

# A Literature Review on Evaluating Tourism Destinations

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**Abstract:** As people's increasing demands for tourism, tourism industry is developing rapidly, and gradually becomes one of the pilot industries of the country, so the researches on tourism have been paid deep attention by the academia, enterprises and government. Since the 1960s, the research of the tourism destinations including the scenic spots has gradually extended to the aspects of the tourism environmental carrying capacity, tourist satisfaction, resource development and ecological protection etc, so the paper should be helpful to the healthy and sustainable development of the tourism by understanding the environmental pressure, the development potential of tourism scenic spots and would review the ideas from three aspects of tourist environmental carrying capacity, tourist satisfaction, tourist resources exploitation and the sustainable development, so as to comprehend the current research status and discuss the prospects of the evaluation of tourism destinations.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

For the last few decades, tourism has become one of the major forces for economic growth in many developing and developed countries. Tourism contributes to economic growth through various channels including foreign currency earnings, attracting international investment, increasing tax revenues and creating additional employment opportunities (Alam, 2016). Thus, to develop tourism is good for the development of economy, and to advocate ecological civilization construction, sustainable and green development is the basic contents. And it is also advocated in the industry of tourism. Since the 1980s, the people of great vision has come out with the connotation and the features of sustainable tourism (Tang, 2013), and it gradually developed and also became the focus of the researches. Meanwhile, tourism destination is as the spatial carrier of tourism, and also its evaluation and development have become the research hot spots.

Based on reviewing the related literature about the evaluation of tourism destinations, the paper would summarize the ideas of the scholars from the aspects of tourism environmental carrying capacity, tourist satisfaction, tourism resources exploitation

and sustainable development, to understand the research status and to have an outlook of its future research direction.

## 2 RESEARCH OF EVALUATION OF TOURISM DESTINATIONS

### 2.1 Tourism Environmental Carrying Capacity

Tourism environmental carrying capacity is also known as the tourism environmental bearing capacity, and the theory of tourism environmental carrying capacity is developed from capacity and environmental capacity. As we know, the foreign related research involved in this aspect at the earliest is that Malthus (1798) mentioned the first basic research framework of capacity in *Principle of Population* (Seidl, 1999), and the terms of "environmental capacity" was first advanced by Hurst, the Belgian mathematician and biologist, in 1838 (Yang, 1996), but tourism environment carrying capacity was presented for the first time by Lapage (1963) and aimed to describe the maximum

capacity or carrying capacity (Wan, 2004). American scholar Wagar (1964) pointed out that the tourism environmental capacity was the tourism activity accounts that a tourism destination maintains the product quality in the long term (Wagar, 1964). Subsequent research pointed out that the tourist environmental carrying capacity was divided into the categories of biological and physical capacity, social and cultural capacity, mental capacity and management capacity (Lime, 1964). Judging from the relations between tourists, tourism resources and tourism destinations, they can be divided into material carrying capacity, ecological carrying capacity and the psychological carrying capacity (Pearce, 1989). And the more influential event was that under the study of tourism environmental carrying capacity in the 1980s, the professors of National Forestry Bureau put forward the life cycle assessment theory, and it was widely used in the environmental protection and management of tourist destinations of the United States, Australia, Canada and so on (David, 1985). Since the 1990s, many scholars have respectively carried out the further study of the definition of tourism environmental carrying capacity, establishing condition, monitoring and so on (Mathieson, 1980; Mieczkowski, 1995; Saveriades, 2000; R. Lawson, 2003; Weng, 2007).

Under the influence of foreign research on tourism environmental carrying capacity, Chinese scholars began to explore it in the 1980s. The initial research analysis was from the qualitative and quantitative perspective of tourism environmental capacity. For example, environmental capacity varied from the space environment of scenic spot (environmental capacity) to the space environment of scenic spot (Zhao, 1983), and tourism environmental carrying capacity should contain the natural environmental capacity in the physical and ecological sense and need to strengthen the studying of tourism environmental capacity theory and method from the aspects of regional tourism system like tourism object subsystem, the tourist media subsystem and tourism subject subsystem (Bao, 1987; Guo, 1990). Tourism environment carrying capacity included the carrying capacity of ecological environment, the resources space, psychological and economic aspects (Cui, 1995). Based on it, the research was to build the theory of tourism environment carrying capacity system and index system (Liu, 2000), and made clear that tourism environmental capacity of "limit" did not simply refer to the number of tourists limit, but referred to the limit of the affected tourism environment (Yang,

2003). Tourism environmental carrying capacity was stable and dynamic and appeared by seasonal variations with different tourist seasons (Yang, 2008), also the amounts of tourism activity depended on the minimum of resource space carrying capacity, ecological environmental carrying capacity, tourism economic development carrying capacity and social carrying capacity (Du, 2013). And the index system of tourism environmental carrying capacity could be establish through tourism resources environment, ecological environment, tourism social economic environment and psychological environment factors (Wang, 2015). Based on these ideas, the follow-up study mainly focused on the quantitative research of tourism environmental capacity (Li, 2016).

