Sustainable Tourism Development: A Case Study of Savannah, United States

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Abstract. The purpose of this study focuses on analysing sustainable tourism development in Savannah, Georgia, United States. Based on the notable factors of sustainable tourism mentioned in contemporary literature, three elements - impact, embeddedness, and authenticity were chosen to assess the current issues of Savannah's tourism. The results of this study will also summarize suggestions and actions toward developing sustainable tourism in Savannah for the future.

1. Introduction

Savannah established in 1733, is the oldest city in Georgia, U.S., the city of Savannah became the British colonial capital of the Province of Georgia and later the first state capital of Georgia. Nowadays, Savannah attracts millions of visitors on a yearly basis. Savannah is nationally and internationally well known as its rich history and historic architectures and has the reputation for American Southern charm and hospitality. Savannah's downtown area is known as one of the largest National Historic Landmark Districts in the country, which includes the Savannah Historic District, the Savannah Victorian Historic District, and 22 historic public squares [1]. Notably, as a coastal city, another tourism attraction is its beach and coastal scenery, and it is especially well known for Tybee island. From this, we can see that the major attractions in Savannah blends nature and cultural heritage.
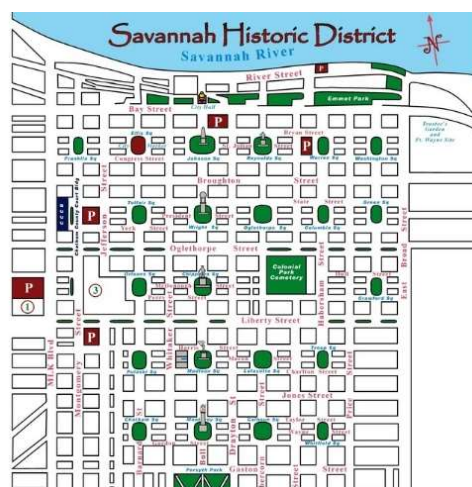

Figure 1. Map of historic downtown Savannah Georgia [2].

2. Method

This paper aims to discuss the development of sustainable tourism in Savannah, to assess the current tourism condition, and seek strategies for the future [3]. Sustainable tourism development refers to tourism that meets the demands of current tourists and local regions while preserving and strengthening opportunities for the future. Additionally, Saarinen states that resource-based (natural and cultural) and community-based (participation of social capital in a local environment) activities are important factors for tourism sustainability [4]. Notably, Jackle Clarke emphasized some specific factors for approaches to sustainable tourism, such as tourism impact, authenticity, integrity, equity, etc. [5].

The methodology of the paper is mainly literature review—the review of academic literature on sustainable tourism, and official government documents of Savannah in terms of its tourism conditions. To obtain more vivid tourism information, the author did some site visits throughout Savannah, and interviewed Erica Backus in 2015, the director of public relations in Visit Savannah. Visit Savannah is the largest business department of the Savannah Area Chamber of Commerce and is the primary tourism marketing organization in the city, supporting local businesses to network with visitors and other tourism related platforms.

This paper will observe and analyze Savannah's sustainable tourism in three points: impact, embeddedness, and authenticity. Then, it will summarize the strategies for sustainable tourism development based on the current conditions.

3. Observation of Savannah's Sustainability

3.1. Tourism Impacts

3.1.1. Environmental Impacts. Positive: The historic buildings and city squares in Savannah are being well protected. To attract more visitors and leave them with a good impression, the city should maintain cleanliness and be in a good conservation condition. Through such efforts, the city's appearance will be well maintained.

Negative: Tourism could cause pressure on natural resources such as land, food, energy and water and lead to short supply for local area [6]. The costal ecosystem will be disturbed because of tourism. The damaging of the coastal environment is a common issue for coastal cities, caused by careless boating, diving, and fishing, or the consumption of seafood pressure on local fish populations [7]. Additionally, tourism will cause environmental pollution, such as air pollution because of traffic as well as water pollution and noise pollution. The city will also lose some open green space due to the building of infrastructure such as hotels and roads.

3.1.2. Socio-cultural Impacts. Positive: The history and culture of Savannah will be emphasized so as to make the city more attractive; in this way, the cultural identity will be preserved. The demand for historical and cultural exhibitions will also increase and the building of infrastructure will improve the quality of life for residents.

Negative: Tourism will cause excessive drinking, alcoholism, and crime which is a big problem in Savannah. Unwanted lifestyle changes will also happen. On weekends or holidays, residents' leisure life will be disturbing by crowded groups of tourists. Moreover, residents will be excluded from some resources, such as beaches, downtown open spaces or public facilities [8].

3.1.3. Economic Impacts. Positive: In 2019, it reached the number of about 14.8 million visitors for one year, the visitors averagely stayed about 2.5 nights. Tourism generates over 27,000 jobs, and statistics show that visitors spent more than $3.1 billion in this year. The tourism clearly created economic opportunities for local residents and businesses [9].

Negative: The increase price of goods and services is a burden on local population. Notably, the price of land and housing in Savannah is very high as well so the cost of living will increase. Additionally,

the profits may be exported by non-local owners. Although most jobs related to tourism attempt to hire local people in Savannah, this issue will still occur.

