Specialty grand challenge: wherever tourism arrives, society notes it first!

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The paradoxes of social dimensions of sustainable tourism

Sustainability research in tourism increasingly focuses on social issues such as the relationship between residents' quality of life and the positive experiences/outcomes of tourists (Helgadóttir et al., 2019). To fully harness the power and opportunities of bringing people and communities together the UNWTO Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (www.unwto.org/global-code-of-ethics-for-tourism) was developed as a reference point for responsible and sustainable tourism. Adopted in 1999 by the World Tourism Organization, the Code's 10 articles are not legally binding and cover the right to tourism, rights of workers and entrepreneurs, and ensuring benefits for host communities amongst other matters. Still, these laudable ideas are not always adhered to, even by their initiator, the UNWTO. In a post-pandemic environment and more than two decades later, it remains to be established whether any progress relating to social sustainability has been achieved. Tourism is full of paradoxes as highlighted by Hall (2022), and fundamental questions remain on how tourists' desire for hedonistic joy can simultaneously contribute to the wellbeing of local communities. Or how an emphasis on economic benefits can simultaneously consider the social needs of all stakeholders in the visitor economy. This is the grand challenge that achieving social sustainability of tourism faces.

The rising importance of social sustainability in tourism

Tourism is seen as a "driver of development and peace, promoting the harmonious co-existence of people from all countries" (UNWTO, 2016), and it is normally assumed that tourism increases the wellbeing of all stakeholders involved (Dłuzewska, 2019). Yet, the social impacts of tourism have become a prominent topic in the media reporting dissatisfaction of residents in destinations around the world, such as the effects of overtourism in Barcelona, Venice, or Kraków (Milano et al., 2021), sometimes referred to as the "managed evil" of hedonistic tourists (Shakeela and Weaver, 2018). In terms of the social dimension of tourism, general declarations prevail. Despite mutual consensus concerning the significance of social aspects in sustainable tourism, the social extent is the least represented both in academic research and in policies (Dłuzewska, 2019). Not much has changed since Hall et al. (2013) stated, that social sustainability remains mostly in a stage of

rhetoric when it comes to global and local organizations. While there is a plethora of research into the social aspects of tourism, they tend to follow a completely different path than those related to wellbeing (Dłuzewska, 2019). Instead, achieving residents' overall wellbeing requires a deeper understanding of the perceived social impacts of tourism to determine appropriate management strategies related to mediating impacts and creating policies for sustainable tourism development. This ultimately would result in promoting behaviors in support of tourism development within communities (Ramkissoon, 2023) and necessitates taking a more holistic approach.

Social justice issues in tourism

Among emerging principles and approaches to justice and tourism, Jamal and Higham (2021, p. 143) pointed to "social justice, equity and rights; inclusiveness and recognition; sustainability and conservation; wellbeing, belonging and capabilities; posthumanistic justice; and governance and participation". As tourism is often used as a tool for the development and improvement of life in a community, each of these elements along with all stakeholders should be given proper attention. Without addressing those gaps, we cannot talk about "fair" and "just" tourism.

Tourism has an impact on children who live in these communities by playing a significant role in their socialization process (Yang et al., 2020). While community-focused tourism research has reached a certain level of maturity, not all the voices in host communities have been heard such as children and young people (Canosa et al., 2016). The social impact of tourism on shaping children's lives and their views on tourism are often neglected, especially for children living in tourist destinations, making the sustainability concept incomplete. Young people are often perceived as not significantly contributing to family tourism businesses (Canosa and Schänzel, 2021), and our knowledge of child labor issues within tourism is limited (Yang et al., 2020). Yet, there is a generation of young people whose lives have been affected by tourism from birth resulting in holding negative attitudes toward tourists and seeing little future in tourism employment and businesses (Koščak et al., 2023). As part of a broader social justice agenda, children's roles, as economic and social actors in tourism, need to be addressed, by taking a child-inclusive approach to research, which is considered critical in tourism policy, and planning to privilege children's rights, their participation, and wellbeing (Canosa and Schänzel, 2021).