Therefore the technology route that the scholars at home and abroad use for studying tourism environmental carrying capacity was different, the foreign studies were mainly based on the management of eco-tourism experiences with an overview of getting command of environmental impacts and the major ideas at home was to control the number of visitors (Lin, 2007), but the findings are lesser, especially on the carbon emissions capacity based on studying the process of tourism environmental carrying capacity.

## 2.2 Tourist Satisfaction

The study of tourist satisfaction originated in product quality and service quality research in manufacturing (Lian, 2004), since the late 1970s, foreign scholars have started the research about tourists satisfaction connotation, influence factors, measurement and so on. For instance, tourists satisfaction showed the "positive" feeling or perception on the basis of the "positive" effects through comparing the expectation of tourists with actual perception to tourist destination (Bread, 1980), and it was not only in the experience of the tourist destination, but the reflection of perceiving whether to be satisfied with how people being treated in tourism destinations (Um, 2006), also, there was other studies on using the SERVQUAL model to do the measurement of tourist satisfaction and service quality analysis (AKama, 2003), the effect analysis of satisfaction (Alegre, 2009) and intention of revisiting and the impact that satisfaction and dissatisfaction to revisit intentions (Alegrea, 2010), using the structural equation modeling to analyze the impact of the relations between destination image and the perceived value to the tourist satisfaction and tourist loyalty

(Ramseok-Munhurrin, 2015), analyzing and comparing the tourist satisfaction among the tourism industry based on the tourist satisfaction index model and expectation-assuming framework (Agyeiwaah, 2016).

In China, the tourist satisfaction research started relatively late, and the researchers have mainly focused on the extension of tourist satisfaction connotation, the measurement, the influence factors, tourist service quality and shopping satisfaction in recent years. For example, it indicated that tourism scenic tourist satisfaction was a kind of comprehensive psychological evaluation to meet the demand degree of the tourism activities in the aspects of tourism landscape, infrastructure, entertainment and hospitality services and so on (Dong, 2005), discussing the influence factors and evaluation system based on the gray system theory (Nan, 2008), establishing tourist satisfaction index evaluation model from the six impact modules of environmental perception, travel expectations, sightseeing expectations, tourist satisfaction, loyalty for tourists and visitors complaints (Wang, 2006), using structural equation to construct tourist satisfaction measurement model from the emotion and cognition (Luo, 2011), building the appraisal model of tourist satisfaction from the six aspects of eating, accommodation, transportation, traveling, shopping and entertainment with PC-FUZZY-IPA method (Liao, 2012), drawing on the core ideas and the structure of the US Customer Satisfaction Index model and the European Customer Satisfaction Index model and using the SPSS to analyze the influence factors of tourist satisfaction (Chen, 2014), and taking ordered-probit model to examine and analyze the hypothesis relationship between visitor's individual variables, scenic spot variables and tourist satisfaction (Lin, 2016).

So the domestic and foreign researches mainly concentrated on the concept, connotation, influence factors, assessment system model, and great achievement has been realized, but the studies on advocating low carbon economy ideas and exploring the ways of low carbon development in scenic areas, especially on the satisfaction of tourists experiencing low carbon scenic areas are not in abundance and need to be further studied.

### 2.3 Tourism Resources Exploitation and Sustainable Development

Since in the 1990s, the sustainable development of tourism destinations and its evaluation indexes and methods have been the mainstream to be studied. In

1992, the world tourism organization took tourism as the center, and started the studies of tourism index system around with tourism activities and conducted experiments in some developed countries, meanwhile Eber (1992) put forward the guiding principles for the sustainable development of tourism (Holden, 2003). After the year of 2001, The researchers in British, Canada, Hungary constructed the indexes suitable for their own tourism sustainable development based on local features (Chen, 2008). Many scholars respectively carried out the researches on the aspects of sustainable development index selection criteria, methodology, evaluation framework and the evaluation index system etc, such as using the Delphi method to have the survey results analysis on tourism sustainable development indexes (Miller, 2001), adding cultural and ecological system to the evaluation framework of sustainable development of regional tourism so as to judge the sustainability of tourism destination (Tae, 2005), trying to create an entire evaluation way for sustainable development and construct the sustainable development of performance indicators to enable the tourism of the protected area developed sustainably (Castellani, 2010), and developing the space model of natural tourism plan based on the standard of the appeal and the accessibility of the target and the regional could be divided into seven types regarding the degree of attraction and accessibility (Rahayuningsiha, 2016).