3.2. Embeddedness

Embeddedness refers to tourism activities or attractions that are apart of local social and recreational life and those that are built on the current environment, space and cultural tradition of an area. Savannah is full of activity year-round. According to Erica Backus, even though the peak months are April, May, and June for visitors, the tourism activities are arranged evenly throughout the year. Notably, Savannah hosts local festivals and events to attract tourists and there are various festivals—almost once a month. The largest event is St. Patrick's Day parade in March where over 400,000 people will come to take park in. The music festival and film festival are also popular. There is a very special event in Savannah which is the ghost walking tour. Because of the long history and the book *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* [10], ghost tourism has become popular in Savannah. This isn't just during Halloween, but this event is year-round. The ghost walking tour is very famous among tourists, about half of the tourists who choose a city walking tour in Savannah will also take a ghost walking tour at night. In respond to visitors' needs, the ghost tours are not only about ghost theme, but the guides also created various place and history-based experiences, to attract visitors for the increase of the economic and social effect [11].

3.3. Authenticity

Authenticity refers to the need for tourism destinations to build tourism based on their innate cultural, natural, economic, and historical assets. Tourism in Savannah is based on its rich history and there are various old buildings and museums, such as the Isaiah Davenport House Museum and Juliette Gordon Low's Birthplace, which all reflect the history of the city. These old buildings and squares have become places of interest where people can visit museums or some old houses to learn its history. Also, some walking tour routes have been designed to help visitors travel in this city. Savannah is a walkable city and there are 88 registered tour companies that provide walking tours [12]. Through following the tour routes or taking a tour shuttle, visitors can easily enjoy learning about this city. Apart for the historic area, tourists are also willing to spend time on the appreciation of its natural resources, such as Tybee Island and River Street. There are various coastal ecotours to visit the extraordinary marshes, waterways, barrier islands, and blackwater creeks near Savannah. This is a good example as these tours use the city's historical heritage and nature to reflect the authenticity of one place.

4. Discussion

There are two faces of tourism. To develop sustainable tourism in Savannah, there are some sustainable strategies that can be applied to maximize the positive benefits from tourism while reducing negative impacts.

4.1. Historic District.

First, the Historic District in Savannah is the main attraction for tourists, To strengthen its positive impact on tourism, the government could engage the local community and educational institutes such as the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD), to create volunteer or educational activities. This can be geared toward improving the urban history attraction with art and culture, thus granting tourists a more creative tourism experience. Also, with 22 historic squares and numerous historic houses, museums and monuments, some stakeholders have expressed that as there is no major landmark. Savannah's visiting experience is scattered between various landmarks, and the path to finding these places between different squares is poor. The government suggests to conduct a professional study to evaluate Savannah's major landmarks and create leading destinations for tourists [13].

4.2. Environmental Protection.

Second, the protection of the environment should also be enhanced. Ceballos-Lascurain implemented a concept of ecotourism, which is stated as being environmentally responsible, reducing the impact of

tourists' visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, enable visitors to appreciate natural environment, in the same time, to promotes conservation. With low visitor impact, ecotourism could also provide local people socio-economic benefits [14]. Ecotourism for Savannah could be, for example (in terms of air, noise, waste-water issues), the improvement of control and the execution of environmental standards as well as the establishment of buffer zones around sensitive natural areas in coastal areas [15]. The City of Savannah government has granted fundamental services that support some business types such as recycling and sanitation, parks and recreation facilities and free downtown transportation [16]. Additionally, the city will collect food waste in restaurants and related small businesses, and donate leftover food to local organizations that feed local food banks, and pick-up of produce waste for composting businesses. Instead of encouraging private vehicles, the city also provides bicycles, free shuttles or boats for visitors to explore downtown Savannah such as Fare Free Shuttle and Savannah Belles Ferry, Bike Share and the planning of safe biking routes, Savannah Canoe and Kayak and North Island Surf and Kayak.

4.3. Endogeneity.
Third, the endogeneity of Savannah could be enhanced, which reflects retaining maximum benefits in a locality by using local resources such as facilitating the purchasing of local food and construction materials. This also includes build up networks of local producers and merchants to improve better marketing and the creation of new productions to satisfies the requirements of visitors. Tourism in Savannah has already provided thousands of jobs for local people in accommodation, food & beverages, local transportation, etc. For the future, Savannah could provide an assessment on incentivizing local producers to further activate the farmer's market and local restaurants. Moreover, they can enhance the food festival by organizing food and wine events, thus creating unique culinary tourism [13]. For example, there are already some farm-to-table catering services that have successfully operated such as Thrive Catering, Cha Bella and Local 11Ten. Notably, some local food suppliers such as Adam's Farm, Joseph Fields Farm, Billy's Botanicals, etc. can provide vegetables, grains, meats and sea food to enhance the endogenous of Savannah [16].

5. Conclusion
In closing, as both a historic and coastal city, Savannah provides great value for tourism. The development of sustainable tourism is crucial, as its not only benefits businesses for tourists and the government, but also requires the collaboration of local community organizations, educational institutions, and local businesses. Such efforts require them to engage and to maintain a healthy and sustainable environment for both tourists as well as citizens.

Acknowledgments

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