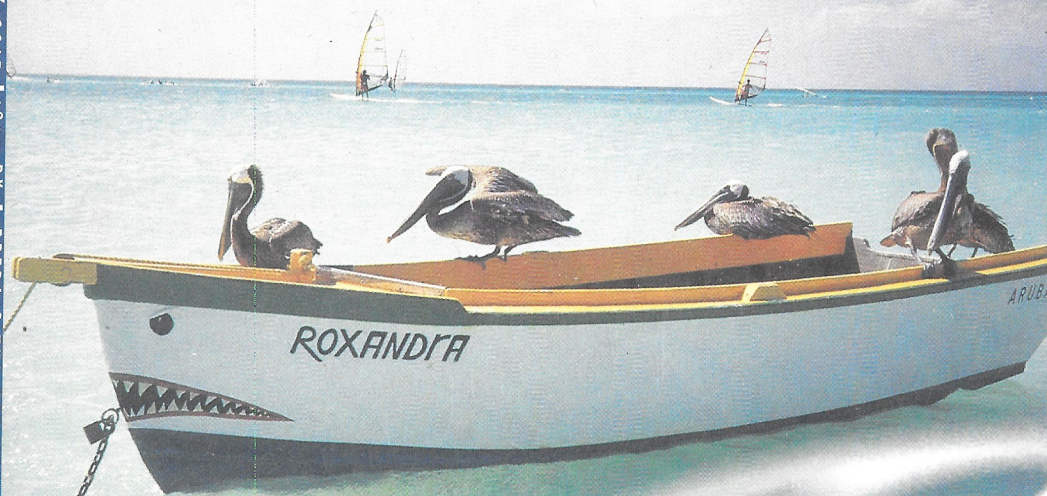


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DESTINATIONS FOR GENERATIONS

INAUGURAL ADDRESS BY
NICO VISSER,
ETM PROFESSOR IN
SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT
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NHTV

Netherlands Institute of
Tourism and Transport Studies



DESTINATIONS FOR GENERATIONS

INTRODUCING THE ETM CHAIR FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Ladies and gentlemen:

Tourism is a booming business. With an estimated 670 million international arrivals in the year 2000, tourism has become the world's largest trade, in terms of export earnings overtaking the chemical and automotive parts industries. Tourism provides direct employment for 115 million people worldwide, which accounts for 4 % of the world's total. Tourism has grown 1.5 times faster than the World GDP with no sign of slowing down in the future. Geographically tourism reaches from Antarctica to the North Pole and from the depths of the Caribbean Sea to the peaks of the Himalayas.

Such an enormous business cannot exist without creating consequences and unfortunately there are also negative effects to tourism.

Social structures, culture, nature and the environment all suffer under its pressure. However if well managed, the growth in tourism - the number of international arrivals is projected to more than double in the coming twenty years - also offers new possibilities for maintaining social and cultural integrity and for conserving nature and the environment.

To protect destinations for future generations, we have to counter negative impacts and to cater for a sustainable development of tourism in the future. Knowledge and understanding of causes, consequences and alternatives are essential to make the right choices and the necessary adjustments in tourism development. This is where the Chair for Sustainable Tourism Development comes in.

But before we begin to talk about the Chair, let me first describe the downsides of tourism for you. I will do so from a historical perspective, giving you some bad and some good news. Then, after briefly analysing the concepts of sustainable tourism development and corporate citizenship and after describing the roles of the stakeholders involved, we will take a closer look at the Chair and its challenging tasks ahead.

DOWNSIDES OF TOURISM

Since the invention of tourism, Europe has been 'tourism continent number one', with a strong concentration of tourism on the coasts of the Mediterranean. I invite you to take a look at the environmental and social impacts that tourism has brought upon these coasts.

MEDITERRANEAN

All around the Mediterranean, tourism has contributed to a severe lack of drinking water. In this relatively dry part of the world, the individual tourist consumes on average twice as much water as a local inhabitant. Due to the water shortage caused by tourism, the coastal communities are forced to produce drinking water out of sea-water or to import expensive drinking water from elsewhere.

Consequently traditional economic activities, such as agriculture, are marginalized by the lack of water. Consumption of large amounts of water leads to a greater production of wastewater, which eventually ends up in the Mediterranean Sea.