On the basis of existing research achievements abroad, the domestic scholars combined with the actual situation, and had positively explored and studied the construction of the evaluation index system from the aspects of sustainable development, environmental quality and resource development, evaluation methods and model of scenic areas, such as the preliminary establishment of index system for evaluation of the sustainable development in regional tourism from the aspects of ecological environment, social culture and tourism supporting system and so on (Cui, 1999), and considering the factors of tourism resources and environmental protection, tourism economy, social benefits, the construction degree of soft and hard environment and the development ability of tourism customer market and putting forward the model of multi-objective linear weighting function of the evaluation index system and comprehensive evaluation (Wang, 2001), constructing the sustainable development index system of tourism industry and the tourism objective judgment model through status evaluation, diagnosis evaluation, trend evaluation and object evaluation (Niu, 2002), to build the tourism

ecological footprint model constituted by food, accommodation, transportation, sightseeing and shopping to evaluate the development of tourist sustainable (Jiang, 2006), in line with indexes of tourism resources, ecology and environment, social economy and culture, risk and disasters and sustainability to have an assessment on environmental impact of tourism master plan (Huang, 2010). Putting forward the main problems of the market allocation in seaside tourism and the countermeasures for the sustainable development to improve the value system of seaside tourism (Zhao, 2014). With regard to the sustainable development of rural tourism resources, the overall balance of "ecological civilization" and "tourism development" should be assured (Zhao, 2015), and from the view of economy to consider the development of tourism resource, sustainable development should insist on the principles of the ethics of location, characteristic, the market, diversity as well as protection (Wang, 2016).

From the reviews above, the foreign and domestic researches on the development of tourism resources and sustainable development are closely combined with each period and local characteristics and the stage progress has been made. Based on eco-tourism and low carbon, new requirements on scenic area about the sustainable development pattern of low carbon economy are raised, thus to achieve long-term sustainable development, low carbon development of scenic areas has gradually become the inherent requirements of both economic development and environmental protection, and the contents of evaluation for low carbon development still need further research.

### 3 PROSPECTS OF EVALUATION OF TOURISM DESTINATIONS

To sum up, the researches at home and abroad for evaluating tourism destination mainly involve the analysis of tourist environment carrying capacity, the evaluation regarding tourist horizon of tourism destination, tourism resources development and the overall planning related to impact on ecological environmental impact, environmental quality and sustainable development system of the tourism destination.

Through the process of reviewing the related literature, the discussion indicates that the research of tourism destinations has obtained many achievements and laid a certain foundation for later

studies, however, it still has some demerits. Firstly, the studies on the effect evaluation of low-carbon tourist environmental implementation under the background of low-carbon economy is of lack and it's difficult to reveal the degree of order, trend and social low-carbon management effectiveness of its inner system on the low-carbon construction of the tourist destinations. Secondly, the application of tourism destination evaluation method and model, has mostly confined to the traditional static and linear evaluation method, and the aspects of tourist economy and society are not mentioned enough. Thirdly, the evaluation system of tourism destination has focused only on the study of tourism destination itself and been lack of multi-view and multi-angle analysis, and the studies on the destination itself and its stakeholders, such as tourism destination managers, and tourists, local residents in this community, was not comprehensively integrated.

Aiming at solving the problems and shortcomings in the current evaluation of environmental quality, resource development and sustainable development of tourism destinations, the further research will probably be based on low carbon economy, regarding the scenic area system as the main research object and views, and taking the stakeholders of scenic spot as auxiliary study object, by means of quantitative and qualitative analysis and with the method of system analysis, and showing the state of the low-carbon management of the scenic spots from the macro and micro level and predicting its future trend to reflect the current and future development of the scenic spot comprehensively.

### 4 CONCLUSIONS

Through the summary and review of related literature about tourism environmental carrying capacity, tourist satisfaction and tourism destination resources exploitation and sustainable development, the current research progress of tourism destination evaluation is reviewed, and it sets a theory basis of the subsequent studying and contributes to the tourism destinations adjusting to the size of the layout, formulating development plans, and it is also helpful to the sustainable development of the tourist industry. In the era of advocating peace and development, the rapid development of tourism promotes the economic and cultural exchanges between countries, and has a great role in country's regional poverty alleviation, cultural construction, economic development with environment friendly,

and it is of great economic significance and social significance copes.

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