999, pp. 2-3). This code aims to create a new world order in the tourism industry that is equitable, responsible and sustainable. This aim can only be achieved if all the stakeholders in the tourism industry work together.

South Africa committed itself to the principle of responsible tourism in its 1996 White Paper on the Development and Promotion of Tourism in South Africa. The principles of responsible tourism were, however, later elaborated on (DEAT, 2002, p. 2):

Responsible tourism is about enabling communities to enjoy a better quality of life through increased socio-economic benefits and an improved environment. It is also about providing better holiday experiences for guests and good business opportunities for tourism enterprises.

‘Responsible tourism’ is being advocated by the tourism industry to achieve equity, responsibility and sustainability. The Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism (2002) was the result of the Cape Town Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destinations organized by the Responsible Tourism Partnership as a side event preceding the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002. The conference addressed ways in which stakeholders can work together to take responsibility for achieving the aspirations of the WTO Global Code of Ethics and the principles of sustainable tourism. In 2002 South Africa also saw the publication of the national responsible tourism guidelines as well as the responsible tourism manual. The Imvelo Responsible Tourism Awards and the first two Sustainable Tourism Certification organisations were also established in 2002, namely Fair Trade Tourism South Africa (now known as Fair Trade Tourism) and Heritage Environmental. In 2010 the National Department of Tourism established a Responsible Tourism Directorate. After lengthy consultations the SABS published the National Minimum Standard for Responsible Tourism in 2011 and 2012 the Sustainable Tourism Partnership Programme was launched to assist tourism establishments with the implementation of sustainability measures and the raising of the level of awareness of sustainability within the tourism industry.
There can be no doubt that for Tourism to be sustainable it must be economically feasible. Economic sustainability implies optimizing the development growth rate at a manageable level with full consideration of the limits of the destination environment. Environmental sustainability recognizes that the natural environment or a destination is not in perpetual supply and may be degraded and depleted. The natural environment must be protected for its own intrinsic value and as a resource for present as well as future generations. Socio-cultural sustainability in turn implies respect for social identity and social capital and culture and its assets, (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006).

If it is not managed carefully and sustainably, tourism is in danger of becoming a self-destructive process destroying the very resources on which it is based. The sustainability of tourism can be determined by measuring the three core areas namely socio-cultural, natural environment and economic sustainability.

Upon reflection of these international trends towards greater sustainability for the very resource on which tourism depends and to strive towards getting a greater portion of the benefits to the communities who should benefit from tourism, a mirror emerged in my own research endeavours as reflected in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>International trends towards Sustainable Tourism</th>
<th>Research Foci</th>
<th>Individual, co-authored research outputs and Masters and Doctoral Supervision</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable Development and the associated environmental degradation</td>
<td>Polyaromatic hydrocarbons and soil pollution, Integrated Water Management, Life cycle assessment, water and Carbon Foot printing</td>
<td>Matsebula (MSc) (2008); Opperman (MSc) (2009); Motsholopheko (MSc) (2009); Engelbrecht (MSc) (2010); Engelbrecht, Thorpe &amp; Mearns (2012); Wessels (MSc) (2015*)</td>
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<td>Public Participation, Resettlement &amp; the role of Civil Society in Environmental Management</td>
<td>Aregbeshola (MSc) (2009), Mearns (2011); Aregbeshola, Mearns &amp; Donaldson (2011); Mearns &amp; Glen (2014); Makhanya (MSc) (2015*); Aregbeshola (PhD) (2016*)</td>
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<td>Remote sensing and GIS for environmental decision making and management</td>
<td>Simms (MSc) (2010); Mathers (MSc) (2013); Nel (MSc) (2015*).</td>
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<td>Waste Management</td>
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<td>Heritage Impact Assessment</td>
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<td>Mass tourism and the effects of mass tourism</td>
<td>Tourism to Protected Areas</td>
<td>Mearns (1996); Mearns, Meeuwis &amp; Woldaardt (1997); Mearns (1997); Mearns &amp; Mearns (2009); Hicks (MA) (2010)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Second home development</td>
<td>Baker &amp; Mearns (2012); Hunter &amp; Mearns (2014)</td>
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There was a time when we could say that there was either a complete lack of knowledge, or at least room for doubt, about the consequences for our planet or our actions. That time has gone. We now know all too clearly what we are actually doing and that we need to do something about it urgently. We need to change. We all need to be the agents of change. We need to change the way we travel, the choices we make and how those choices affect the environment and the people around us.

Tonight I would like to lay down a challenge to all of you as Citizens of Planet Earth to get involved and to make a difference in that area, that community, that sphere of influence, where you live and work to bring about the change we need in order to live in greater harmony with our environment.

“We borrow environmental capital from future generations with no intention or prospect repaying (WCED, 1987: 8).” We will have to account for our actions to our children and grandchildren, and if we don’t get this right. What future will we leave them?
List of References