The cumulating pollution forms a problem because of the low refreshment speed of this Sea. And although a growing number of hotels and municipalities treat their waste water -at least partially- before discharging it into the sea, recently developed holiday destinations still contribute negatively to the balance. The large amounts of extra energy needed for tourism, are in most cases produced out of fossil fuels, which add to the environmental pressures on the region and the atmosphere.

Garbage produced in the name of tourism, forms another persistent environmental problem around the Mediterranean.

All these forms of pollution have their repercussions on nature. Over-exploitation of natural local food products, certain fish species for instance, and the production of souvenirs out of scarce natural products, may lead to even further degradation of nature. In a great number of cases, the last remaining bits of unique nature are taken over by the tourism industry for hotel construction.

COSTA TOURISTICA

In many regions around the Mediterranean the traditional character of the original beach resorts and their surrounding landscape has been destroyed by the erection of huge concrete structures to lodge the thousands of visiting tourists.

The construction of these new tourist centres has led to a disappearance of the traditional societies that used to live on the coasts of the Mediterranean.

The impact of tourism on the local population around the Mediterranean took place precisely as described in the study books on tourism. In fact it is the number of tourists in combination with their behaviour, that influences the local social structures and culture in the tourism destinations. Normally, tourism, in its first stages, is welcomed by the local population: the tourist is an interesting sight; as long as the number of visitors is low, tourism will not influence their daily life. However with the growing number of visiting tourists the absorption limits are reached and the attitude of the local population changes: tourists are seen more and more as a commercial object. Tourist eating, drinking and other behaviour patterns are copied, especially by the younger part of the local population.

And as soon as these new lifestyles are no longer affordable to them, jealousy and resentment enter the social scene, eventually resulting in social unrest and crime. Tourism and local population have at that point in the development process become two worlds apart. In this turmoil of changes, the local cultural traditions are often forgotten.

The negative impacts I just described are not unique to the Mediterranean; they are prominent in many coastal areas around the world.

Apart from the Mediterranean there is an inland area in Central Europe with heavy tourism pressures, accounting for more than 12 percent of the world-wide turnover in tourism, which deserves a closer look:

THE ALPS

On a yearly basis, more than 120 million tourists weave their way through the mountains and valleys of Switzerland, Austria, France and Italy. This overflow of visitors has contributed to greater air pollution, the disfiguration of the landscape through construction of hotels, apartment buildings and roads, and towards large consumption of water and energy.

The growth in winter tourism has also led to the felling of trees on the slopes for the construction of ski-pistes and ski-lifts, which in its turn has contributed to erosion and a growth in landslides and avalanches over the decades. Snow cannons add artificial snow to the already compacted natural snow on the mountain sides, which does not melt in time to allow the Alpine meadows to recuperate along their normal lifecycle. By inter-connecting ski areas the last undisturbed refuges for the fragile Alpine plant and animal life are sacrificed to tourism.

With the introduction of tourism into the Alpine population, social structures have been disrupted and traditional ways of life, such as farming, have been abandoned. The discontinuation of traditional agriculture, means that the Alpine meadows are no longer grazed by cows in summer. This in turn results in the disappearance of grazing dependent herbs and plants and the related fauna. The final outcome of this process is a dramatic decline in biodiversity in the Alps and an increase in erosion, landslides and avalanches.

NEUKIRCHEN AM GROSSVENEDIGER

After this list of negative impacts of tourism on the Alps, you may have the impression that all is lost. Therefore it might be interesting to take a close look at a place that is trying hard to live by the principals of sustainable tourism.

Neukirchen am Grossvenediger is a small village with 2.600 inhabitants in the Province of Salzburg in the Austrian Alps. Both in the summer and winter seasons the number of inhabitants more than doubles because of the alpine tourists that come to town and occupy the 3.300 hotel- and pension beds in Neukirchen.

At first sight Neukirchen could be seen as the prototype of the hundreds of alpine holiday villages that are scattered around Austria and Switzerland. But Neukirchen is different. 'Neukirchen is a village that places concern for the environment squarely at the forefront of everything it does', the brochures say; now what does that mean in practice?

To begin with, 75 percent of its total 6.500 hectares of surface, forms an integral part of the Hohe Tauern National Park, the largest national park in the Alps, that borders the village on the south side.