Transformational change in sustainable tourism

Including the voices of all stakeholders to achieve sustainability in tourism is part of a human rights approach as is implementing gender equality. Alarcón and Cole (2021) state that without tackling gender equality in a meaningful and substantive way sustainable tourism will remain elusive. Undoubtedly, all this requires critical thinking, political will, and a re-evaluation of priorities along with a paradigm shift toward a transformation in tourism. While the pandemic provided some opportunities for a reorientation of tourism, in most cases, tourist destinations have gone back to business as usual.

A global approach is needed to address inequalities and achieve sustainable tourism. As Hall et al. (2020, p. 1) state: "Despite clear evidence of this necessity, the possibility for a comprehensive transformation of the tourism system remains extremely limited without a fundamental transformation of the entire planet". Social sustainability mandates can only be achieved within our planetary limits and by addressing power inequalities in the Global South with critical key questions remaining on whether tourism can contribute significantly to the lives and wellbeing of the poor. However, to achieve this, all players must be committed to action along with decision-makers, at every level, meticulously planning for development and tourism. The field for change is wide, and many significant players do not participate in planning or do so at a general level. This can be seen, for example, in the management of temples (pilgrimage tourism), where issues in terms of broad environmental issues are overlooked by managers or clergy, thereby escaping the responsibility and opportunities for change (Apollo et al., 2020).

Marginalized communities

Although on a superficial level, it may seem that the quality of people's lives is improving, common challenges, including food insecurity, climate action failure, biodiversity loss, social cohesion erosion, digital inequality, and cybersecurity failure remain, and some regions are affected more than others (World Economic Forum, 2022). Disparities have widened within and between countries, and particular areas are more disadvantaged by the environment, geographical conditions, local diseases, and in some cases, unenlightened cultures, and political autocracies (Pogge, 2010). In such conditions, progress is slow, and there may be setbacks. As poverty and development are complex phenomena, the aim should be to eradicate poverty by any means, and tourism may be one way to achieve this (Apollo and Moolio, 2021). However, it is necessary to give voice and decision-making power to people living in areas that are marginalized politically and economically by national and local administrations. One such area is mountainous areas (not only in the countries of the Global South), both high, such as the Himalayas (Apollo and Andreychouk, 2022), and lower, such as those in Cuba (Apollo and Rettinger, 2019). This marginalization and inequality are particularly visible in the example of Cuba, where mountain tourism can be one of the key factors contributing to the development, prosperity, and wellbeing of all stakeholders, especially communities outside the coastal tourist enclaves.

Lessons from indigenous people

The importance of social sustainability in tourism lends well to engaging in further research on how indigenous frameworks can be used to address inequalities in tourism as a starting point for a broader research agenda. In Aotearoa New Zealand, *manaakitanga* in Māori contexts demands a values-centered

approach that is based on the principle of reciprocity. This form of exchange extends beyond the economic focus on traditional business models and, when applied to non-Māori contexts, demands a degree of culturalising commerce rather than commercializing culture (Wikitera, 2019). Indigenous practices that serve as useful approaches in achieving more culturally sustainable tourism development are increasingly providing a pathway to the integration of Indigenous knowledge in tourism (Prasetyo et al., 2023). Much can be learned from more holistic indigenous practices that are proving instrumental for attaining culturally and socially sustainable tourism developments.

Leaning further on the knowledge gained from the indigenous people of Aotearoa/New Zealand, there is a Māori proverb: what is the most important thing in the world? It is people, it is people, it is people! *He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata!* Applying the He Tāngata Principle is about how tourism can contribute toward the wellbeing of the individual and the community. The aim then for considering social impacts within sustainable tourism development should be about thriving communities that feel the visitor economy is good for them and their place alongside achieving memorable life-changing experiences for tourists.

"We the tourism people"

Tourism generates benefits for countries in the North and South, but it is the Global North that receives far more share of the cake. Those benefits may be economic, but they may also be social, environmental, or cultural (Hall, 2007). However, Esteves et al. (2012, p. 40) point out that "for the correct approach and proper understanding of the term 'social impact' we need to revisit core concepts, such as culture, community, power, human rights, gender, justice, place, resilience, and sustainable livelihoods". Thus, "we the tourism people" have a crucial role to play, as tourism due to its size impacts every sphere of our lives. Our vision is that *Social Impact of Tourism* can serve as a platform for innovative approaches in tourism research to avoid or mitigate negative impacts and enhance positive benefits to ensure the wellbeing of all stakeholders.

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