

ABSTRACT

The most challenging aspect of carrying capacity is measuring it in terms of realistic indicators that will capture the complexity of any given system, yet without embroiling the procedure in meaningless and costly specifics. This paper looks into the various attempts to develop measurements of carrying capacity in the context of the ecotourism sector.

Preliminary findings show that in lieu of measures that entail pegging numerical upper limits to visitors at tourism destinations as earlier defined, new methodologies have evolved that allow for defining thresholds to carrying capacity in each relevant state or category (e.g., land use) of a defined system. These evolved frameworks allow for multiple data sourcing and methodologies as well as participatory planning mechanisms to arrive at results that allow for evaluation and mitigation responses among various stakeholders. The practicality and flexibility of the approaches are invaluable to sustainable ecotourism planning and development. However, it is clear that some data for certain states or categories may not be available and substituting these with approximate values may entail some subjectivity. Proxy indicators may have to be developed. In the interest of operational significance, the substitution of proxy indicators must be validated carefully and periodically assessed in terms of comparability and replicability.

Finally, the carrying capacity approaches and indicators reviewed were applicable to all recreational areas and protected areas, but not specifically to island coastal areas that are prone to overcrowding as a result of mass tourism. This is a specific area of investigation that is unique to a tourism destination type. The development of a composite outcome-based approach and a corresponding set of indicators will be useful in facilitating the effective management of specific resource-based recreation types.