This geographical position provides all sorts of advantages - who wouldn't want to have a national park in his backyard - but it also brings about a number of obligations and restrictions in terms of zoning and building, as well as restrictions for agricultural and industrial activities. By accepting these restrictions, formulated by the National Park, Neukirchen became an official 'National Park Community'.

TO SKI, OR NOT TO SKI

Neukirchen's main ski area, at the bottom of the Wildkogel (2100 meters) only covers 3% of the total surface of the municipality. Compared to other resorts in the Alps, this ski-area is modest in size, so the pressures on it are relatively high. And only through intensive care for the underlying nature, can its long term quality be guaranteed. By their grazing during summertime, the village cows maintain the biodiversity of the meadows at the bottom of the Wildkogel and give back their enriching manure in exchange for the grazed grass and herbs. Come winter and snow, the vulnerable parts of the ski slopes are carefully covered with straw, to prevent the snow from being compacted directly on the bottom. Experts confirm that here, on the slopes of the Wildkogel, nature does not degrade under the pressures of snow and thousands of skiers. In this delicate balance between human use and nature, snow cannons are not welcome.

The sun's energy is used to drive one of the ski lifts at the Wildkogel ski-arena. The mountain restaurant, which caters for hundreds of luncheon-guests on a daily basis, is connected to the municipality's sewage system and has a well developed system of waste separation. For transportation of the winter tourists around the village, free ski-busses are available.

In terms of energy, Neukirchen may be considered to be self-supporting, as all the needed electricity is provided by its own two small hydropower installations. Even so, much emphasis is put on educating the inhabitants and visitors to save energy as well as on proper water and waste management.

Architecture in Neukirchen is relatively traditional. There are no large scale or high-rise hotels or apartment blocks. Virtually all hotels and pensions are small and family owned, thus providing for employment and income to a wide group of inhabitants. The food that is served in the hotels and restaurants in Neukirchen is for the greater part produced locally on an organic basis. In order to control the production methods of the foodstuffs and its consumption in local restaurants, a number of Eco-labels have been developed in the context of the National Park. Neukirchen is doing its best to live by the guidelines of sustainable tourism. For the most part it is succeeding, but there are some persistent negative components.

NO MOBILITY, NO TOURISM

One of the environment-related issues that even Neukirchen has trouble coping with, is international mobility, often referred to as the Achilles heel of tourism. Almost all forms of mobility -probably only excluding walking and swimming- put pressure on the environment. Airplanes are seen as the biggest polluters with the automobile as number two, followed by train and bus.

The fact is, all these means of transportation use fossil fuels that are exhaustible and contribute to higher CO₂ levels in the atmosphere and therefore to climate change, whilst most of the exhaust gasses also have additional polluting effects. Furthermore every form of transportation needs infrastructure and this infrastructure destroys nature and disturbs the landscape.

As a rule collective transportation as compared to individual is less polluting. But if we look at today's transportation mix, for instance in winter sports tourism to the Alps, between 70 and 80 percent of all tourists still travel in their private cars, instead of travelling by Eco-friendlier collective alternatives, the train or the touring car. We still have a long way to go.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Now let us have a look at the developments in thinking about how to cope with the negative effects of tourism on the environment.

The leaders of the world assembled in the Earth Summit, the World's Conference on Environment and Development in Rio in 1992. Here, for the first time they recognised the long term consequences of economic development and population growth for the environment. During this conference the concept of 'sustainable development' (as developed by the Brundtland Commission) was presented as a coherent way out of the problems. This three dimensional concept allows for economic development that should however not be detrimental to the population or the environment. As was the case with other economic fields, sustainable development was also projected on tourism and this led to the following definition:

Sustainable tourism development meets the needs of the present tourists and host regions (destinations) while protecting and enhancing the opportunity for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled, while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems.

THE TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE

With a shift from 'public' to 'private' over the last couple of years, the private sector developed a concept highly comparable to sustainable development, called 'corporate citizenship'. This concept is primarily aimed at commercial enterprises and preaches a moral standard of business, that gives well balanced attention to three elements; Profit, People and Planet.

International management guru John Elkington refers to these three P's as the 'triple bottom line'. He states that 21st century business will not survive, unless proper attention is given to the correct balancing of these three P's.

In relating these 'P's' to tourism, the P for profit not only means that tourism should be a commercially profitable sector, but there is also the element of income generation in holiday destinations, as well as revenue sharing.

The P for people not only refers to fair employment, but also to social and cultural integrity in destinations. The third P for planet aims at properly managing the environment and conserving the world's nature.

To Elkington's three P's, I would like to add a fourth. This P is rather indicative to tourism. It stands for peace and political stability, both being essential prerequisites for tourism. How relevant peace and political stability are, is illustrated by the political unrest in Indonesia that caused a definite decline in tourism. The same applies to Turkey and Kenya, both destinations whose political instability has led to dramatic decline in the numbers of visiting tourists.

Tourism should however not only be reacting to political instability, it could also contribute to stability. A perfect example of such a contribution is the creation of a number of trans-frontier so called 'peace parks' in southern Africa, that, through the facilitation of tourism without borders inside those areas, contribute to the political stability in the area. This stabilizing role is a perfect example of tourism as a positive tool for development.

SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES

Because, apart from coping with the negative impacts, we should realise that tourism has an enormous potential for development, especially given its projected growth in the coming twenty years.

Millions of new jobs will be created in this sector, providing an income to families worldwide, offering all sorts of career opportunities, especially to women, whose position in many countries could use some support.

If well planned, tourism could be used to contribute to cultural regeneration and to the proper maintenance of and support to cultural heritage.

Through different mechanisms, tourism may even contribute to the conservation of nature and its proper management. It may even help to save the tropical rainforest, the coral reefs and Antarctica. Promising example in this context is the Pan Parks programme of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) that aims at protecting Eastern Europe's nature by providing economic value through tourism.

In short, tourism could be an excellent tool for development, of course on the condition that this development takes place within the limits of sustainability.

Education is there to assist in this thrilling process.

FROM GREEN TO RED

As you have seen, the sustainable tourism approach has up to now mainly focused on issues related to nature and the environment, probably because we thought they were relatively easy to tackle. Another reason for this initial concentration on nature and the environment is, that local non-governmental environmental organisations have been quite vocal and successful in expressing their concern about the negative impacts of tourism on nature and the environment.

In the coming years however, I expect to see social - such as the position of women - and socio-cultural issues - such as the delicate position of indigenous people - flaring up and receiving more attention with the rising pressures of tourism.

Then, with a time frame of 5-10 years, I expect delicate economic issues like revenue sharing in holiday destinations to become more prominent than they are now.

STAKEHOLDERS IN TOURISM

This brings us to a further analysis of the major players in tourism and their roles in making the product sustainable.

DESTINATIONS

First of all, there are the so called holiday 'destinations', which are geographical concentrations of tourism activities, like islands or a wider circle of hotels and other tourism infrastructure or sometimes a whole country, around an international airport. The term destination includes not only the built tourism infrastructure-hotels, restaurants, etc.- but also the people that happen to live there, their living culture and monuments, as well as nature and the environment. There are 'old' destinations that have seen tourism come and go. There are also new or emerging destinations convinced that they will not make the mistakes that some of the old ones have made in the course of their development. But for all these destinations, in all their elements, be it social cultural or natural, there is one fundamental aspect that is decisive for the amount and type of tourism a destination can withstand: the carrying capacity.

Or in other words: how much tourism can a local culture absorb without losing its identity; how much tourism can nature take without permanent damage. What are the 'levels of acceptable change'? Setting these levels, sticking to them and constantly monitoring to see if they work in practice, is for a great part what sustainable tourism is all about.

Destinations have in some cases gone through a bedazzling process of economic development triggered by tourism. In many cases these destinations were simple farming or fishing communities before tourism arrived, with the planning and management infrastructure that one could expect. In some twenty years or less, these villages have developed to mid-sized cosmopolitan towns with all social and management problems attached. However their administrations and political leadership in most cases did not keep pace with the tourism and urban development. In still many cases, the knowledge, experience and sustainable vision on how tourism should develop is lacking in destinations. Often the tourism sector itself has become a decisive power.

In this respect there is a need for 'destination emancipation' in which education may play an important role.

TOURISTS

The second stakeholder is the individual tourist. You may well ask: 'why doesn't the tourist complain about the negative impacts?' The answer is simple: in most cases the average tourist chooses a different destination every year, thus staying totally unaware of the 'before and after' scenario. They haven't a clue as to what a destination looked like before they arrived, and don't usually return to see what damage has been done.

Furthermore, tourism is what you may call a 'facade industry', 'keep the garbage out of sight', and therefore real environmental or social abuse may remain hidden to the untrained holiday makers eye.

Another reason is that the tourist doesn't always feel responsible for the negative effects that his or her very presence causes in the holiday destination. He considers it to be 'their' problem.

A last important reason is that there are no real tourist organisations, which makes it difficult for the individual tourist to pressure for improvements.

Other cases of international environmental mismanagement, such as the overexploitation of the tropical forests, have led to international public reaction, with (in this case) consumers pressing for a more sustainable utilisation of the forest resources by introducing an Eco-label for sustainably harvested tropical hardwood. In the case of tourism i don't see this happening.

TOUR OPERATORS

There is however a third stakeholder that could -or in my view should- make a difference: tour operators follow the developments as they visit holiday destinations regularly to buy up hotel beds and screen excursions for the next season. These tour operators in fact are to a high degree dependent on the state of the holiday destination, because, intact nature and culture are the basic elements of a destination. Can a tour operator advertise a destination that has polluted swimming water, a degraded nature and nothing to offer in cultural terms? Such a destination simply does not sell. And in a sustainable relationship it's for better or worse which in this case implies, that the tour operator should assist the destination in protecting itself against over exploitation in environmental and social terms.

In my view tour operators have for the greater part neglected their responsibility to assist holiday destinations in coping with the negative impacts and planning their future in a sustainable way. They too could well benefit from education.

On the other hand, tour operators and travel agents have the right tools to educate the tourists as well; this role fits their position as intermediate between the tourists and the destinations perfectly. Their most important tools are the holiday brochure and the information given over the counter in the travel agency and - in less than a few years time - via the Internet.

These three parties, the holiday destination -in all aspects like its people and their culture, hotels, infrastructure and nature-, the tourist and the tour operator -as the intermediate between tourists and destinations-, are the main stakeholders in tourism and they will have to make the difference.

If we want to achieve sustainable tourism, these three parties are the main players; they are the ones that need to be educated about sustainable tourism. And this leads us to the Chair for Sustainable Tourism Development.

THE ROLE OF THE CHAIR

The idea of a Chair for Sustainable Tourism actually developed out of the realization that tourism has caused all sorts of negative impacts and could potentially have a much greater negative impact on the basis of its projected explosive growth. At the same time however there is the notion that growth in tourism -if managed properly- has this enormous potential for development and creates opportunities for people, their culture and for the conservation of nature and the environment.

Both, curbing the negative effects and guiding the development process in a sustainable direction, call for an integrated and co-ordinated approach for which coming generations of tourism managers should be properly prepared.

Over the years, several initiatives focusing on aspects of sustainable tourism have been taken at the NHTV; study books were written, lectures were given on this topic. These initiatives are now gladly incorporated in the Chair, that will provide continuity, the necessary integrated approach and a coherent basis for education and research.

In fact the word 'Chair' may be somewhat misleading. What we are talking about, is a group of enthusiastic lecturers at the NHTV, around my colleague Ton van Egmond and myself, that form the nucleus of all sorts of activities related to sustainable tourism development, focusing on education and research.

After a first successful two weeks seminar on sustainable tourism development last month, the Chair is presently developing the programme for a full final study year on sustainable tourism development in the next educational year.

Apart from education and research, a third line of activities of the Chair will be to organise national and international conferences and workshops on aspects of sustainable tourism. One of the first big events on the calendar of the Chair is the Groeneveld IV Conference on Sustainable Tourism Development to be held on 25 May 2000, and that will focus on destinations.

INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

One of the great advantages of the Chair is that it operates in the framework of the European Tourism Management (ETM) programme. Therefore its educational and conference programme -which are conducted in English- welcomes students from the ETM partner institutes. Apart from the NHTV these are: the Université de Savoie in France, Dalarna University in Sweden, Escuela Oficial de Turismo in Spain, the Fachhochschule Heilbronn in Germany and Bournemouth University in Great Britain.

This international linkage assures that the message of sustainable tourism is spread to all corners of Western Europe, from Sweden to Spain and from Germany to Britain and allows for a widespread participation in its educational and research activities.

MY LITTLE FISHING BOAT

By now you may wonder why there is a small fishing boat on the cover. I would like this little boat to represent a visual model of sustainable tourism development. Picture yourself relaxing in the natural shade of a sea grape tree on the white tropical beach of PortoMari plantation on Curaçao, a Caribbean island that is being visited by a number of tourists that both in social and natural terms is in balance with the size of the island. You are staying in environmentally well managed eco cabins on PortoMari plantation and this postcard is your view.

The little boat you are looking at is owned by a local fisherman, who provides the tourists staying at the plantation with fish and his family with an income.

Look at the perfect state the boat is in: its fresh coat of paint shining brightly in the Caribbean sun and the traditional shark jaws paint work to give it an authentic and personal touch; this is a show of pride, a living piece of culture that well survived the pressures of tourism.

You will notice that the boat lies in beautiful clear waters, and clear and clean water is the basic ingredient for any beach-related holiday. This small boat is being used for the traditional -in this case Caribbean- way of fishing, with a simple line and a hook with bait, no fancy tricks, no rods no nets, just one or two men in a boat, fishing in the purest sense, until they have enough or they've had enough. And by sticking to this traditional fishing method, they can go about it rather selectively, the too small fishes are thrown back, the best ones are kept for themselves, the 'just right' ones are for sale to the tourism industry. 'the catch of the day'. No disturbance of the equilibrium, no tipping of the Eco-balance.

And finally you will notice the five gray pelicans resting on this little fishing boat; resting from their fishing efforts for masbangoe or in Dutch 'marsbankers' in the productive and protective shallow waters around the boat, signifying the support rather than disruption that human presence or activities may also give to nature.

WHAT CAN YOU, AS AN INDIVIDUAL TOURIST DO ABOUT SUSTAINABLE TOURISM?

Let me give you some practical advice: First you can select the most Eco-friendly way of transportation to your destination. Choose a holiday accommodation that has an Eco-label or is managed in an Eco-friendly way. Select activities and excursions that are not harmful to nature and the environment. Visit protected natural areas under local guidance, eat local foodstuffs that are produced organically or fished selectively and buy only locally made souvenirs that are not made of protected animal products or plants.

Ladies and gentlemen, I hope that I have contributed at least somewhat to your understanding of the difficult but challenging tasks ahead for the tourism industry and for the Chair for Sustainable Tourism Development.

Now that you have been educated, your excuses will no longer be accepted. I count on you as ambassadors for sustainable tourism and as responsible individual tourists to give tourism and the destinations the future they deserve.

I wish you many happy holidays.

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Nico Visser (1952) studied Public Law and Ecology at Leiden University in The Netherlands. He began his professional career at the Institute for European Environmental Policy in Bonn, Germany, where he researched the role of environmental groups in the decision-making process of The Netherlands. Not surprisingly, his next employers were two environmental organisations: the Worldwide Fund for nature (WNF) and the Netherlands Society for Nature and Environment (Stichting Natuur en Milieu). Both asked him to analyse the environmental legislation for the borderland between Belgium and The Netherlands.



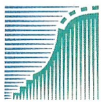
Next he joined the Department of Public Health and the Environment, where for five years he concentrated on multilateral environmental contacts and issues. In the following five years, he did international green work with the Directorate for Nature in the Department of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries.

This Department appointed him Counselor at the Netherlands Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya, where he managed 'green development projects' and reported on 'green' issues in eastern and southern Africa. Here his interest in the relationship between tourism and nature became part of his professional work.

After a year in the Strategic Planning Unit of the Department of Agriculture, he went to the Netherlands Antilles for a three-year period. His task was to set up a modestly-sized Department for the Environment, which would also focus on tourism and the natural environment in the five islands of the Netherlands Antilles.

In 1998, Travel Unie Nederland and Hapag Touristik Union appointed Nico Visser their adviser for sustainable tourism development. Since then, during one day a week, he has lectured in this subject at the NHTV, the Netherlands Institute of Tourism and Transport Studies in Breda.

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